Cadmea

A play

Part four of

City of Wine

A cycle in three trilogies

by
Ned Dickens

The Grape Trilogy
HARMONIA
PENTHEUS
THEBE

The Vine Trilogy
CADMEA
ELIS
JOCASTA

The Wine Trilogy
OEDIPUS
CREON
SEVEN

Commissioned by Nightswimming
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“Thebes is famous everywhere, for wine and welcoming.”
City of Wine is a nine-play cycle telling the story of the Greek city of Thebes—best known as the home of Oedipus. It begins with the founding of Thebes by Cadmus and Harmonia, and ends with the death of six of its last seven citizens on the battlefield of Troy.

The *City of Wine* cycle is a powerful portrayal of leadership and civic life. This contemporary epic breathes new life into these magnificent stories while portraying the citizens of Thebes as distinct yet familiar individuals, unique to playwright Ned Dickens’ vision of this legendary city.
Brian Quirt.

Playwright's Notes

The UnNamed
City of Wine features great names: Zeus, Athena, Harmonia, Laius, Jocasta, Oedipus, Dionysus, and Tiresias, to mention only a few. Such names are so powerful that I felt I could not introduce fictional ones into the mix. At the same time, I very much wanted to find a new approach to the idea of the Chorus. I wanted to show a diversity of interacting personalities which, taken together, would represent the ordinary people—the citizens—of the *City of Wine*.

The result is a group of seven personalities (often related from play to play but not always the same individuals) who, although distinct and real, are never named. Throughout *City of Wine* they are always present, reacting to and affecting the actions of the Named.

The UnNamed are "the aching, dancing body of my town." In order to keep them straight in the text I gave them "tags". The truth of my premise that names are powerful things is borne out by the fact that many people persist in thinking of these tags as names. You, of course, will not make that mistake.

Synopsis

The Grape Trilogy

Harmonia
This is the story of how Harmonia, daughter of the gods Ares and Aphrodite, and her mortal husband Cadmus, become the founders of the city that will become Thebes. In the kitchen of Ares' palace on Mount Olympus, surrounded by the desires and games of both gods and mortals, Cadmus wins the love of Harmonia but incites the fury of the gods. Harmonia gives up her immortality to pursue her love as she and her new husband are driven from Olympus. They vow to found a great city dedicated to equality and truth—and thus the city is born."Nothing begins in history." As I scratched around for a point of entry into the story of Thebes I tripped over the idea that two gods would give Harmonia, their goddess daughter, to marry an enslaved mortal who had not only offended them but had failed at everything he had tried to do so far. Equally intriguing was that she might fall in love with him. "There has to be a story behind that!" I told myself, and here it is.

Pentheus
The second play introduces us to Harmonia and Cadmus' grandson Pentheus, who finds himself chosen king just as the city is undergoing an unexpected transformation. Also brought to life are the magical characters of Tiresias, the seer whose prophecies play a pivotal role in city's story, and Dionysus, the god whose gift of wine brings both joy and chaos to Thebes. In this alternative

version of the events of The Bacchae, the tragedy of King Pentheus (and a hidden love story!) brings our city into a new era .

While HARMONIA can be said to deal with the conception of the city, this play looks at its adolescence. It swirls with sexual infatuation, questions of emerging identity, and a tragic loss of innocence. Robert Graves (poet and scholar) suggests that the real root of all the problems which beset Thebes (called Cadmea at this point in the story) is the institution of patrilineal monarchy, the idea that the crown must pass from father to son. He argues that this idea offends the powerful female energy in the ancient world and sets off "the war of the sexes" with a bang. I have tried to show how, in context, that idea, called here Pentheus' Law, might make sense to a young man who unexpectedly finds himself on a throne for which he feels completely unprepared.

Thebe

The character and story of Thebe have grown organically over the years. Exploring and unpacking both was a huge part of the impetus behind the last expansion of *City of Wine* from seven to nine plays. In HARMONIA, Poseidon, spurned by her, spits into Thebe's mouth (a particularly nasty assault that echoes the story of Apollo and Cassandra) and he decrees that her kiss will always give instant forgetfulness. The dynamic between memory and forgetfulness is central to our story, and storytelling. It also allows me to introduce narrative elements that have no basis in traditional versions, as long as I arrange to have them forgotten, such as Thebe's being the mother of Tiresias and, eventually, Laius.

The Vine Trilogy

Cadmea

The city has grown, but so has distrust and fear between the sexes. Lycus and Dirce rule in luxury while Laius waits impatiently to take the crown. Amphion and Zethus, the twin unacknowledged sons of Lycus, arrive. They use Laius to punish Lycus for his treatment of their mother, Antiope, unleashing assassination, riot, and massacre. Laius escapes into exile and the brothers arrange to be elected twin kings. Thebe fulfills the prophesy that she will be queen.

Fairly late in the 30+ year *City of Wine* writing process it occurred to me that the Theban plays of Sophocles et al. weren't Theban at all: they were created and celebrated in a city trying to be a democracy (Athens). They are stories about the horrifically dysfunctional monarchy, and military rival, next door. They are deeply political. The city of Cadmea/Thebes is the protagonist of *City of Wine*, and her challenges, growth, triumphs, disasters, and her journey from an intentional settlement to a city state, take centre stage in the Vine Trilogy. Here she becomes a place familiar to a modern audience, shaped by familiar characters: grifters, schemers, dreamers, and traditionalists.

Elis
Elis is a nearby city in the mountains, where Laius has sought refuge in exile. Wine has also arrived in town and a dis-used slaughterhouse is becoming a tavern, with help from Bowl. Laius festers in bitterness and self-pity, abusing the hospitality and the vulnerable son of his hosts until he, Laius, commits a crime that will haunt Thebes and its people for generations.
ELIS is the middle play of the cycle and, like the first and last, it doesn't take place in Cadmea/ Thebes. Elis is a mountain city based heavily on cattle farming. Their main festival celebrates the semi-annual slaughter. Dionysus is the god of wine, of course, but he is also god of the theatre. One theory suggests that public theatre emerged as a way to contain and control the rites of the riotous god. The need for that containment shows when bacchanalia meets slaughter festival.

Jocasta
This play illuminates the story of Jocasta, one of the great figures of ancient mythology, familiar to us largely for her death scene in the play Oedipus. The exiled Laius returns to Thebes, marries Jocasta and she bears him a son. The first act of Jocasta traces the descent of the city, under King Laius' rule, into dictatorship and despair. Act two brings with it a much-discussed moment in Greek mythology/legend: the magnetic first meeting between Jocasta and Oedipus. With no idea what their relationship portends (for themselves or Thebes) their happy marriage restores peace to the city.

Tragedy is often an architecture of unfortunate choices, many of which make sense in context, but which add up to disaster. The impulse to write this play (fourth in the cycle but the second written, after Oedipus) came from the realization that many of the critical choices which inform that story were made before it begins, by Jocasta and Laius, rather than by Oedipus. I wanted to find out why, and what those situations may have looked like. The more I explored and imagined my way backwards into hypothetical time, the more enthralled I became with this extraordinary woman. Wanting to understand her is the seed crystal around which the entire *City of Wine* has grown.

The Wine Trilogy

Oedipus
Oedipus attempts to relieve Thebes of a plague, and the curse that brought it to the city, and in doing so brings the famous story of Jocasta, Laius, and Oedipus to its disastrous and horrifying conclusion.

OEDIPUS was the first play written, and still marks the grand climax of the cycle. Much of the motivation for writing the larger project was rooted in a desire to fully contextualize what happens here. In the modern world we have tended to think of ourselves as moral singularities, responsible only for our own choices and actions. Seen through that frame, Oedipus becomes a victim of cruel and irrational fate, doomed to suffer despite his best efforts. I offer him rather as a point in a larger narrative curve, paying the cost of his father's crimes and his family's unfolding pattern of well-intentioned error.

Creon

On a pleasant evening, years after the events of Oedipus, a visiting stranger enters a peaceful tavern and acquaints himself with the Thebans savouring the local wine. His questions about their city and its history result in an impromptu and often comic reconstruction of the story of Antigone. Its controversial story about leadership is re-evaluated and the fate of Thebes is explored, disputed and reinvented. Once again, wine points the way, bringing both chaos and, finally, good cheer in its wake.

Throughout *City of Wine* the Unnamed are always present, responding to and influencing the actions of the Named, but in CREON they take over, and the cycle enters a new stage. Increasingly it is less about history and more about story. BOWL says "I have just listened to the stories that wounds tell." I wanted to look at how communities define, heal, and even re-create themselves through the sharing of narratives. I also wanted to introduce an element of suspense to an ancient tale. Since I have chosen to wander from the path of received mythology from time to time, in this play I decided to offer my characters the same opportunity, and then see where they would take the story.

Seven

During the siege of Troy, seven scruffy Theban citizens, all that remain of Thebes, sit drinking around a campfire in their makeshift outdoor tavern. After receiving orders to go on a futile and certainly fatal mission the next morning, the seven spend their last night trying to make sense of their lives, their place in history and in memory. Will wine offer insight or blindness? How will they meet the challenge that dawn brings? What will remain of Thebes after they are gone?
The Iliad is such a detailed account of the Trojan War that some scholars surmise that the author was actually present for the great events and not just passing on an oral tradition, thus marking a transition from myth to history. How stories, and through them societies, evolve and survive, or not, up to and then through such a massive transition fascinates me. Theatre itself, in a way, sits on the threshold between written and remembered narratives. Indeed, it pushes backwards from written into oral narrative. Beyond all that however, I could not resist the temptation to spend one last night with the UnNamed.

Characters

The Unnamed
BLOOD
BOWL
B R E A D
CLOTH
FIREWOOD
GLASS
M A N 1
M A N 2
WATER
Mrs M

The Named
AMPHION – Claims to be the son of Zeus
DIRCE – Married to Locrus
LAIUS – Son of Labdacus. Heir to the throne of Cadmea
LOCRUS – half brother to Thebe, a son of Zeus
LYCUS – Regent on the throne of Cadmea
MENAECEUS – Senior administrator and Judge
NIOBE – daughter of King Tantalus
THEBE – a Naiad
TIRESIAS – Blind Seer
ZETHUS – Twin brother of Amphion

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The Barn, in the street outside the Barn, the Palace, outside the Bull (a different tavern), the public Square.

(Distant thunder. Discover TIRESIAS sitting in the gutter outside the Barn. At this point they are a middle aged male, dirty and disheveled. He throws small bones on the ground. Flash reveals THEBE.)

THEBE

Hello Tiresias.

TIRESIAS

Thebe, hello.

THEBE

You know me, then? Oh good.

TIRESIAS

I know your voice, your name,

The rest is moonlight on a waterfall.

No. I recall...

We gave...

THEBE

We kissed.

TIRESIAS

And kissing gave, exchanged, what Zeus *(Lightning)*

THEBE

And Poseidon *(Thunder)* did to each of us.

TIRESIAS

Prophetic vision.

THEBE

And forgetfulness.

The kiss.

TIRESIAS

And then a sudden emptiness.

THEBE

All truth at once.

TIRESIAS
I was so lost and lonely

THEBE
And afraid.

And yet, with time, years?

TIRESIAS
Yes.

THEBE
It all began to fade.

TIRESIAS
To fill again, for me.

THEBE
I see.

I also see that much has changed with you.

TIRESIAS
Oh, that.

Yes. Yes. I was a woman then.

THEBE
You were: young, wise, and beautiful.

TIRESIAS
More change.

She drowned, in wine I think.

THEBE
She is still here. A mother knows.

TIRESIAS
My mother? Yes, of course.

Well, look at that.

That truth released, a stream of others flows.

It seems I see too much again:

A butterfly, a cave.

I know that cave, but not like this.

A gentle fire, and food, some furniture, and you,

A lamp, and many books.

THEBE

My home, my books.

Whatever life or lightning offered me,

Unsure if it was memory or prophesy,

I wrote it down.

Vision by word by page, I built who I am now.

TIRESIAS

I also see that you were happy there.

Why did you come to this sad town?

THEBE

I had no more to write.

What is to be is now an empty page to me.

TIRESIAS

And so it ought to be.

THEBE

And you?

TIRESIAS

Like shapes that sculpt the shadows as our eyes adjust,

The curse of Zeus returns relentlessly,

And once again I see far more than I can say or understand.

THEBE

You told me once I would be queen.

TIRESIAS

I did. You will.

THEBE

Can you say how?

TIRESIAS

I have no special sense of cause or consequence.

But I suspect you would be wise

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To take on some disguise until the time is right.

When you left town...

THEBE

I was confused.

TIRESIAS

To them you were, and are, completely mad,

And yet the inconvenient mother of the king to be,

A complicated place to be.

THEBE

And you?

TIRESIAS

Who? Me?

Mad also, I suppose, but they are used to me.

THEBE

I see.

TIRESIAS

Ha!

THEBE

What?

TIRESIAS

Well, mother, look at me.

Could I not be your father now?

THEBE

A fine pretence, that could make sense

Of any odd things I might say and do.

Why not?

It might help, and can do no harm.

TIRESIAS

Perhaps.

THEBE

What now?

TIRESIAS

I will live long, so long, but on the way

I die a little every day I tell a lie.

I will do this for you.

It helps that, in my heart, it is a little true.

THEBE

Such love.

I will not waste your life, or mine.

For now, if you allow me, father dear,

I will, I think, be near but stay unseen

Within the waters of my stream,

Whatever it is now.

TIRESIAS

Will you see Locrus?

THEBE

Ah. My brother is still here?

TIRESIAS

In every stone.

THEBE

My stream is still a sewer, then?

TIRESIAS

Your stream now feeds a string of terraces and pools,

Grottos and gardens,

Its laughter spilling down from the palace

Through the centre of the town.

It is the heart song of our city now.

THEBE

Perhaps.

TIRESIAS

Can you make peace with him.

THEBE

Again, perhaps. *(She begins to go)*

Thank you, Tiresias.

TIRESIAS
It is a little thing.

(He throws small bones on the ground.)

Evening in the Barn.

(A barrel sits centre in a puddle of wine. FIREWOOD hums a melody.)

CLOTH
This is ridiculous.

GLASS
Pleasantly quiet though.

CLOTH
Well I can wait for anything,

But wine.

It must be time.

FIREWOOD
It is.

(The top flies off the barrel and LAIUS stands up in it, splashing wine and gasping for breath.)

LAIUS
How long was that?

CLOTH
Longer. I think.

WATER
No, not so long.

GLASS
Do it again.

These things require practicing.

BLOOD
Oh, mother, please.

LAIUS
Alright I will.

Watch this.

(He takes a deep breath and submerges himself, pulling the lid on top.)

BREAD
What if he drowns?

CLOTH
I might not drink the wine.

(Enter MENAECEUS.)

GLASS
Hello, Menaeceus.

What brings you here?

MENAECEUS
My duty, more than pleasure.

WATER
But pleasure is our duty here,

God Dionysus must be served.

(Offers MENAECEUS wine.)

MENAECEUS
My first child swims tonight towards this life.

I should be with my wife, and yet, instead,

I must come send the young prince to his bed.

Is Laius here?

(Several of the women point at the barrel.)

Again? Oh dear.

the street outside

(Enter AMPHION and ZETHUS.)

AMPHION
I do not like the smell of towns.

TIRESIAS (*from the shadows*)
That would be me,

No, death, no, both.

ZETHUS
Dead a long time, I think.

ZETHUS
Leave him to rot.

There is some life in here.

AMPHION
Shall we go in?

ZETHUS
Eventually.

A strange flock should be approached upwind, and quietly.

(He listens at the door.)

AMPHION
I cannot be so still.

So I will walk the town and find out what I can.

TIRESIAS
And I will drink.

inside the Barn

FIREWOOD *(Hums the melody of the Drinking Song)*
He should be finished… now.

(LAIUS emerges again.)

GLASS
That was the best one yet.

MENAECEUS
Prince Laius, you should stop.

LAIUS
You have no faith in me, Menaeceus.

What kind of friend are you?

MENAECEUS
One you can count on in the morning too.

LAIUS
I have a strategy.

Each time I drink more wine and make more room for air.

(He demonstrates. General laughter.)

LAIUS
I will be king of all of you,

BREAD
We all have dreams about that day.

LAIUS
I dream of making our Cadmea great,

The kind of state respected in the world.

I know our history, but more, I know my destiny.

BLOOD
Oh, yes?

LAIUS (*getting out of the barrel with difficulty)*

(A full clown turn possible throughout this speech.)

I have a simple plan, you see.

To follow the advice that Cadmus gave to his own son,

And, so they say,

My father, his grandson,

King Labdacus,

Had sworn to give to me:

To be a king I first must be a man.

And to be fully, truly both,

I must restore the balance of the crowns

That Cadmus and Harmonia knew.

For that I need a worthy queen,

One wise and strong and capable enough in every way

To balance me.

(He begins to fall. BREAD catches him.)

Thank you.

And so, you see, it is my royal fate

To make myself available

To such a mate.

MENAECEUS

A fine plan.

The world is rich with good examples.

LAIUS

Oh?

MENAECEUS

Pelops of Elis comes to mind.

GLASS

Well, he was wise enough to choose a clever wife.

MENAECEUS

And sometimes that can be enough.

It was for me.

Some of these women, Laius,

I would guess,

Have seen more kings at work than you or I.

BLOOD

Your father and Pentheus.

FIREWOOD

Briefly, both, and Cadmus too.

We know at least what not to do.

CLOTH

We are not girls but we are young enough

To crush you ... with our thighs.

(Enter ZETHUS.)

WATER

Ah, welcome stranger.

ZETHUS

Zethus.

MENAECEUS

(Offers him a handkerchief.)

Oh… no… your name… I thought…

WATER

Come. Join us by the fire.

FIREWOOD

And here, drink some of this.

We call it wine.

ZETHUS

Wine?

Does it taste better than it smells?

LAIUS

What smell?

My nose is suddenly so full of sweaty animals

It has no room for other smells.

ZETHUS

You speak of me.

I tend a flock.

(Tense pause.)

I think that I should go.

LAIUS

I meant it as a joke.

Sit down.

CLOTH

There was a flock here once, my father's actually.

GLASS

Let us exchange our stories and our smells.

WATER

Have you come far?

FIREWOOD

What brings you to our town?

ZETHUS

My mother was from here.

BLOOD

Oh yes? Her name?

ZETHUS

Antiope.

BLOOD

The niece of Lycus was she not?

GLASS

She knows her history.

LAIUS

And have you come to visit with him then?

ZETHUS

Something like that.

So many women, so few men.

Are men not welcome here?

WATER

Good hearts are welcome anywhere.

BLOOD

Those who respect our ways may stay.

This is our place, and in our way we celebrate our god.

FIREWOOD

Dionysus, yes.

BLOOD

He is a son of Zeus.

ZETHUS

Most wonderful.

A son of Zeus.

To you a god, you say?

CLOTH

Our one true god.

ZETHUS

Where are the men?

LAIUS

I am a man.

WATER

The rites of Dionysus celebrate

The special gifts that women have.

BREAD

Something like that.

Some women welcome men.

WATER

There is another place, a few, in fact,

Where those who honour other gods, or none at all,

Gather together in their way.

ZETHUS

And does great Zeus still have a temple in your town?

CLOTH

Oh yes, a temple of a kind, and men can be found there.

BREAD
Yes, more than here.

WATER
And they drink wine as well.

CLOTH
As much perhaps, but not as well.

ZETHUS
How strange.

FIREWOOD
Men are afraid of us.

BLOOD
Two kings have died for mocking at our god.

WATER
Most terrible, their deaths I mean.

FIREWOOD
As was their mockery.

MENAECEUS
Ours is a painful history.

In every marriage bed old angers lie,

And cold truths go unsaid.

ZETHUS *(To MENAECEUS)*
Why are you here?

MENAECEUS
I came to see him safely home.

ZETHUS
The drunken boy?

LAIUS
I am the king.

ZETHUS
The king?

But surely Lycus is an older man.

LAIUS

I am not Lycus, Lycus is not king!

(The women echo LAIUS in gentle mockery.)

I am prince Laius, son of Labdacus,

Grandson of Polydorus, Cadmus' only son,

And so the only rightful king, according to the law,

Pentheus' Law,

That said the crown must pass from man to son.

GLASS

Before Pentheus' mother tore her son apart.

BREAD

With help from many hands.

FIREWOOD

These hands.

WATER

And these.

ZETHUS

Yes, I remember now.

They say in Athens—

LAIUS

Ah, listen to this.

ZETHUS

They say that there is some delay

In sorting out the crown.

LAIUS

I am the rightful king, make no mistake.

Lycus but warms the throne until I choose

To claim my rights.

ZETHUS

Forgive me, prince.

But still, I feel I need to ask,

Why are you here with common women?

BLOOD
What?

BREAD
Did you hear that?

ZETHUS
Enough.

Be still.

I asked the Prince.

BLOOD
I will show you—

GLASS
Peace, girl.

FIREWOOD
He will soon learn.

WATER *(To LAIUS)*
Answer him then.

LAIUS
Because I am the prince,

And soon will be the king of all,

Including them.

How can I rule a city that I do not know?

A wise king, I am told,

Should get to know his citizens as fully as he can.

And so, when I am king,

I still will come and drink right here.

And so must all Cadmean kings,

At least once every year.

Call it king Laius' Law.

ZETHUS
A worthy law.

BREAD
Laius has done his best to know us all.

ZETHUS
I see.

Well, I am pleased to hear that Lycus is not king.

We have some reasons not to wish him well,

My brother Amphion and I.

CLOTH
A story, good, and less proud posturing.

FIREWOOD
More wine, and come around the fire.

ZETHUS
Well,

Our mother—

CLOTH
Wait… Antiope!

ZETHUS
Yes, well.

Was taken, as in love, by Zeus when she was young.

(The women react knowingly.)

What now?

GLASS
Nothing is new.

Go on.

ZETHUS
Perhaps she loved him willingly.

I do not know.

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ZETHUS
Her father was enraged.

I think he felt she could no longer wed a mortal man.

BREAD
Perhaps she had no interest, after Zeus.

ZETHUS
She fled her father's anger and her shame.

BREAD
What shame?

GLASS
My guess is that she swelled with child.

ZETHUS
With two, my brother and myself.

GLASS
How many girls in how many towns,

Alone and in that state, have cried

"A god came to me in the night!"

CLOTH
How many are believed?

ZETHUS
It is the truth.

BLOOD
But you are not a god?

ZETHUS
Not that I know of, no.

FIREWOOD
You would.

Go on.

ZETHUS
In his despair grandfather killed himself.

BREAD
How sad.

ZETHUS
It is.

And Lycus then,

no one knows why,

seized good Antiope

and made her prisoner.

CLOTH
Oh shame.

ZETHUS
Her babies—

CLOTH
You and…

FIREWOOD
His brother Amphion.

ZETHUS
Were left upon a mountainside to die.

WATER
Again, oh shame.

GLASS
Yet here you are.

BREAD
Did someone find you then?

ZETHUS
A shepherd, yes.

BLOOD
A common shepherd saved your lives.

Imagine that.

LAIUS
Hard to believe.

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GLASS
Which part?

LAIUS
Both, I suppose.

That he would leave them there

And that a stranger took them home.

FIREWOOD
Not strange at all.

One of the first great goods is welcoming.

MENAECEUS
As I was welcomed, loved, and raised right here.

ZETHUS
The Shepherd and his wife raised both of us.

I tend their flock, or did until quite recently.

MENAECEUS
Why are you here?

ZETHUS
Enough of me, for now.

My brother will come soon.

(Enter AMPHION.)

ZETHUS *(Cont'd)*
Brother, come in.

The gods are kind to us at last.

GLASS
Well, speak of him and he appears.

ZETHUS
I mean, Dionysus' name be praised,

These women are most welcoming.

AMPHION
Yes, so I see.

ZETHUS

And this is Laius, rightful king,

Of whom you will have heard,

Kept from his birthright by old Lycus' vanity.

AMPHION

Of course.

An honour, sir.

The world waits for your monarchy.

LAIUS

Yes, well.

ZETHUS

Too long, if you ask me.

LAIUS

I think so too.

MENAECEUS

And what do you propose?

AMPHION

Our talk is with the Prince.

LAIUS

The King… to be.

Go on.

AMPHION

We seek revenge.

ZETHUS

For crimes against our mother.

AMPHION

Yes.

You want, I think, a little help to gain the crown.

ZETHUS

Your crown.

LAIUS

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I do.

AMPHION
So, shall we go and get both then?

LAIUS
What? Now?

MENAECEUS
I do not think that would be wise.

LAIUS
And what would be?

MENAECEUS
Laius, my friend and future king,

you drip with wine inside and out.

Take the crown soon, but not like this,

If only so your greatest day

Is not forgotten as a drunken dream.

LAIUS *(To ZETHUS and AMPHION)*
What do you say?

ZETHUS
Our wills are matched with yours today.

LAIUS
I like the sound of that.

MENAECEUS
The meaning is less clear.

You two are bold to come into a town

And speak against the man who rules.

ZETHUS
Why should we not?

AMPHION
This town has shown us only women,

And the king, of course,

And you.

GLASS
A pleasant populace.

BLOOD
Most of the time.

FIREWOOD
If you prefer more manly company

There is another drinking place.

MENAECEUS
Perhaps you should go there.

AMPHION
Do you now challenge us?

WATER
Oh look.

Already they are waving things about.

BLOOD
Feathers and fur all stirred.

FIREWOOD
It almost makes me laugh, until someone is killed.

CLOTH
Please, sirs.

Not here.

MENAECEUS
Perhaps I ought to challenge you.

WATER
Your father died before you lived,

Do not now give your child that same cold parentage.

ZEPHUS
Who are you, sir?

MENAECEUS
I am Menaeceus, and I am told my father was Pentheus.

29

AMPHION
King?

ZEPHUS
So why do you not claim the crown yourself?

FIREWOOD
Only the mother knows for sure who is the father of a child.

GLASS
Not always her.

MENAECEUS
My mother is unknown.

Pentheus died, most horribly, before my birth.

ZETHUS
Murdered, you mean,

by these you treat as friends.

You are no king.

You are no man at all.

MENAECEUS
Enough. Too much.

Stand up and fight!

WATER
Enough, indeed.

Remember where you are.

FIREWOOD
All men must leave.

This puffing pushing is not welcome here.

AMPHION
You dare to throw us out?

BLOOD *(Rising impressively)*
We do.

ZETHUS
We are the sons of Zeus

30

And brothers to your god.

You ought to honour us.

CLOTH

We honour laughter, life, and joy.

The son of Zeus we love will always be a boy.

BLOOD

Get out.

LAIUS *(Yawns)*

I think I will retire.

I need a bath.

MENAECEUS

I will escort you.

LAIUS

No. I know my way.

(Exit.)

WATER

(To AMPHION and ZETHUS.)

You too, go now.

AMPHION

We will remember this.

WATER

We will forget as quickly as we can.

You may come back,

FIREWOOD

Respectfully.

ZETHUS

Come brother, we should go. (*Exeunt)*

BLOOD

You too, Menaeceus, for now.

Come back another day, and bring your family.

31

MENAECEUS
My other family.

Good night. *(Exit)*

WATER
Come friends.

The Lady Dirce waits for us.

BLOOD
To wait on her.

FIREWOOD
No. Not tonight.

The invitation mentions wine and conversation.

CLOTH
I come.

BREAD
And so will I.

GLASS
We may come later.

BLOOD
We have a thing to do.

BREAD
Well, good for you.

(Exeunt. WATER locks the door. AMPHION and ZETHUS in the street.)

AMPHION
Let us go find our father's fire.

(Enter THEBE/MANTO.)

Cadmea's men: no doubt frustrated and confused,

Must be ripe ready to be moved

To any furious action we desire.

THEBE/MANTO
Oh my.

That sounds exciting.

May I come?

AMPHION
We ought to go.

ZETHUS
Hello…?

THEBE/MANTO
Manto.

ZETHUS
Are you… well?

THEBE/MANTO
I am, and better now.

AMPHION
Come, Zethus,

To the men, as we agreed.

THEBE/MANTO
Your partner calls.

ZETHUS
My brother, Amphion.

THEBE/MANTO
If you say so.

(AMPHION an ZETHUS exit one way. THEBE/MANTO steps into the shadows with TIRESIAS, who has been there all along. MENAECEUS begins to cross.)

TIRESIAS
Menaeceus?

MENAECEUS
Who speaks to me?

TIRESIAS
Someone who loves you well.

MENAECEUS
Do I know you, old one?

33

TIRESIAS
You did, when you were very young.

I am Tiresias.

MENAECEUS
Who? No.

You cannot be.

TIRESIAS
And yet I am.

MENAECEUS
But, but,

Tiresias was first made blind…

TIRESIAS
As I am blind,

By proud Athena's rage.

MENAECEUS
And then was given gifts of prophesy by Zeus himself.

TIRESIAS
Some call them gifts.

MENAECEUS
And then transformed into a girl by… no-one knows.

TIRESIAS
A woman, but…

MENAECEUS
And then went mad and disappeared.

TIRESIAS
And you believe all this?

MENAECEUS
Yes, I suppose I do.

TIRESIAS
Then why is it so hard to think

The story of Tiresias goes on

34

And he is once again a man and here with you?

(THEBE/MANTO Steps forward as if entering.)

TIRESIAS *(Cont'd)*
Hello my dear.

(THEBE/MANTO kisses his cheek.)

MENAECEUS
Yes, so I see.

TIRESIAS
Menaeceus… my daughter, Manto.

MENAECEUS
Oh -I, but… Oh. Hello.

THEBE/MANTO
May I go now?

I long to meet some people my own age.

TIRESIAS
Of course. Be good.

(Another kiss. Exit THEBE/MANTO.)

Do you have wine?

MENAECEUS
What? No.

My wife—

TIRESIAS
Sleeps happily.

And nestled safely in her arms

Your son sleeps too.

MENAECEUS
A son…

TIRESIAS
You are a royal counsellor?

MENAECEUS
Something like that.

TIRESIAS
What wisdom turns its back on prophesy?

One drink ?

MENAECEUS
Yes, yes, but not in there.

TIRESIAS
Take my arm, son and lead me anywhere.

(Exeunt. Enter LOCRUS, GLASS, and BLOOD.)

LOCRUS (*taking notes*)
Thank you my friends,

I did not know.

BLOOD
Well, you do now.

GLASS
Between your parks and avenues,

BLOOD
And palaces.

GLASS
Most people lack the things that Cadmus planned.

They carry water home in buckets from your pretty stream.

BLOOD
And squat in circles in the muddy streets.

LOCRUS
Yes. So I see.

GLASS
You have the skills and influence,

BLOOD
But, more than that,

You have the men.

LOCRUS
The men?

BLOOD
One man in three has worked for you,

GLASS
Good jobs, well paid and managed,

And now gone.

BLOOD
And now most taverns of the town are full

Of frightened men with heavy tools.

GLASS
Pay them to make Cadmea decent for their families,

And they will follow you in—

(LYCUS, adjusting his clothing, steps out of a doorway and turns back to it.)

LYCUS
What? Pay you? No.

I am - Oh, never mind.

(He throws a few coins through the doorway, which is slammed shut.)

Tax day is coming soon.

BLOOD
Lycus.

LYCUS
Not I! I mean…

LOCRUS
Not now.

GLASS
Why not?

BLOOD
He is .. exposed.

LOCRUS
A cornered rat cannot hear flattery.

LYCUS
I have a knife, somewhere.

LOCRUS
Trust me.

GLASS
We do.

BLOOD
For now.

LYCUS
Oh, Locrus, good.

LOCRUS
Is all well, sir?

LYCUS
Of course.

I serve our citizens at any hour.

Show me your stream again.

We are allowed, I think,

To both be proud of it.

LOCRUS
As are the men who built it.

LYCUS
Who? Yes, of course.

What shall we call it?

LOCRUS
What?

LYCUS
The stream.

LOCRUS
It needs no name.

38

It has been sacred to both Ares and Athena,

And Thebe was, and is, the spirit of the spring.

LYCUS

I know.

I will—

The very thing.

(Pause.)

LOCRUS

So, Sir. What next?

Perhaps—

LYCUS

A wall.

LOCRUS

Just one?

I thought perhaps new houses—

LYCUS

No. A wall.

To keep us safe.

LOCRUS

The men, I think, would rather build—

LYCUS

Whatever I decide to pay them for.

A wall, or else no jobs at all.

Good night.

I need to bathe. *(Exit.)*

LOCRUS

A wall. Oh, well. (*He sets aside his notebook.)*

(Enter THEBE/MANTO.)

THEBE/MANTO

Hello. Oh, sir. *(Turns to go.)*

39

LOCRUS

Please stay.

It is a public place.

Your face… do I know you?

THEBE/MANTO

My name is Manto.

LOCRUS

You look just like…

THEBE/MANTO

You do not know me,

I am new in town.

LOCRUS

Forgive me…

(She turns to go.)

Thebe.

THEBE/MANTO *(Her back turned to him)*

Who?

Manto, I said.

LOCRUS

If you say so, sister, dear.

THEBE/MANTO

Thank you.

LOCRUS

Yes, well. Good night. *(Exit)*

(Enter BREAD, CLOTH, WATER, and FIREWOOD.)

FIREWOOD

Wait, friends.

CLOTH

Why? Wine.

40

WATER
Oh, let it age a few breaths more.

BREAD
What is it?

FIREWOOD
I thought at first,

“Oh, good.

She might , perhaps be one of us.”

CLOTH
Who lives in a palace.

BREAD
Yes. I want to see it.

CLOTH
So do I.

FIREWOOD
We will, I just…

WATER
Do not trust her?

THEBE/MANTO
Who?

CLOTH
Dirce.

THEBE/MANTO
Why not?

WATER
Well.

THEBE/MANTO
I am not from here.

BLOOD
The lady Dirce is the wife of Lycus,

Who is the Regent here until young Laius takes the throne.

THEBE/MANTO
So many names.

FIREWOOD
Do you have one.

THEBE/MANTO
Manto.

CLOTH
How pretty.

Come now to visit Dirce

And to drink her wine.

THEBE/MANTO
May I?

WATER
We are her guests and you are ours.

BREAD
I want to see the bath.

They say that it is built on the spring

That fed Athena's sacred pool so long ago.

THEBE/MANTO
They do?

Imagine that.

(Exeunt. Enter NIOBE with bags.)

NIOBE
Hello?

I need attending to.

This will not do.

(Looks around. Enter LOCRUS to retrieve his book.)

This might.

How very nice.

The stream flows this way

42

And the eye flows that,

To there.

The palace, I expect.

LOCRUS
You are correct.

NIOBE
Oh, sir.

You startled me.

LOCRUS
Forgive me.

NIOBE
Wait.

I need your help.

LOCRUS
Of course.

(She offers a coin.)

No need for that.

My name is Locrus.

NIOBE
Yes?

LOCRUS
Designer of… all this.

NIOBE
I see.

You must be proud.

LOCRUS
I was.

Tomorrow, early, I have much to do.

(Again makes to leave.)

NIOBE

43

Do you know Laius?

LOCRUS
Yes.

NIOBE
Is he still, well…

LOCRUS
Young? And impulsive?

Often drunk?

NIOBE
I am a princess.

LOCRUS
Oh. I see.

Is he unmarried, then?

Yes. Yes, he is.

NIOBE
My father is King Tantalus.

LOCRUS
And you are here to tempt the Prince.

NIOBE
Meet him, and then, who knows?

LOCRUS
My sister, probably.

NIOBE
What did you say?

LOCRUS
Nothing.

That way there is a place, the Barn.

NIOBE
A barn?

LOCRUS
Where you will find food, wine, and welcoming,

And then a safe bed for the night.

NIOBE
Will you escort me there?

LOCRUS
I- Yes.

NIOBE
And bring my bags. *(Exit)*

LOCRUS
Of course, your majesty. *(Exit with bags)*

The Palace. Dirce's bathchamber.

A VOICE*, Off.*

Ladies, through there.

Please, help yourselves to the food and wine.

The Lady Dirce sends apologies,

But she has been delayed.

(Enter FIREWOOD, WATER, BREAD, CLOTH, and THEBE/MANTO.)

BREAD
Waylaid, no doubt.

(To CLOTH, re food.)

Try some of this.

CLOTH
After a glass, perhaps.

(WATER and FIREWOOD look around.)

WATER
What do you think?

FIREWOOD
More graceful than I feared.

45

WATER
So there is hope?

FIREWOOD
Hope? Always.

If we look for it.

(THEBE/MANTO steps into the bath.)

THEBE/MANTO
Oh. Hot. How strange.

(Enter DIRCE.)

WATER (*to THEBE/MANTO*)
What are you doing?

No, get out.

DIRCE
Please, all of you, join her.

I know I will.

WATER
But, but, our clothes?

DIRCE
It is only a dress, and under, only nakedness.

I have dry clothes for all of you.

(Sits beside THEBE/MANTO.)

Are you quite comfortable?

THEBE/MANTO
More cooked, I think.

DIRCE
I know. It feels….

Semi-divine.

THEBE/MANTO
Not quite.

DIRCE
Have we met?

THEBE/MANTO
Other than now?

DIRCE
You look…

THEBE/MANTO
Much like my father I am told.

(The others have joined them, in or out of the water.)

FIREWOOD
And who is he?

THEBE/MANTO
Tiresias.

(General reaction.)

CLOTH
Well, well.

He is indeed

The father of all mysteries.

DIRCE
But wait. I knew Tiresias.

A woman. No?

WATER
Just so.

(To THEBE/MANTO.)

Oh, did you know?

THEBE/MANTO
I know it all: his life, her suffering,

Blindness and snakes and prophesy.

WATER
Imagine that.

47

DIRCE

Yes, well.

You see?

This is exactly, more or less,

Why I invited you.

FIREWOOD

Oh, yes?

DIRCE

I am not one of you by birth.

I first came here reluctantly.

But I soon loved this place,

Especially the promise it had made itself

And tried to keep: Harmonia's Balance.

Which, as I understand,

Is more than just a double crown.

Should not equality flow down

Through every aspect of the town?

WATER

What does that mean?

DIRCE

Lycus is Regent, but the people come to me

For government.

CLOTH

My mother says my father farmed

By squinting at the sun,

While she did all the rest.

BREAD

Men have their uses.

DIRCE

Yes.

(Laughter.)

48

WATER
Why are we here?

DIRCE
I have been studying.

BREAD
The men?

DIRCE
That too.
No doubt there is much
I could learn from you.
But lately I have learned about the women too.

FIREWOOD
Oh Yes?

DIRCE
The Feast of Dionysus and the Fire.

BREAD
Pentheus and young Labdacus.

DIRCE
Yes. That was sad.
And yet, apart from that,
So much of it seems beautiful.
Just women dancing.

CLOTH
Drinking.

DIRCE
And celebrating life and themselves.
It only went all wrong when men appeared.
I thought, perhaps, we might just try again,
Without the fire, to share…
All that,
For Cadmea's sake.

49

CLOTH

Here, let me try.

“In Dionysus name, all drink!!”

(They do.)

It works.

(Laughter.)

DIRCE

Thank you, my sisters,

How I thirst to laugh

And hear the stories of our town,

Both those passed down,

And those still happening.

WATER (*to FIREWOOD*)

Ah ha.

FIREWOOD

You want us to, well,

Spy upon our friends.

DIRCE

No. I have spies.

WATER

What then?

DIRCE

I want to be your friend,

To know that, here, in privacy,

We share both honesty and true equality.

CLOTH

But only here, in secrecy?

DIRCE

For now.

Where is the other one?

Manto, I think.

BREAD
I did not see her leave.

CLOTH
How strange.

THE VOICE *(off.)*
But, sir. You cannot—

LAIUS *(off.)*
Yes, I can and will.

Where is Queen Dirce?

(Enters.)

Ah.

DIRCE
That title is not mine.

LAIUS *(Entering)*
Not yet.

BREAD
Prince Laius, please.

It is not right to come so,

Into a lady's bath.

LAIUS
And who are you to tell me what to do?

BREAD
No-one, apparently.

DIRCE
Leave us alone.

(Pause.)

You, ladies, please.

BLOOD
But …

51

DIRCE

Prince Laius, please, let us respect these ladies' modesty.

Come here, to me, while, in defence of their's,

I sacrifice my own.

LAIUS

What? Oh, I see.

DIRCE

Lycus, who lives only to serve this prince,

Would want me to provide such counsel as I can,

At any time, in any place that Laius asks.

WATER

Equality, I see, has drained away.

BLOOD

There will be splashing now.

CLOTH

And no one will get clean.

(Exeunt LADIES.)

LAIUS

Oh, Dirce, you must know how much I ache

To make you Queen.

DIRCE

Go on.

LAIUS

When I am king—

DIRCE

But I am Lycus' wife.

LAIUS

All things can change.

DIRCE

All things?

LAIUS

Let us just say so much will come my way

When he is gone,

That, naturally, I think of it, from time to time.

DIRCE

Perhaps you think too much.

You are a man from time to time, I know.

When will you dare to be a king?

LAIUS

So soon, I think, that you will be surprised.

DIRCE

I do not like to be surprised.

LYCUS (*Off)*

I hear my Dirce chuckling like a mountain spring.

(LAIUS climbs from the bath, fumbling for his sword/knife. DIRCE takes it and hides it under water.)

DIRCE

No.

Not like this.

(LAIUS gathers his clothes and hides.)

DIRCE *(Cont'd. Loudly)*

My noble husband comes, so leave us, ladies.

We would be alone.

LYCUS *(Off)*

I like the sound of that.

But do not rush yourselves for me.

I must undress.

DIRCE

I wish to spare you their distracting nakedness.

LYCUS

How kind you are,

You always think of me.

DIRCE
Come soak yourself.

LYCUS *(Entering)*
Dirce, my love,

Of all your fine ideas,

Building this bath must be the best.

DIRCE
How was your day?

LYCUS
A long and uphill climb to reach this mountain pool.

The view from here is worth the effort though.

(Kisses her.)

Well, it works, your plan.

A few seeds spilled to suggest

That you and I conspire against each other

And gossip does the rest.

Since lunch I have learned seven things about you, dear.

DIRCE
And I of you, while you were spilling seed.

LYCUS
So, is it true that you enjoy…? *(Whispers in her ear)*

DIRCE
Yes, but not now.

Talk to me first.

I too have worked today.

You rush so quickly in I might be anyone.

I am your wife, remember me?

LYCUS
I know that well.

54

And that is why I have prepared a special gift for you.

DIRCE
A gift? Where is it then?

(He splashes her playfully.)

LYCUS
Why, here it is.

DIRCE
You mock me.

LYCUS
No. I would not dare.

The water is my gift.

DIRCE
I do not understand.

LYCUS
One scrap of paper I approved today

Will give your name to the stream

that flows from here to feed our town.

DIRCE
You have done what?

LYCUS *(Splashes her again)*
The river Dirce springs between our legs.

Tomorrow, with a splendid feast,

And all the necessary public rituals.

DIRCE
Such as?

LYCUS
Well, in my youth…

A sacrifice, perhaps?

DIRCE
Human?

55

LYCUS
What? No.

How barbarian.

Some animal.

DIRCE
A bull perhaps?

LYCUS
The very thing.

And so, tomorrow I will kill a bull,

Somehow,

in Zeus' name,

To celebrate the naming of the stream and you.

DIRCE
How nice.

What is her name this time?

LYCUS
Who, love?

DIRCE
Great gifts suggest great guilt.

Is there another child?

LYCUS
You punish me.

So many years have passed and still you punish me.

Can you forget Antiope? I have.

DIRCE
Her I could sacrifice.

You have forgotten what?

Her young breasts in your hands?

The sad surrender of her innocence?

Her name, I see, is fresh enough to you.

Do you remember all of them so well?

56

LYCUS

Enough. My fire is out.

You have no right to lecture me.

You too enjoy green fruit.

What have you learned from Laius, dear?

(LAIUS, hiding, tries to sneak away and makes a noise.)

DIRCE

Ask him yourself.

I sleep alone tonight.

(Exit DIRCE.)

LYCUS

Come out now, son.

I know that you are there.

(Enter LAIUS, half dressed and dripping.)

You are all wet.

LAIUS

I spilled some wine.

LYCUS

Not all of it, I think.

LAIUS

What do you mean?

LYCUS

It seems you saved enough to drink.

LAIUS

Yes, some.

LYCUS

Tell me.

How is my wife?

LAIUS

Dirce is well, I hope.

57

LYCUS
Well satisfied?

LAIUS
I do not know—

LYCUS
There is so much you do not know,

And that is why you are not ready to be king.

Cadmea is a noble town,

With able help from Locrus and Menaeceus,

But you, I fear, have far to go.

LAIUS
Can you alone decide?

LYCUS
It is the duty I was asked to bear.

LAIUS
If it oppresses you then free yourself

And let me take my chances with the crown.

LYCUS
You are too hot.

LAIUS
You are too cold.

LYCUS
A hot blade, cooled, is strong and keeps its edge.

LAIUS
But, but…

(LAIUS hesitates and then exits. LYCUS leans back in the bath and covers his eyes with a wet cloth. THEBE, holding the knife, surfaces silently.)

LYCUS *(Cont'd)*
Oh gods.

When will you free me from this tiresome boy?

THEBE

Tomorrow. At your sacrifice.

(THEBE submerges. LYCUS snatches the cloth from his eyes.)

LYCUS

Athena? Is that you?

(The Bull. A door bursts open. Loud voices and music within. Two men, laughing, are pushed out dramatically, but not violently by BOWL.)

BOWL

Out, out, you blistered pissers, out.

Do not come back, and when you do,

We throw my stones.

(BOWL rattles a cup, then exits within.)

M1 *(Sitting)*

I did not cheat.

M2 *(Standing up)*

He knows it too.

His great heart billows sparks and smoke,

But anger is a joke to him.

Relieve yourself and we will go back in.

(Turns to piss against a wall.)

M1

I did not cheat.

(Stands beside M2.)

But if his luck should change,

I will have doubts about his stones.

M2

You are new here, I think.

M1

How can you tell?

59

M2

The smell of your feet.

M1

My feet?

M2

They smell of piss, mine actually.

M1 *(Looks down)*

Oh gods.

(Enter AMPHION and ZETHUS unseen.)

M2

There is a clearer puddle over there.

(Gestures with his head, making M1 jump.)

What brings you here?

M1 *(Rinsing his feet)*

I heard that there was work.

M2

There was.

M1

No more?

M2

For now.

Locrus will need us soon.

Some hope for parks and others sewers,

Me?

I think that he could cleverly do both at once,

And make it beautiful.

Stay friend.

There will be work.

M1

It is a risk.

60

M2

Of course, take no risks.

Instead, let us go in and gamble with our fiery friend.

AMPHION

This is the place?

ZETHUS

Of course it is, just smell.

AMPHION

Must I?

M2

Whatever place you seek, friends,

This is it.

ZETHUS

We seek for wine.

AMPHION

And games of chance.

ZETHUS

All in the name of Zeus, of course.

M2

Well, praise his name,

Come in, come in.

(To M1.)

And you?

M1

When my feet smell like me again.

(Exeunt M2, AMPHION and ZETHUS within. Enter LOCRUS and NIOBE, who watches M1.)

NIOBE

This is not promising.

LOCRUS

No, perhaps not.

As I said, the Barn is more appropriate for you.

NIOBE
You flatter me.

LOCRUS
I mean…

If you wait here I will

Find out why the Barn is closed.

NIOBE
But—

M1
I will watch the lady.

NIOBE
Locrus, please.

M1
Locrus, the very man.

I am a carpenter.

(Grasps hand.)

LOCRUS
You will be safe.

This is an honest hand.

(Exit within.)

M1
So. New in town?

NIOBE
I am a princess.

M1
So I see.

You should not stand just there.

NIOBE
I will stand anywhere I—

Oh, I see.

(Voices within.)

All drink!!

NIOBE *(Cont'd)*
What are you doing?

M1
Washing my feet.

(Voices within.)

To Cadmea! Yes!

All drink!!

NIOBE
May I?

M1
Of course. *(She joins him.)*

VOICES WITHIN
To Zeus!!

All drink!!!

(Enter LOCRUS and AMPHION.)

AMPHION
Much better, yes,

So loud.

LOCRUS
Your brother spends so heavily.

AMPHION
He hates the weight of coin and so

He turns it into wine and generosity.

LOCRUS
And shallow popularity.

63

NIOBE
Locrus, at last.

Can this man help?

AMPHION
I hope I can.

NIOBE
My name is Niobe.

My father is king Tantalus.

AMPHION
And mine is Zeus.

My name is Amphion.

NIOBE
I seek a bed.

AMPHION
Then come with me.

NIOBE
How dare-?

AMPHION
I mean, we too are new to town.

But we have taken lodgings at a place respectable and clean.

And I believe they will have rooms for you.

NIOBE
Well then.

Thank you Locrus.

AMPHION
Who? Yes, of course.

A moment, princess, if you will.

NIOBE
Of course.

I will… admire the view.

M1

Hello again.

AMPHION *(To LOCRUS)*
All this was made by you,

I understand.

LOCRUS *(Indicating within)*
By them,

The sweating shoulders of the town.

AMPHION
What next?

LOCRUS
The Regent wants a wall.

AMPHION
And you?

LOCRUS
There are so many things to do.

M1
They say, Prince Locrus,

You can do them all at once.

NIOBE
A Prince?

LOCRUS
Not I, I am from Athens.

There are no princes there.

Well, good night. *(Exit)*

AMPHION
So, Princess, shall we go?

NIOBE
We shall, sir. *(Exeunt.)*

VOICES WITHIN

All drink!!!

65

M1

No. Wait for me! *(Exit within)*

(Enter MENAECEUS and TIRESIAS.)

TIRESIAS

Are we there yet?

MENAECEUS

This is the place.

(TIRESIAS pulls back.)

Why do you hesitate?

TIRESIAS

We cannot go in there.

MENAECEUS

What is this now?

We came for wine, remember?

TIRESIAS

I remember everything.

MENAECEUS

I should go home.

The man is drunk and mad.

(The door bursts open. Enter BOWL.)

BOWL

Stand back or drown!

(He rushes out.)

Unless I find release I will erupt and kill us all.

(He pisses against a wall.)

MENAECEUS

Well, here is fitting company for you.Good night, Tiresias.

(He starts to leave.)

BOWL *(Still pissing but turning to look)*

Tiresias?

My father knew Tiresias.

He said, my father did, he was a handsome girl

And then a beautiful young man.

Or else, perhaps, the other way around.

If you can wait,

I would be honoured, sir, to shake your hand,

And yours, of course.

There, done.

(He turns, wipes his hands on his clothes,and offers to shake MENAECEUS' hand.)

MENAECEUS

Not me.

That is Tiresias, or claims to be.

BOWL

But… I remember now, Tiresias was a girl at last.

TIRESIAS

Yes, for a while,

And then more snakes, and other mysteries.

MENAECEUS

Buy him a drink and see who else he is.

BOWL

Or, better yet, we can drink this,

(He produces a bottle.)

Which followed me outside mysteriously.

MENAECEUS

Again, not me.

I have no taste for stolen wine.

BOWL

You wound me, sir.

I only steal when all else fails.

This wine, and much besides,

was bought by Zethus, here inside,

Newly arrived, and eager, it would seem,

To gather friends as quickly as he can.

A strategy which generally would work with me,

And yet, somehow…

TIRESIAS

You feel, uncomfortable?

BOWL

Exactly, yes.

There is a purpose to his cheerfulness

That smells of hatred and that picks away

At wound's best left to heal.

I cannot help but feel I want no part in it.

So, shall we share the night and this good wine,

Tiresias?

TIRESIAS

Most willingly.

BOWL

Who is your cheerful friend?

TIRESIAS

Menaeceus.

BOWL

Ah, yes, our youngest judge,

Well, good for you.

TIRESIAS

And now a parent, too.

Sit down, my boy.

These stones are throne enough for any king.

Cadmus sat here.

68

BOWL

More over there I think.

Sit, sir, and have a drink.

And let us find out who we really are.

I know no better way.

MENAECEUS

Perhaps just one.

BOWL

Now, now, Tiresias here may be the gifted seer,

But I predict we will have more than one.

TIRESIAS

You have your father's voice and easy way.

He was a good man and a friend.

BOWL

He was.

TIRESIAS

A friend to me and to King Cadmus in his time.

Your father walked with him down from Olympus,

Did he not?

MENAECEUS

He did?

Of course he did.

BOWL

Indeed, he did.

He used to claim he tasted wine before all other men,

but you knew him.

MENAECEUS

I did.

His heart was honest but he loved to tell a tale.

For many years he owned the drinking place

Where Dionysus rules.

69

BOWL

The Barn.

My sister drinks there still.

MENAECEUS.

Yes, yes.

TIRESIAS

But you do not?

BOWL

Part pride, part shame.

Mostly the shadow of his name.

So, that is who I am: my father's son.

Now, sir.

I think I know a way to prove to you

That this man is Tiresias.

Myself, I need no evidence but take him at his word,

But you, being a Judge…

Well anyway.

(To TIRESIAS) I have here, hidden in my hand,

Something Athena gave my father long ago.

TIRESIAS

By Ares' kitchen fire.

A stone, marked on one side by her own thumb,

With which you play a game of chance.

MENAECEUS

Well?

BOWL *(throwing the stones)*

Yes, exactly so,

At least, one of these three,

I never knew which one.

MENAECEUS

Your father loved this game.

BOWL
Too much, I fear.

TIRESIAS
I played with him not far from here.

BOWL
Yes, so he said.

So much for doubt.

MENAECEUS
Forgive me, please, Tiresias.

I have been rude.

TIRESIAS
You have.

But who I am should make no difference.

MENAECEUS
You scold me like a mother, sir,

And I accept it willingly.

No one has ever spoken so to me.

TIRESIAS
I know.

Your mother loves you, though, with everything she is.

MENAECEUS
My mother lives?

TIRESIAS
She is no more and yet her love is with you even now.

MENAECEUS
You knew her then?

TIRESIAS
As well as… well,

I knew your father too,

Briefly but very…very well.

71

MENAECEUS
Pentheus?

TIRESIAS
Yes, of course.

MENAECEUS
And can you tell my mother's name?

TIRESIAS
No.

MENAECEUS
You say I am the son of king Pentheus,
But, without my mother's name—

TIRESIAS
Or Pentheus' acknowledgement
That fact cannot be proved.

BOWL
My father used to say,
"A name is like a shadow, nothing more."

MENAECEUS
What does that mean?

BOWL
I do not know.
He often said it, though.

TIRESIAS
Perhaps he meant a man is not his name,
But rather how he lives and what he does.
Perhaps your mother wished to keep you from the crown
So you might live like other men
And earn whatever honour comes your way.
Perhaps—

MENAECEUS
Perhaps?

72

You know and will not tell.

What have I done, that you should torture me?

BOWL

Perhaps… Forgive me, sirs.

A thought, like this year's wine,

Bubbles to life inside my mind.

Perhaps your mother,

As all mothers do, sought to protect you.

MENAECEUS

How?

From what?

BOWL

Think of it, sir.

Kings tend to die unpleasantly, especially here:

Your father, whom she loved, presumably,

TIRESIAS

Devotedly.

BOWL

And then king Labdacus.

MENAECEUS

The same.

I see.

What do you think, Tiresias?

TIRESIAS

Perhaps.

I can say this.

You never will be king.

.

MENAECEUS

Yes, this I know.

73

TIRESIAS
But you will father royalty.

MENAECEUS
My son?

TIRESIAS
A queen and…

Yes, poor Creon too.

I say too much,

Give me more wine.

MENAECEUS
What?

That is all.

BOWL
It is enough.

TIRESIAS
It is too much.

(He speaks into his hand.)

Can you forgive me once again, my love?

MENAECEUS
What have you there?

BOWL
They look like gaming stones.

TIRESIAS
Not stones, no, bones.

These finger bones that I have held so long

They shape my hand.

There I go again.

I talk too much.

Give me more wine.

74

MENAECEUS

And me.

I feel a chill, so pass that bottle, friend.

What is this stony game you play?

BOWL

Ah ha, I told you so.

Always more wine.

MENAECEUS

A game, another drink, and then,

I think,Tiresias must come with me,

And, in the morning, meet my family.

End of Act One

75

Act Two

Outside the Barn

(Enter THEBE/MANTO.)

THEBE/MANTO
Tiresias?

(Enter NIOBE.)

THEBE/MANTO
Tiresias? Where are you?

NIOBE
Have you lost your dog?

THEBE/MANTO
My father.

NIOBE
Oh. I see.

My father is a king.

THEBE/MANTO
Mine is prophet, blinded by Athena.

He was a woman, but is now a man.

Well, semi-divine, in fact.

His mother is a Naiad.

NIOBE
What?

THEBE/MANTO
A water spirit.

(Gestures towards the stream.)

Actually—

76

NIOBE
Oh, just a Nymph.

THEBE/MANTO
No.

NIOBE
Do you know Laius?

THEBE/MANTO
I do. He is—

NIOBE
In there? *(The Barn)*

THEBE/MANTO
Not yet, I think.

But soon.

Why do you ask?

NIOBE
And why do you?

THEBE/MANTO
I have an interest in him.

NIOBE *(Laughs)*
Really?

He will be king, you realize.

And you—

(WATER opens the door.)

WATER
Are most welcome, Manto, dear.

NIOBE
My name is Niobe.

I am—

WATER
Welcome as well,

With or without a name.

77

(To THEBE/MANTO.)

We were concerned about you, dear,

You disappeared.

THEBE/MANTO

Well I am here.

(Inside: WATER sets up while FIREWOOD lays the fire. CLOTH sleeps on a table. Enter ZETHUS and AMPHION.)

AMPHION

May we come in?

WATER

You have already, it would seem.

ZETHUS

Are we not welcome, then?

WATER

That, sir, is up to you.

FIREWOOD

Relax, she pokes.

Last night is gone: today is new.

WATER

So new we are not yet prepared.

ZETHUS

Too early, then?

CLOTH

Too late.

(Sits up.)

No. Wait.

No. Just in time, I think.

(Water brings a bucket from which CLOTH washes while WATER mops the floor. When her rough toilet is complete, CLOTH turns to the brothers.)

78

NIOBE

Amphion. Hello.

CLOTH

Silence, while I call forth

The smile of Dionysus.

(During the following CLOTH pours and drinks repeatedly. Enter BLOOD and GLASS.)

Forgiveness, then purgation,

Then more wine to make amends,

And back through revelry to new offence.

The sacred circle never ends.

So, shall we drink?

One to wake up, then one for appetite,

(WATER brings food.)

One more to help the food go down.

Thank you.

One each for courage, laughter, and desire,

And… there.

A priestess' working day is done.

Come, join me by the fire.

AMPHION

Such labours. Do you ever rest?

CLOTH

Oh, yes. Of course.

Feast days I spare myself all courage,

And I celebrate instead.

BLOOD

There is a feast declared today.

ZEPHUS

Oh, yes?

79

CLOTH
Oh, good.

WATER *(To BLOOD)*
How do you know?

BLOOD
The palace wants a bull.

CLOTH
A bull? For a feast?

GLASS
Why not a cow? The meat is better.

BLOOD
The bull is needed for a sacrifice.

FIREWOOD
A sacrifice?

WATER
Not here.

NIOBE
In proper cities sacrifice is commonplace.

CLOTH
Wine pours in our rituals, not blood.

GLASS
A feast and sacrifice for what?

THEBE/NIOBE
May I? I know.

First, thank you for taking me to the party at the palace.

NIOBE
What?

AMPHION
At where?

ZETHUS
Forgive them, Manto.

Please, go on.

THEBE/MANTO
Thank you.

It is a large and interesting place.

My senses led me and I soon was lost.

And when I flowed back to the bath.

NIOBE
The bath?

THEBE/MANTO
You were all gone.

Laius was there, with Dirce, in the bath.

BREAD
We know.

THEBE/MANTO
Then Lycus came.

AMPHION
Oh, yes?

THEBE/MANTO
And Laius hid.

NIOBE
He did?

BLOOD
What of the sacrifice?

AMPHION
Yes, tell.

ZETHUS
She will.

THEBE/MANTO
Lycus intends, with this ritual,

To name the spring, and the stream…

WATER
What?

THEBE/MANTO *(spitting the word)*
“Dirce.”

CLOTH
No.

GLASS
This is not good.

AMPHION
Why do you care?

CLOTH
Names matter.

FIREWOOD
Yes.

That stream was sacred first to Ares, then Athena.

WATER
Now it is the best part, and the heart, of our town.

THEBE/MANTO
It is?

BLOOD
We should be there.

CLOTH
Yes. Well prepared.

All drink!

THEBE/MANTO
I will be there. *(Exit the BARN)*

BREAD
Not me.

I doubt I will be missed. *(Exit)*

82

Outside

(LAIUS and BREAD meet.)

BREAD
You are up earlier today.
I would have thought you still asleep.

LAIUS
I am awake and rested, bathed, and freshly dressed,
And eager for this day.

BREAD
Well, good for you.

LAIUS
You have no taste for kings?

BREAD
You will be king and need a royal queen.
I would be just one more shamefaced girl
Who blames her belly on the lust of Zeus.
A child is hard enough to raise alone
Without his thinking he is half divine.
Have a son whom you can be a proper father to.

(LAIUS enters the drinking place. Exit BREAD.)

AMPHION
Good morning to our king to be.

LAIUS
I will be King today.

CLOTH
Today?

ZEPHUS
So soon?

AMPHION
You have a plan?

83

LAIUS

Of course I have.

Have you heard of this foolishness about the stream?

WATER

We have.

LAIUS

Lycus will bring a bull to sacrifice

When he re-names the stream.

AMPHION

Which god will he invoke?

CLOTH

Oh, all, or none.

WATER

He will be vague, as politics require.

LAIUS

This much I know,

He will come humble and unarmed.

The bull will live.

The weak old fool will fall instead.

I will be king.

This feast will honour me.

(Silence.)

AMPHION

It is your plan to kill an unarmed man

While he performs a sacred sacrifice?

CLOTH

I doubt that Dionysus will be pleased.

BLOOD

But Ares might.

LAIUS

You women are as weak as pale Menaeceus.

What do the brothers have to say?

AMPHION

King Laius has hit upon a plan as bold as he.

The moment comes, the hero acts, and all is well.

(Stands.)

Today this town will have a real king.

Do this exactly as you say and we will stand with you.

Who else dares play a part in history?

ZETHUS *(Stands)*

Your wisdom, brother, sweeps all doubts away.

LAIUS

And what about the rest of you?

You all have dreamed of this, you said.

CLOTH

We all will come and see.

I like a little history.

ZETHUS

Then lead us, Laius, to the city square.

AMPHION

Perhaps.

Perhaps, if I may, it would be wise

To let the men know too, what Lycus plans,

And have them there for the sacrifice.

LAIUS

Yes! To the Bull!

(Exeunt omnes).

in the street

(ZETHUS and AMPHION pause)

ZETHUS
You have a plan?

AMPHION
Perhaps.

Follow my lead?

ZETHUS
I will.

(Enter NIOBE from the Barn.)

NIOBE
Zethus. Thank Zeus.

May I?

(Takes his arm.)

All this excitement makes me…. well.

May I walk with you?

ZETHUS
My pleasure, princess.

NIOBE
Yes. How nice.

(Exeunt.)

Outside the Bull

(Bowl, Locrus, Man 1, and Man 2.)

M1
But, but, will there be wine?

M2
Good question. Well?

BOWL

Of course there will.

This is Cadmea after all.

LOCRUS

Not at the sacrifice itself, I think.

But here, of course when it is done,

And someone, Lycus probably, will pay.

M2

Oh, good.

M1

Yes, we will come.

BOWL

Be patient with me, Sir.

You seek to tempt me to a bloody sacrifice

Out in the sun,

A long hot walk away from wine,

By promising me wine when I return?

I will stay here.

LOCRUS

Your father would be there.

BOWL

Oh. Why?

LOCRUS

He always was, as I recall,

When his beloved city changed.

BOWL

Sometimes he caused the change.

Why should I care if Lycus spreads her name around?

It is only a name.

LOCRUS

You disappoint me, sir.

BOWL

What? “Sir”?

What have I ever done to you?

LOCRUS

Friend, neighbour, citizen.

Some people care: the women, mostly,

Who remember Thebe and Athena at the stream.

BOWL

My sister.

LOCRUS

Yes.

BOWL

She will be there.

But other than the name, what is the change?

LOCRUS

That part is up to us.

This is your moment, men.

To do this foolish thing,

To flatter or appease his wife,

Comes at a cost to Lycus.

BOWL

Ah.

It will offend and anger some.

LOCRUS

He will have lost respect.

BOWL

He has none.

LOCRUS

Well, authority,

Unless the city sees that we,

The men who’s sweat made something beautiful

Out of a filth clogged ditch, approve.

Then, men,

The celebration and respect is yours.

M1

What should we do?

LOCRUS

If we, together, tools in hand,

March down and stand,

To witness what is done,

His foolishness becomes success,

And Lycus knows he owes Cadmea's working men

A debt, and that he rules

Because, together, we allow him to.

Then we shall see what kind of work we do.

(Exit BOWL within.)

M1

Shall we go now and spread the word?

M2

What word?

LOCRUS

To gather here, and why.

M2

Right.

M1

Yes.

(Exeunt severally. Enter BOWL, draining a cask.)

BOWL

I have a drum.

LOCRUS

Of course you do.

(Enter AMPHION and NIOBE, arm in arm, followed by ZETHUS.)

NIOBE *(Laughing)*
That is so clever.

I have spent my life watching a king—

Did I say?

AMPHION
You did. Yes. Tantalus.

NIOBE
And I know what a king looks like.

(She makes a point of making eye contact.)

Must he drum?

BOWL *(With a flourish)*
He must.

Until the working men all come,

To drink first,

Then to march with Locrus to the naming festival.

ZETHUS
Well, Locrus, it is true.

You get things done before, well,

Anybody asks you to.

(Enter M1 and M2, running.)

M2
A great crowd comes.

BOWL
Come citizens and make more drums!

(Exeunt BOWL, M1, and M2 within.)

AMPHION *(To NIOBE)*
Why do we speak of crowns?

Prince Laius will be king.

(Enter LAIUS, running.)

90

LAIUS

Wait! Wait for me, and I will lead you men.

(LAIUS slips and falls in the urine pool.)

Oh Zeus, my hands. *(Enters the BULL.)*

NIOBE

Perhaps the gods have other plans.

Menaeceus' home

(Enter Mrs M with baby.)

MRS M *(Singing gently)*

Cadmus left Athens and followed a cow.

It gave up the ghost where our city stands now.

(Enter TIRESIAS from within.)

TIRESIAS

We've lived and we've loved and we've died here.

MRS M

And how did you get in?

TIRESIAS

I am Tiresias.

MRS M

You lie.

TIRESIAS

I cannot. No.

MRS M

I knew Tiresias.

She was, well, many things,

But she was she.

I knew her when I was a child.

91

TIRESIAS

At school in the barn.

And there you met Menaeceus.

And this is Creon. *(The baby)*

Much has changed.

(Enter MENAECEUS.)

MRS M

How do you know his name?

We only just last night—

MENAECEUS

He is Tiresias, and our honoured guest.

MRS M.

But, but..

MENAECEUS

I brought him here.

MRS M (*To TIRESIAS, with a sniff.)*

Stay there.

And come here, husband, please,

Into the breeze.

(They step aside.)

Is that where you got the name?

MENAECEUS

He is Tiresias.

MRS M

If you say so.

MENAECEUS

I do. I know.

He prophesied that Creon,

And a daughter yet to be,

Would both wear crowns,

92

But, separately… I think.

MRS M
And all this while you bought him drink?

MENAECEUS
Well, yes.

MRS M
You are but two halves of one drunken fool.

TIRESIAS
At school

Your love for him began as trust,

As living loving must.

MRS M
But,

TIRESIAS
I see you say,

“We now have peace and hope for honest government.”

MRS M
That was so long ago.

I do not like to be confused.

He has to go.

MENAECEUS
Tiresias…

TIRESIAS
Hear me.

However I may look or smell,

I see the truth untied to time.

To say what I know has cost me more

Than most lives hold.

I know that we four stay here quietly

For several days.

We bar the door and we ignore

93

All of out there,

While chaos blazes and consumes itself.

If we do not Jocasta never lives

And Creon never rules.

MRS M
Jocasta?

TIRESIAS
Queen.

(Mrs M nods her assent. MENAECEUS takes baby CREON into his arms.)

the Square

(Enter LYCUS and DIRCE.)

LYCUS
You look magnificent.

DIRCE
How nice.

And you look…

LYCUS
Humble?

As my role today requires?

DIRCE
You know, you almost do.

How strange.

Should you not have an animal?

LYCUS
What?

DIRCE
The bull.

94

LYCUS

The thing has been prepared and I will lead it, briefly,

Just before I cut its throat.

That part is bad enough.

I have no taste for blood.

DIRCE

Your tastes are known to me.

LYCUS

Can you be kind today?

DIRCE

Forgive me, yes, of course.

Thank you for this.

LYCUS

I thought you would be pleased.

(Enter THEBE stealthily, unseen by LYCUS, with the knife.)

DIRCE

I am.

Oh, look. *(Gestures Off)*

Your bull.

Go introduce yourself at least,

Before you kill the beast.

It may be calmer then.

LYCUS

You know, I will. *(Exit)*

(THEBE comes up behind DIRCE.)

THEBE

The river Dirce.

DIRCE

Yes?

THEBE

Springs from these wounds.

95

DIRCE
What wounds?

THEBE
Those I will now soon make in you.

DIRCE
Which is it?

THEBE
What?

DIRCE
When? Now or soon.

(THEBE hesitates.)

You will not kill because you haven't yet.

It is not who you are.

(DIRCE turns slowly and puts her hand over THEBE's on the knife.)

Who are you, child?

THEBE
No child.

I walked down Mount Olympus on The Day,

But never have been slave.

DIRCE
Nor goddess?

THEBE
No.

And before that I was, I am,

The life in the waters where Athena bathed,

Where you now entertain,

Where all Cadmea comes to see themselves,

I—

DIRCE
Thebe. Not Manto.

THEBE
Yes.

96

DIRCE
Your hatred honours me.

THEBE
I will be queen.

DIRCE
Oh yes?

THEBE
It has been prophesied.

DIRCE
Ah. When?

THEBE
What?

DIRCE
When will you be queen?

THEBE
What do you mean?

DIRCE
You are immortal?

THEBE
No.

DIRCE
But live, have lived, a long, long time.

THEBE
I have.

DIRCE
And will, while many mortals, citizens, and queens,

Will live and go.

And so, how do you know this is the time?

I do not think so.

THEBE
No?

DIRCE
If you do this now…

(She removes her hand.)

I am a martyr and my name revered,

97

And you are one last cruelty from the gods.

Find patience Thebe, or your long, long life

Will be more torture than delight.

I may be queen first for a while, or not,

But you know you will be eventually.

It is a future fact.

Wait for the moment, child, then act.

(Enter LYCUS. Drumming off.)

LYCUS

The whole town comes to celebrate with us.

DIRCE

For me?

How nice.

LOCRUS

We come to bathe in your name.

LYCUS

All men are drawn towards your beauty's flame.

LAIUS

All men of blood are drawn to beauty and to power.

LYCUS

My wife has much of both.

DIRCE

Thank you, my love.

LYCUS

Enough for many men.

DIRCE *(Looking off)*

Ah, good.

Much as I love the company of men,

This is too much for even me.

But I see, over there,

A crowd of women who, I hope, will share

98

This moment now with me.

Come closer, friends,

And make room, gentlemen.

LOCRUS

Of course,

Please, fellows, stand aside and stand behind,

And you will find that all can see what Lycus will do now.

FIREWOOD *(Aside)*

I feel surrounded more than welcome here, somehow.

LYCUS

Bring forth the bull, sacred to Zeus,

And all the other gods, of course.

Strike drums, pour incense on the fires

And all the other things that sacrifice requires.

Oh gods, look now and see

How we bow down in chaste humility.

(Some bow, some kneel. LAIUS steps forward.)

LAIUS

Let me.

LYCUS

Not now.

DIRCE

What is it, son?

LAIUS

I wish to play my part in this.

As great Cadmea's natural king.

Where is the knife for Lycus' sacrifice?

LYCUS

You flatter me.

This sacrifice belongs to all the gods.

99

I am their humble servant, as you see.

LAIUS

Humility becomes you, sir.

Where is the sacred blade?

THEBE

I have it here.

(She brings it forward.)

LAIUS

Give it to me.

DIRCE

To you?

LAIUS *(Taking the knife)*

It is my honour, as the king to be, to offer it to Lycus.

LYCUS

Good.

But, Laius, turn the handle round to me

So I may take it properly.

LAIUS

You take it as I give it, sir.

LYCUS

Is this your manhood, now?

Be careful boy, or you may scratch someone.

LAIUS

I will scratch out your name from history

And take your wife and crown to be my own.

LYCUS

You lack the bone.

(Pause.)

ZETHUS

Why do you hesitate?

AMPHION

Act now or never be a king.

LYCUS

Give me the blade and stand aside.

You cannot do it, boy.

ZETHUS

He can.

(Aloud) Stop! Laius, no!

(AMPHION and ZETHUS thrust LAIUS and LYCUS together over the knife, which is driven into LYCUS.)

LAIUS *(Raises the bloody knife.)*

I am the king!

LYCUS

You have been played with like a toy,

Pathetic, drunken, foolish boy. *(Falls)*

DIRCE *(Catching LYCUS)*

Oh, Lycus, no.

I did not know.

I would have warned you, love.

LAIUS

You would?

You were to be my queen.

DIRCE

I am his wife.

(LYCUS dies.)

And who are you?

AMPHION

We have hot cause to wish him dead.

ZETHUS

We are the sons of good Antiope;

Disgraced, imprisoned, and at last avenged.

101

LAIUS

Lycus is dead.

I am the king.

ZETHUS

He is a murderer.

And every man here saw the cowardly crime.

(The "men" roar angrily. The women are jostled.)

LAIUS

You too?

I am betrayed.

ZETHUS

(Male voices, off, react throughout with increasing anger.)

Men of Cadmea, as you feared,

Laius has proved himself to be dishonest, cowardly,

And vain.

The women, once again,

Have bled his manliness away.

How many times?

How long can this go on?

Oh shame, oh painful shame even to say,

This quivering boy, this girlish thing,

That once had hoped that you would choose him king,

Has mocked the ancient gods, our city, and ourselves.

With this, the sacred, sacrificial blade,

He has betrayed all things at once.

LAIUS

Help me, now, Locrus.

LOCRUS

Why?

LAIUS

I am your rightful king.

LOCRUS

I am Athenian.

I have no king.

(He turns to the crowd behind him.)

You built this city with your skill and tools

And you decide how it is ruled.

ZETHUS

Wise words.

Go friends, and think of Lycus and your love for him,

And of his brutal end.

AMPHION

You, with the drum, take this.

(Gives BOWL money.)

For no man pays for wine tonight.

Go drink, and think of his face and name

And who to celebrate and who to blame

ZETHUS

We may come join you, Amphion and I,

When we have borne the corpse of Lycus home.

AMPHION

Our uncle's spirit is with Zeus, our father, now.

Tomorrow and together let us all

Bring peace and order and strong government

To this, our town.

ZETHUS

In great Zeus' name.

AMPHION

Of course.

(The women begin to leave but stop when DIRCE starts laughing.)

ZETHUS

The poor weak woman has gone mad with grief.

Take her away and comfort her.

DIRCE

So beautiful, so beautiful.

Such perfect punishment

For such an ugly crime

AMPHION

No, wait.

Please, let the honoured widow speak.

DIRCE

Your punishment.

You hated Lycus and now he is dead

And all Olympus knows his blood

Runs through your fingers, now and evermore.

ZETHUS

Laius killed him.

DIRCE

No.

Laius was an instrument, just like the blade.

But you brave sons have slaughtered him,

Your father.

Ha.

No crime is worse.

AMPHION

What? No.

ZETHUS

Take her away.

GLASS

What did she say?

(The women come closer to hear. AMPHION and ZETHUS struggle to maintain control.)

DIRCE

My husband was well known for lechery.

When he was young he took to bed Antiope, his niece,

Though she was younger still,

I think that she went willingly.

ZETHUS

Zeus is our father.

AMPHION

Yes.

DIRCE *(Playing, successfully, to the women)*

And all incestuous bastards make that claim.

Look in your hearts,

Would you not feel the blood of Zeus, as Dionysus does?

Are you half gods in any way, except your arrogance?

You killed your father and the laws

Of Man and Nature fall on you.

Dionysus, in your name

We call out once again, for punishment!

(AMPHION and ZETHUS are prevented from action by BLOOD, who is armed.)

BLOOD

Come, sisters, to the Barn and bar the door.

DIRCE

Please take me to your fire.

CLOTH

May Dionysus guard us.

BLOOD

With my help.

(Exeunt DIRCE and the women. BLOOD as rear guard.)

105

AMPHION
Come brother.

To the Bull.

ZETHUS *(Looking at LYCUS' corpse)*
But.

AMPHION
Let rats and dogs attend him.

Come. *(Exit)*

(ZETHUS covers LYCUS' face.)

THEBE
She said he was…

ZETHUS
Who knows.

He was somebody's son.

That much I know.

THEBE
I will be queen.

ZETHUS
I have to go. *(Exit)*

the Barn

(Enter BLOOD, who looks around.)

BLOOD
All clear.

(Enter FIREWOOD, WATER, DIRCE, CLOTH, GLASS, BREAD, & NIOBE.)

FIREWOOD
I will secure the windows and the other door.

BLOOD
Yes, good.

(To WATER) Can you..?

WATER
Go with her?

Yes, of course.

BREAD *(To BLOOD)*
More light? (*BLOOD NODS)*

GLASS *(to BLOOD)*
The fire? *(Another nod)*

CLOTH *(Helping herself)*
And wine for all.

BLOOD
No. Not unless—

DIRCE
I pay.

BLOOD
Then yes.

DIRCE
You lead, I see.

BLOOD
Who? Me? No—

Only in the things that I do best.

As do all the rest.

(CLOTH is pouring when FIREWOOD and WATER re-enter.)

WATER
Who said - ?

DIRCE
I did. With this. *(Gives money)*

(Raises cup.)

May I?

How our god smiles on us even now.

Look at us.

Cadmea's women, once again,

Around a fire, and free from men.

To Dionysus! *(All drink)*

I am more now at home with you

Than I was in that draughty place.

BREAD

Yes, well—

DIRCE

I am not done.

And yet, the palace should belong to all.

(Some agreement.)

Make no mistake, those brothers plan

To take the palace and the crown,

And they well might,

Unless we women, now, tonight,

Unite to fight for freedom!

I would be proud—

CLOTH

You are too loud.

FIREWOOD

If you are truly one of us, then meet us one by one.

GLASS

We all have much to say.

BREAD

And much to listen to.

FIREWOOD

It is our way.

DIRCE

Of course.

May I still buy the wine?

CLOTH

Let me decide.

This is what I do best.

And I say…. yes.

(The circle breaks. DIRCE approaches BLOOD.)

DIRCE

Please, may I see your blade?

You hold its balance well.

I watch, and I can tell.

(Exit NIOBE to…)

the Street

(…where she encounters THEBE.)

THEBE

I will be queen.

NIOBE

I do not think so dear.

I have to go.

I know something that someone needs to hear. *(Exit)*

(Inside.)

DIRCE *(To GLASS and BREAD)*

For years I have dreamed of that glorious hour,

Its passion and its power.

(WATER and FIREWOOD approach and listen.)

The fire, the wine, the frantic dance,

No man would ever have a chance—

WATER

We know.

DIRCE

You know that Lycus was a fool,

That it was me who truly ruled.

With you behind me now I could—

FIREWOOD

We think that you should go.

DIRCE

And who are you to say?

WATER

Your hosts.

FIREWOOD

We brought you here to save your life,

Not start a war.

WATER

We do not want your kind of leadership.

(BLOOD opens the door and looks out.)

BLOOD

Quiet. For now.

DIRCE

Alone? Out there?

BLOOD

I would leave now if I were you.

GLASS

You are alone in everything you do.

(Exit DIRCE. BLOOD closes the door.)

BLOOD

But.

FIREWOOD

Yes.

We cannot hide and wait for history.

GLASS

I think it has arrived.

BREAD

What can we do?

WATER

Let us go tell each home the news

And let each mother choose

What she will do.

BLOOD

But do so carefully,

And come or call to me

If you need help.

I will go to the square.

Look for me there.

(All except CLOTH embrace and leave separately. CLOTH shuts and bas the door.)

CLOTH

And I will guard the wine.

Outside The Bull. N.B. During this scene all available cast members double as Men. They enter, exit and re-enter as needed.

(BOWL pours for 2 Men.)

M3

To Zeus *(Drinks)*

M4

To us *(Drinks)*

M3

Two more.

(BOWL pours. Enter LOCRUS.)

LOCRUS

And one for me.

111

But please, wise citizens, save some sobriety.

Cadmea has no government.

(Both men drink.)

Do you not see?

This is an opportunity.

(Enter M1 and M2 etc. BOWL pours.)

BOWL

Would you be king?

M1

That is a good idea.

M2

I think so.

LOCRUS

No.

M1

Oh? Why?

M2

We need a king.

LOCRUS

In Athens there has been no king for many years.

M1

And is there chaos without government?

LOCRUS

The people choose who governs them.

(AMPHION and ZETHUS approach.)

M2

But… how?

LOCRUS

Each man has a vote.

BOWL
Men only?

LOCRUS
Why?

BOWL
Go on.

LOCRUS
And they elect an Areopagus.

M2
A what?

LOCRUS
A group

BOWL
Of men

LOCRUS
Who govern for a certain time.

And then they do it all again.

M1
What? Govern?

LOCRUS
Vote.

(Enter NIOBE.)

AMPHION
And does it work?

LOCRUS
Quite well, most of the time.

ZETHUS
An excellent idea, when times allow.

AMPHION
But surely, in a crisis, such as now,

A firmer hand—

113

NIOBE

How can you stand and drink,

And talk and talk, and think you think,

While Dionysus' madness, once again,

Is conjured to devour the town?

AMPHION

What do you mean, good Princess Niobe?

NIOBE

Good Amphion.

Ambitious Dirce, in the boy god's name,

Blows hot breath on the flame

That murdered Labdacus and Pentheus too.

She is high priestess of the cult and has,

Since long before I came,

Met with her wine mad followers to plot

Her bloody path to power.

This is that hour.

On my way here I saw her messengers

Spread out to spread the fires

Of fury, hatred, and desire that blister

Every woman's heart in this most tortured town.

Act now to bring her down,

Or watch Cadmea die most terribly.

(MEN exit and re-enter as needed to create a sense of greater numbers and mounting urgency. BOWL exits within the Bull.)

A MAN

The bull!

The bull has broken loose and riots savagely!

NIOBE

Zeus acts.

Where are his sons?

LAIUS *(Off)*
I am the king!

Give way or die! (*A scream off.)*

A MAN *(On/from the other side from LAIUS)*
Dirce was seen.

A MAN
Armed women gather in the square.

A MAN
Chaos is everywhere.

AMPHION
Act now or all is lost.

ZETHUS
Do what you must, and later count the cost.

(Running and shouting, the men exit variously. AMPHION, ZETHUS, NIOBE, and LOCRUS remain.)

ZETHUS
Now, Locrus, tell us more about your Areopagus.

LOCRUS
Should we not try to help?

To organize?

ZETHUS
To lead?

AMPHION
No-one has chosen us.

ZETHUS
Madness and chaos rule us now,

And will until they have consumed themselves.

Then, while the ashes cool,

AMPHION
The men, as you suggest,

ZETHUS
And as is fair,

NIOBE
Will say who rules.

LOCRUS
I will be there. *(Exit)*

AMPHION
And where shall we be, Princess,

Until that moment comes?

NIOBE
The palace?

AMPHION
Yes.

ZETHUS
An excellent idea.

(Exeunt.)

the Barn, several days later. The place is in disarray

Enter BOWL frightened and disheveled..)

BOWL
Hello?

Is no-one here?

Oh this is terrible, what shall I do?

(Enter CLOTH from within.)

Sister, you live.

(Embraces her.)

CLOTH
Of course I do.

What, in the name of wine, is wrong with you?

BOWL
I am a man.

CLOTH
Yes, of a kind, but not the worst.

What happened here?

Did I make all this mess?

BOWL
Where have you been?

CLOTH *(Pointing within)*
Through there, for… quite some time.

Trying to find the bottom of a cask of wine.

What have I missed?

BOWL
Oh, sister, sit, and hold my hand.

Each day, new horrors grip our town.

First they—

CLOTH
Who?

BOWL
The men who worship Zeus,

And Ares, I suppose,

And those who worship nothing but themselves,

CLOTH
The men, you say?

BOWL
They look like men, but—

Give me some of that.

Where to begin?

It started with arrests,

Then personal revenge.

It lost all purpose and became

117

An evil thing without a name.

They first came here,

To crush all loyalty to Dionysus' name,

CLOTH

To -

Why?

Oh, that.

Forgetfulness could save us all.

BOWL

Women and girls especially have suffered

At their hands most terribly.

CLOTH

Oh town.

BOWL

Your cask of wine has saved your life,

For now.

(Enter WATER.)

WATER

Is that my wine?

CLOTH

How can you care at such a time?

WATER

How can you drink?

CLOTH

I seek the guidance of our god.

Great Dionysus, speak to me. *(Drinks deeply)*

WATER

What does he say?

CLOTH

"More wine", I think.

(Enter BLOOD, bloodied. She bars the door. She sees BOWL and prepares to fight him.)

BLOOD

One man alone?

I like these odds.

For one by one like stepping stones

They lie behind me now.

WATER

Not him. Not here.

BOWL

Not me.

BLOOD

Why not?

He is a man.

WATER

He is our friend.

No harm to anyone.

BLOOD

Say that out there.

WATER

There are good men.

Think of Menaeceus.

BLOOD

All that is swept away by rape and riot.

(A hammering at the door.)

WATER

Who knocks?

FIREWOOD *(Off)*

Let me in.

(BLOOD rushes to the door and opens it. Enter FIREWOOD, and GLASS. BLOOD bars the door again and stands by it.)

119

GLASS
Dirce is dead.

BLOOD
Most terrible.

GLASS
I saw it done.

One mob seized her,

Another, with some losses, caught the bull.

They came together where—

BLOOD
Go on.

GLASS
They bound her to its horns

And then released the furious animal.

It—

FIREWOOD
No.

Imagination ends this story now.

WATER
Laius is dead as well then, I suppose?

BLOOD
Perhaps by now,

But he still lived when I last saw,

Cowering beneath the corpses of the men

Who tried their manliness with me.

They will harm no one now.

120

the street outside the door

(BREAD enters.)

LAIUS *(Hiding)*
Do not hurt me.

Is that you?

BREAD
Poor frightened girl,

Come in and we will care for you.

(Enter LAIUS.)

BREAD
I see.

Prince Laius—

LAIUS
Please.

My name is death to me.

Do not betray me to the mob, I beg of you.

BREAD
Wait there.

(BREAD knocks. GLASS opens the door.)

WATER
Come in, but quickly, sister.

And let me bar the door.

BREAD
But I am not alone.

(An exchange of glances and then nods.)

Thank you.

(Enter BREAD, followed by LAIUS,who stands in the doorway.)

WATER
I see.

121

Well, shut the door.

GLASS
He cannot stay.

BREAD
He cannot live out there.

GLASS
We all will die if we are found to shelter him.

BREAD
Then he must not be found.

(WATER pulls LAIUS in and bars the door.)

GLASS
He murdered Lycus.

FIREWOOD
We let him think that we approved.

CLOTH
The city eats itself.

Well, king, go govern it.

FIREWOOD
Yes, horror floods our town,

And he is swept along by it as much as anyone.

WATER
Laius must leave this town as quickly as he can.

LAIUS
Yes please. But how?

CLOTH *(To BOWL)*
And you should too.

BOWL
How can I leave you all?

BREAD
We will endure.

We always do.

WATER
They will be satisfied,

But not until they know the prince is dead or gone.

FIREWOOD
I have a cart I use for firewood.

WATER *(To BOWL)*
Old friend,

I doubt you would last long without some wine.

So, take this cask,

The one that Laius fits inside.

FIREWOOD
And take it with you for the walk to Elis,

Or beyond.

CLOTH
Go, brother.

Keep in your eye the vision of Cadmea

That Cadmus and Harmonia,

And our good father too,

first walked towards,

And walk towards it still.

BOWL
I will.

(They embrace.)

WATER
You have some courage after all.

BOWL
Oh yes, they will sing songs for years to come

Of how I bravely ran away with all this wine. *(To LAIUS)*

Get in then, Sir.

123

But wait, before you do.

Should we not give him breathing room?

WATER
Let us all drink to better days.

FIREWOOD
All this must pass and gentle peace will come at last to our good town.

LAIUS
I wish to say—

GLASS
No. Save your breath.

We do not wish your death,

But have no interest in your life.

We only wish to end this senseless strife.

BOWL
I will return.

(LAIUS sinks into the barrel. As the lid comes down on him,fade to black.)

the Street, pre dawn

(Enter MENAECEUS and TIRESIAS.)

MENAECEUS
Oh, town.

TIRESIAS
The smell of death is everywhere.

MENAECEUS
And yet the sounds of dying are no more.

TIRESIAS
So sad a silence fills my ears

That I can hear the falling of my tears.

MENAECEUS
The “River Dirce” chokes on corpses,

No!

Stay, Tiresias.

TIRESIAS
What do you see?

MENAECEUS
Oh, Sir.

Your daughter—

TIRESIAS
What?

Oh, Manto.

Where?

MENAECEUS
Not moving. In the stream.

Face down

TIRESIAS
I see.

MENAECEUS
Did you not know?

TIRESIAS
This moment, now, again.

Forgive me, good Menaeceus.

You need to go towards what happens next.

You always will.

But I cannot. *(Begins to wander off.)*

I will…

MENAECEUS
Until…

125

the Palace, a blood red dawn comes slowly

(Discover AMPHION, ZETHUS, NIOBE, M1, M2, and as many other "men" as can be mustered. M1&2 wear some rudimentary mark of authority, a sash or hat perhaps. They are armed with tools.)

AMPHION

So then, it is agreed.

(Enter LOCRUS.)

You have, I think, all that you need

To calm the streets.

Now, go.

LOCRUS

Wait. No—

We had agreed to meet to vote.

ZETHUS

We have.

These citizens, new made—

NIOBE

Well paid—

ZETHUS

Commanders of the Civil Guard, have,

On behalf of all the others,

Had their say.

LOCRUS

But, but, my vote?

AMPHION

They spoke as one voice,

Didn't you?

M1

We did.

M2

Almost.

ZETHUS
And so one vote more or less would make no difference.

LOCRUS
I see.

And who will be our Areopagus?

NIOBE
Well, actually…

AMPHION
It was suggested and agreed,

That, in the current grave emergency,

A smaller group—

M1
We need a king.

ZETHUS
And so, reluctantly,

AMPHION
And only temporarily,

LOCRUS
You took the crown.

AMPHION
What? Took it? No.

ZETHUS
I, on behalf of the town,

Asked him to lead.

NIOBE
To rule.

AMPHION
And I, of course, refused,

Unless my brother, as we all are brothers,

M2
Yes

127

AMPHION
My brother Amphion agreed to share the burden.

LOCRUS
Two kings?

AMPHION
Yes. Temporarily.

LOCRUS
Then one?

NIOBE
Well, as you taught,

The people must decide.

LOCRUS
They want this?

M1
They have been told.

M2
And almost no-one disagreed.

(Enter MENAECEUS.)

MENAECEUS
I met some coming here,

But they are silent now.

AMPHION
Cadmea needs stability before it can choose anything.

ZETHUS
We bring that now,

When it is needed most.

(To M1.)

Post guards and send patrols.

(To M2.)

And bring all prisoners to the square.

They will find justice there.

NIOBE
Go. Now.

M2
Yes, Sir. I mean—

LOCRUS
No. Stay.

NIOBE
And so, wise Locrus,

What will you do now?

There was, as I recall,

Some talk about a wall.

MENAECEUS
Excuse me, Niobe.

Who are you now, to give commands?

NIOBE
My I tell, Amphion, my dear?

AMPHION
Let them hear it from me.

We had thought we should wait until—

LOCRUS
The killing stops?

MENAECEUS
The dead are buried?

ZETHUS
But? What news, my brother?

AMPHION
Cadmea has, since Cadmus' time, enjoyed a double crown.

Harmonia's Balance is the rock on which he built this town.

And so, for the good of all,

This Princess has agreed to be my queen,

And rule with me.

ZETHUS
And me.

NIOBE
Yes, yes, of course.

(THEBE rises dramatically from the bath.)

THEBE
And me.

M1
Oh Zeus!

M2
Athena?

THEBE
No.
But I knew them all.
Athena sent me here,
To save you if I can.
I am your queen,
And I will take this man
To be my king.

NIOBE
Who are you?

LOCRUS
May I introduce
The Naiad Thebe,
Living spirit of this place
Since long before Harmonia came
Or Cadmus slew the serpent here.
And being so, the only one
Who claims Cadmea's crown

Who is a citizen of the town.

AMPHION *(To ZETHUS)*
Do you agree?

ZETHUS
I… I…

THEBE
The moment comes, the hero acts, and all is well.

ZETHUS
I do.

AMPHION
You challenge me?

M2 *(to M1)*
What is that smell?

M1
War.

Civil war.

More terrible than all that goes before.

ZETHUS
I—

MENAECEUS
May I speak?

AMPHION
No.

ZETHUS
Yes.

(AMPHION begins to draw his blade.)

You may speak.

For what king is so weak he cannot listen

To the wise advice of judges?

131

AMPHION *(To Menaeceus)*
Well?

MENAECUS
If you draw that blade another finger's width,
Or you say "yes" again.
Your stories end in a lake of blood
So deep it drowns us all.
So think now while you can.
Harmonia's Balance says
Two crowns are good,
And she, of course, is wise and right,
But, might not that truth stand
Even more solidly on four?
Locrus has spoken of the… what?

LOCRUS
The Areopagus.

MENAECUS
That governs Athens?
A small group, chosen by the people
Who rule them

LOCRUS
Temporarily.

M1
Yes, but—
We thought, that something simpler…

M2
Under the present circumstances…
Yesterday.

MENAECEUS
A smaller group?
So, why not four?

132

LOCRUS
But… Temporarily.

MENAECEUS
Yes, yes, of course.

That is what you said?

AMPHION
It was.

ZETHUS *(to AMPHION)*
I challenge you to rule with me,

And Niobe, and Thebe, who,

Before the sun goes down,

Will be my queen,

And one of two queens in our town.

There is so much to do

To make Cadmea sing again,

To sooth the women and placate the men.

LOCRUS
And someday soon, together, make a plan

That sees the royalty in every man,

MENAECEUS
And woman?

LOCRUS
Yes, of course.

AMPHION
A path to peace and a road

To justice and, well, harmony.

Yes, I agree!

But, do our queens to be?

(NIOBE and THEBE lock gazes until the both nod, slightly, together.)

And, if my fellow royals will allow,

I now declare a Wedding Festival!!

My brother and our brides,

Husbands and wives who, from both sides,

Of… what has happened recently.

Come show, that all may see,

How Love can save us all!

ZETHUS. *(To AMPHION)*
Brother, your hand.

(An awkward handshake becomes an even more awkward embrace.)

NIOBE *(To THEBE)*
So.

Do I understand that you are…

What, now?

Semi-Divine?

THEBE
I am.

NIOBE
While I am just a mortal princess?

THEBE
Yes.

That is true. *(Begins to go to ZETHUS)*

NIOBE
I have not been here quite as long as you,

But I have read Cadmean law.

(THEBE stops. NIOBE speaks to MENAECEUS.)

Did not Harmonia decree,

That gods, and so, presumably,

God-ish things cannot be

Cadmean royalty?

MENAECEUS
She did.

NIOBE *(To the group)*
And so, you see..

LOCRUS
She was a goddess.

NIOBE
Yes, but,

She gave up immortality.

LOCRUS
For love.

Love of her man,

And for the town, this town,

That they both planned

To be made sacred by equality.

Her love and loss are the stones

On which we stand.

If Thebe, now, will do the same,

Surrender any claim to be

Anything other than mortal,

And so, alive.

Then you, like me, can call her sister first,

Then queen.

And we can build again,

On these four cornerstones.

THEBE
Brother, I do.

Oh, Zethus, hold me now.

Who ever knew life was so dry?

(The two couples come together.)

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MENAECEUS
Well, what have you built now?

LOCRUS
Peace first.

MENAECEUS
And then?

LOCRUS
Who knows?

End Of Play

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