Elis

A play

Part five 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.

Elis

Characters

The UnNamed

BLOOD
BOWL (from Cadmea)
BREAD
CLOTH (from Cadmea)
FIREWOOD
GLASS
WATER

The Named

CHRYSIPPUS prince of Elis
EKION a young man of Elis
HIPPODAMIA queen of Elis
LAIUS exiled prince of Cadmea
MENAECEUS envoy from Cadmea
PELOPS king of Elis
TIRESIAS a blind prophet

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Settings

Various places in the small mountain city of Elis: a slaughterhouse becoming a tavern, the palace, the street.

Prologue

TIRESIAS (*Sitting in a gutter, drinking alone, throws small bones on the ground.)*

I like to say "Most things are true eventually."

Some people nod and buy me wine,

Others just laugh and say,

"There goes Tiresias again, poor thing.

He was a Prophet, once, you know."

Who knows?

I am as blind as mothers' love,

But still,

I glimpse a darkness coming

To devour the stars.

(Thunder, closer.)

If I could kill this truth,

If I could smother it as easily as murdering a child,

I would, but I cannot.

I cannot help or warn these people here:

The dancing, aching body of my town.

But like a ghost, can only frighten them.

And no one needs more fear,

So I sit here

And vainly hope I can forget what you have yet to see.

This landslide of disastrous necessity

Beginning,

Now.

a street

(Enter Blood, Glass, and Bread to put up decorations, perhaps a banner, for the upcoming Slaughter Festival.)

BLOOD
I told you he would be the King of Blood.

GLASS
And did we disagree?

BLOOD
If it were up to me he could be king all year.

BREAD
And who, if it were up to you, would be his queen?

GLASS
The blood in your cheeks says it all.

BLOOD
It might be fun, just for the day, to stand beside him,

Wear the crown of bones,

GLASS
And hold his hand that holds the blade of life and death.

BLOOD
He is so—

(Enter EKION, unseen by BLOOD.)

BREAD
Here.

GLASS
Hello Ekion, or should I say, your Majesty?

EKION

Oh. I.

So, you have heard?

BREAD
And told everyone.

EKION
It is, of course, an honour, and—

BLOOD
Who is to be Queen?

GLASS
Yes, Ekion,

Who is the lucky girl that you will bathe

in the steaming blood of the best of bulls?

BLOOD
And dance with at the Slaughter Festival?

And…

BREAD
Celebrate fertility.

BLOOD
Yes.

Will it be me?

EKION
If it were up to me—

(Enter CHRYSIPPUS.)

CHRYSIPPUS
Wait for me Ekion.

My legs are not as long or strong as yours.

BLOOD
Prince Chrysippus.

BREAD
We were just—

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GLASS
Ekion has been named—

CHRYSIPPUS
Oh, yes. King for a day.

What fun.

Well, Prince or King, he is my friend—

GLASS
And ours.

CHRYSIPPUS
Yes, but—

(To Ekion) Shall we go?

(Exit EKION and CHRYSIPPUS.)

BREAD
Well, that was rude.

BLOOD
He is the Prince.

BREAD
King Pelops is not rude.

GLASS
But he is not a boy who stumbles into

Three such beauties, blushing with desire.

He is less proud than terrified, I think.

BLOOD
Perhaps. Come friends,

There is so much to do.

BREAD
And yet I think that you are more prepared

Than any bride could ever hope to be.

(Exeunt.)

elsewhere, nearby

(Enter CHRYSIPPUS and EKION.)

EKION
What is the hurry, Chrysippus?
Did you see how they looked at us?

CHRYSIPPUS
At you.

EKION
What? Are you jealous?
You? Who will be the real king of Elis
When your good father—

CHRYSIPPUS
Dies.

EKION
Jealous of me? The butcher's boy?
Can I have this? For I have little else.
My name is not even my own,
But handed down like this old blade,
From a grandfather who was born,
If that is the word,
Out of the dust that swirls still
In the dark alleys of another town.

CHRYSIPPUS
I know, and I apologize.

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But did you see their eyes?

They worship you, and I—

I have to go.

Prince Laius waits for me.

EKION

But he—

CHRYSIPPUS

He understands what royal disappointment is.

(Exeunt.)

The palace of Elis

(Enter Menaeceus, Pelops, and Hippodamia.)

MENAECEUS

Trust me, King Pelops, I do understand.

He is, as he has always been, a complicated man.

PELOPS

He is also, unfortunately for us, our guest.

For twenty years now he has claimed that name

And I must honour it, or shame my own.

MENAECEUS

Your name is honoured everywhere.

HIPPODAMIA

For what, Menaeceus?

How easily we can be used?

MENAECEUS

For patient generosity.

PELOPS

How can it be when Laius hides,

Or sneaks about, disguised,

In constant fear of Amphion and Zethus,

As if Cadmea's comfortable kings

Need ever even think of him?

HIPPODAMIA

He is a drunken liar and a fool.

PELOPS

My dear.

MENAECEUS

He is Cadmea's rightful king.

HIPPODAMIA

When he first spilled out on our floor

We both could see some possibility.

But all these years have passed

And he has never crawled

Beyond that puddle's edge.

Bad meat cannot be saved

By soaking it in wine.

And you were best to look for royalty

That can stand up and say its name out loud.

PELOPS

As you can see, Menaeceus,

My patience will run out.

MENAECEUS

I understand.

The noble families I represent,

Who wish to bring King Laius home—

HIPPODAMIA

Though, why, I cannot understand.

MENAECEUS

Not his… behaviours… quite so much as what he represents.

These latest changes I have told you of:

Un-necessary and expensive walls,

And all of that,

Show just how much we need tradition now.

Tradition gives us peace and unity, and so,

As King Pentheus' Law decrees,

Our crown must pass from father down to son,

And Laius is the only certain such connection that we have

With Cadmus and Harmonia.

And so, such as he is, he is our rightful king.

PELOPS

Perhaps.

But hear this, friend.

If you have any hope that you might gain something yourself

Through Laius' gratitude, you are a fool.

HIPPODAMIA

He does not know the meaning of the word.

MENAECEUS

I seek only to serve my city, sir.

PELOPS

Of course.

MENAECEUS

Perhaps he only needs some balance in his life.

My faith in what a good queen's love can do

Is justified each time I visit you, Hippodamia, queen.

(HIPPODAMIA hides MENAECEUS' hat.)

PELOPS

You are a diplomatic man.

HIPPODAMIA

And generous, as I recall.

MENAECEUS

Again, the families I represent, not least my own,

Wish to express, in solid terms,

The gratitude they feel to Elis and to you.

(MENAECEUS offers money.)

PELOPS

This much might keep him for a month or two.

MENAECEUS

I will return before the harvest, then.

HIPPODAMIA

Tell me, Menaeceus,

Your city's men, are more of them like him or you?

MENAECEUS

They are like others everywhere.

Why do you ask?

HIPPODAMIA

Our Elis is a quiet place,

Not noticed and not feared,

But good to live in as it is.

We have no army, little crime,

And do not need the many layers of government

That you have built so carefully.

PELOPS

We will grow, I suppose, eventually.

HIPPODAMIA

It is our fondest wish that Elis does so peacefully.

We have not earned the anger of the gods,

But we enjoy their… inattention, gratefully.

PELOPS

There is, we know, some wine here now,

Sold at a place that plays at Dionysus' rituals

In happy innocence.

HIPPODAMIA

So far.

But things can quickly change.

PELOPS

I can, for now, most of the time,

Keep Laius and his ways here in my home,

But not forever, nor entirely.

MENAECEUS

I understand. .

I will do what I can.

Be well.

HIPPODAMIA

Until the Slaughter Festival?

MENAECEUS

So soon?

You said a month or two.

PELOPS

I said this money should keep him that long.

HIPPODAMIA

We doubt it will.

But, more than that,

We both enjoy your company.

PELOPS

Well, travel safely, friend,

And take our greetings to your wife and family.

MENAECEUS

Thank you, I will.

As soon as I can find my hat.

(Exit.)

PELOPS
Why do you try to anger him?

HIPPODAMIA
To find out if I can.

I like the man.

PELOPS
Oh. Yes?

HIPPODAMIA
He is a bit like you.

And so, I hope, is Chrysippus.

PELOPS
Our son is fine.

HIPODAMIA
I hope he is.

He has your spirit but his mother's watery blood.

You and your nymphs.

PELOPS
One nymph, once, long ago.

HIPPODAMIA
You smile when you remember though.

Relax, I gave you my forgiveness then,

I will not take it back.

You know I love the boy, as if he were my own.

PELOPS
One thing Cadmea gives the world

That I accept without regret

Is this "Pentheus' Law":

I think it right and good a king's own son

Should be the one to next put on the crown.

HIPPODAMIA

And so do I.

PELOPS

Our Chrysippus can still hope to be

A worthy ruler after me.

He has your guidance, as do I.

HIPPODAMIA

He has his mother's looks.

PELOPS

You look just fine to me.

HIPPODAMIA

Just fine?

PELOPS

I cannot win.

HIPPODAMIA

Then play another game.

(Kisses him.)

Go first and I will follow you.

PELOPS

Yes, love. *(Exit)*

(HIPPODAMIA retrieves the hat.)

HIPPODAMIA

Menaeceus.

Your hat.

(Enter MENAECEUS.)

MENAECEUS

Thank you.

How odd.

HIPPODAMIA
Menaeceus.

A word before you go.

MENAECEUS
Of course, good queen, but understand,

I am expected by my family.

HIPPODAMIA
You are a happy man.

MENAECEUS
Yes, in my way.

HIPPODAMIA
Your daughter,

You have sworn to make her queen?

MENAECEUS
Well, it was prophesied.

HIPPODAMIA
My Pelops is not young.

MENAECEUS
No, nor am I.

HIPPODAMIA
But he is old.

Make no mistake, I love the man,

But all men die.

MENAECEUS
Apparently.

What are you trying to say?

HIPPODAMIA
His son. Our son,

Prince Chrysippus, will soon be king,

And he will need a queen.

MENAECEUS

He is a boy.

HIPPODAMIA
He looks a little younger than he is,

The beautiful so often do.

But with our guidance,

And this balance you describe…

MENAECEUS
Harmonia's?

HIPPODAMIA
Yes.

He could become a proper king.

Jocasta could be queen.

MENAECEUS
Of Elis?

HIPPODAMIA
Yes.

Is that so bad?

MENAECEUS
I never thought of it.

HIPPODAMIA
No, but we did.

MENAECEUS
We?

Who?

HIPPODAMIA
Your wife and I.

MENAECEUS
Oh yes?

HIPPODAMIA
We have not met.

But when I heard my kitchen talk about the two

As if they were already in their wedding bed,

And learned a woman of your town

Had recently arrived and made herself

Most welcome by our fire

With wit and, I suspect, some wine,

And that she stirred this pot of talk,

With tales dressed in details that show

She had been welcome in your home as well.

I recognized a skillful mother's hand,

And felt I had an ally and a friend.

MENAECEUS

A most… impressive lady is my love.

And still some people think I am the government.

But surely Elis has a girl or two.

HIPPODAMIA

None raised to be a queen,

And none with parents like you two.

MENAECEUS

Well, I suppose it is a good idea.

I would so miss her, though.

HIPPODAMIA

You would be welcome here,

With all your pretty grandchildren.

MENAECEUS

My father's bones are there.

Thank you.

I should go home.

HIPPODAMIA

And I to bed.

MENAECEUS

Yes, Pelops waits.

HIPPODAMIA
Dreaming, I think, by now.

Dream of your daughter's happiness.

MENAECEUS
Thank you.

My faith in the wisdom of

An equal balance between king and queen

Is strengthened every time I visit here.

HIPPODAMIA
Yes. So you said.

Thank you.

Good bye, for now.

(Exit MENAECEUS.)

CLOTH (Off)
Now?

HIPPODAMIA
Yes.

(Enter CLOTH.)

CLOTH
"With tales dressed in details"

You flatter me.

HIPPODAMIA
Because it works.

You have the boy?

CLOTH
I do.

HIPPODAMIA
Good. Send him in.

(CLOTH hesitates.)

What now?

CLOTH

Where I come from,

And other places too,

It is unlucky not to thank a messenger.

HIPPODAMIA

My kitchen waits for you,

My cook will serve my gratitude.

CLOTH

Thanks. But.

I have a brother, come to town,

And I, in our way,

Would share a cup with him.

Perhaps some form of gratitude

That is… more portable?

HIPPODAMIA *(Gives money)*

Here.

Send the boy in.

And, thank you, friend.

(Exit CLOTH. Enter EKION.)

EKION

You sent for me, your Majesty?

HIPPODAMIA

I did.

Come closer.

Stop.

And let me look at you.

EKION

I—

HIPPODAMIA

Good. Now.

Think well before you answer me.

If I, your one true Queen,

Commanded you to come to bed with me

And love me passionately.

What would you do?

(Pause.)

EKION

Leave town.

HIPPODAMIA

Explain.

EKION

If I… resisted the temptation.

HIPPODAMIA

Ha. Good boy.

EKION

I would fail in my loyalty to you.

But if I gave myself the glorious delights—

HIPPODAMIA

Enough.

Go on.

EKION

I would betray my king.

And either way I would have forfeited my honour

And I could not stay.

HIPPODAMIA

You have been chosen to be king

Of this year's Slaughter Festival?

EKION

I have.

HIPPODAMIA
I can see why.

Yet you would leave?

EKION
So—

HIPPODAMIA
Breath in, young king.

Your honour is as safe with me

As mine with yours.

I was just testing you.

You are a good friend to Prince Chrysippus.

EKION
I try to be.

HIPPODAMIA
He needs you now, and so do I.

EKION
I—

HIPPODAMIA
Draw your blade.

(He does, she looks at it.)

How strange.

EKION
It was my grandfather's,

One of the warriors who sprang up from the dirt

At Cadmus' feet.

HIPPODAMIA
Cadmean, then?

EKION
He was, but, after tragedy,

He came to Elis,

Where he turned his blade

To simple butchery.

HIPPODAMIA
I see.

But can you use it, man to man?

EKION
He taught me to.

For exercise.

HIPPODAMIA
So, on this ancient blade,

I ask you now to swear to me

You will protect Prince Chrysippus with—

EKION
My life.

I swore that long ago.

HIPPODAMIA
Good lad.

Now, go, before I ruin everything.

EKION
Your Majesty. *(Exit)*

HIPPODAMIA
And yours.

in a hall outside the palace kitchen

VOICE 1 (*Off, from the kitchen)*
No! Not like that.

VOICE 2 (*Off)*
You said to beat them.

(Enter LAIUS. He eavesdrops.)

VOICE 1 (*Off)*
Not like a criminal.

Hippodamia is particular about her eggs.

VOICE 2 (*Off)*
Look!

Look who comes!

(LAIUS jumps and begins to flee.)

VOICE 1 (*Off)*
Ah, welcome friend.

(LAIUS hesitates.)

Cadmea's glory.

Come, beside the fire.

(LAIUS decides to exit, i.e. "enter" the kitchen, believing he has been invited.)

VOICE 2 (*Off)*
And taste this.

CLOTH (O*ff)*
I do believe I will.

Thank you.

(LAIUS stops himself, slinks into the shadows, and listens again. Eating sounds.)

This is so good.

Subtle, yet open, like Jocasta's smile.

It begs for balance, just like royalty.

Some wine perhaps?

VOICE 1*(Off)*
You know we have none of our own.

CLOTH *(Off)*
Ah, yes.

Well, luckily I have brought these.

(Clinks. Sounds of pleasure.)

But, sadly, I must go,
With only one (*drinks)* or two *(drinks longer)*
Swift sips, as ritual requires.
My brother is in town,
Delivering wine to the Slaughter Hall,
And I would join him there to welcome
Dionysus properly to town.
I will return.
One more? Alright.
I can be rude, but not to you.

(Exit LAIUS opposite)

the Slaughter Hall. An occasional slaughterhouse used between times as a kind of Dionysian wine den

BOWL *(Off)*
Gently, oh, gently, please.
Oh, yes, well done,
Gently, I said, it bruises easily.
Yes, good, at last.

(Enter BOWL, backwards, followed by FIREWOOD and WATER, rolling a barrel.)

BOWL (*Cont'd)*
Now set it over here, I think.

FIREWOOD
So, clear the way at least.

(BOWL pushes some furniture about uselessly.)

BOWL *(To the barrel)*
Welcome to Elis, love.

Always a joy to meet a friend from home.

WATER
I need a drink.

BOWL
Oh, so do I.

But after you of course.

(Pause.)

So. Open it.

(To the barrel.)

Excuse us, dear, this slight indignity.

WATER
He has watched us do this,

For twenty years.

And yet he does not learn.

BOWL
Learn what?

Who brought the very first of these to you?

WATER
Three quarters empty, though,

And smelling of… I do not know.

BOWL
Yes, that was then, but I am thirsty now.

FIREWOOD
Watch carefully, again.

(They demonstrate.)

WATER
Hard work.

FIREWOOD
Thirst.

WATER
Water.

(They drink water.)

FIREWOOD
Thirst relieved.

Try it and see.

BOWL
Sh.

Wine is in the room.

She may go sour to hear you speaking so.

Oh, wait, I see.

You think I will not pay.

Today I will.

WATER
You will?

BOWL
You will, of course, be paying me today for helping you?

WATER *(Reluctantly digging out coins)*
So we agreed.

FIREWOOD
Although, you were, somehow, less help than usual.

BOWL
Who held the doors?

And scared the beasts and thieves away?

WATER
He has a mighty snore.

FIREWOOD
Alright, if only to protect our name.

BOWL
No, keep your water and your coins.

Pay me in wine.

WATER

Drink water, foolish friend.

What you are paid is added to the price,

So take your money to Cadmea,

And, there, buy much more wine than you can here.

BOWL

Who is a fool?

I am here now, with the wine.

No coin will kiss my tongue and throat.

It will not rock me gently from within

Or lift my ears to let the breezes in.

It will not spice my blood

Or make my singing beautiful.

It will not make all people wise.

It cannot take this half scrubbed slaughterhouse

And, with a little firelight, and some few friends,

Turn it into the temple of a lively god,

Where those of Elis who enjoy a taste

Of Dionysus' greatest gift

Are coming,

Soon.

So, if you love your coins so much

Keep mine, and give me wine.

FIREWOOD

Enough, you have a liquid tongue.

Here, drink, and I will drink with you.

BOWL

Thank you. *(Drinks)*

But first, you have much work to do.

(There is a knock at the door.)

31

You see?

You talk too much,

And so are not prepared.

I will buy time.

(WATER and FIREWOOD bustle about to set up for guests.)

BOWL

Knock louder please.

I did not hear.

(Repeat knock. Pause.)

BLOOD *(Off)*

So?

BREAD *(Off)*

How was that?

(BOWL examines the room. WATER and FIREWOOD have tried to get ready to open.)

BOWL

Not bad, for now.

(Opens the door. Enter BLOOD, GLASS, and BREAD.)

BOWL *(Cont'd)*

Come in then, friends, and join our happy company.

FIREWOOD

Yes, come.

It will be warmer soon.

WATER

What may I offer you?

BOWL

Or I?

GLASS

You do not seem prepared?

BOWL

I am.

BREAD
Where are the bones and blood and blades?

BOWL
All stowed or scrubbed away,

Except the odd stain,

Here and there.

BREAD
But they are wanted for the Festival.

BLOOD
The Slaughter Festival.

WATER *(To FIREWOOD)*
I told you so.

FIREWOOD
I know.

We have decided.

WATER
Have we?

FIREWOOD
Well, we are considering a change.

BOWL
Less slaughter and more festival.

But, if you like,

Perhaps a daub above the door would do.

BREAD
And may I ask, sir, who are you?

BOWL
“Sir”?

What have I done now, that you should call me names?

I am a priest, well, worshiper,

Of Dionysus,

33

Whom we celebrate with song, with laughter, and good company,

And with his glorious gift,

Richer than blood and hotter than fire,

Which can, without some care,

Unleash the worst of both.

His gift, great as it is, would fall

On a Slaughter Festival

Like rendered fat onto a cedar blaze.

And so, perhaps a few bones by the fire,

For decoration, but no blades,

Trust me, my gentle friends,

I know.

BLOOD

You are Cadmean then?

BOWL

I am.

BLOOD

Oh.

GLASS

So, do you have this fire blood magic stuff?

BREAD

Can we have some?

BLOOD

What will it do to us?

(WATER begins to serve them wine.)

WATER

It is called wine.

See for yourselves.

BOWL

But wait.

34

Is this the very best you have?

For nothing less will do for goddesses.

GLASS
Listen to him.

BLOOD
We are not goddesses.

BOWL
Perhaps.

Who really knows?

BLOOD
A real god might.

BOWL
Yes, I suppose.

And when one comes…

But until then let us be friends and drink together.

BLOOD *(To FIREWOOD)*
Is this what happens, you know, there?

FIREWOOD
Cadmea?

GLASS
Yes.

FIREWOOD
Yes, so I understand.

BOWL
Now, to be fair, not all Cadmean men

Are quite as fine as I.

FIREWOOD
This one is harmless, more or less.

He works for us.

BOWL
Well… work.

It is like this.

I please the mistress of the house,

The master pays me,

And I serve my god by bringing wine.

So, drink.

GLASS
We will. *(They do)*

BOWL
What do you think?

BREAD
I do not think, I feel.

I feel so many things.

BOWL
You will do well.

BLOOD
And we will pay, so put your coin away.

Our fathers tend the royal herds.

Tonight you are our guest.

BOWL
If you insist.

outside the Slaughter Hall

(Enter CHRYSIPPUS and LAIUS.)

CHRYSIPPUS
This is exciting.

I have heard much about this place.

LAIUS
Wait, Chrysippus, while I disguise myself.

CHRYSIPPUS
But, Laius, why?

36

LAIUS

Assassins seek me everywhere.

(LAIUS steps aside and adjusts his appearance. Enter Ekion.)

EKION

Ah, there you are.

CHRYSIPPUS

What? Do you follow me?

EKION

I do.

It is my pleasure, and employment now.

The Queen has asked me to.

CHRYSIPPUS

What? Spy on me?

EKION

Protect you.

Sir.

I am your bodyguard.

CHRYSIPPUS

Oh bloody bones.

She sticks her fingers everywhere.

EKION

Nothing has changed, my friend.

CHRYSIPPUS

Perhaps.

But do you work for her or me?

EKION

For you.

CHRYSIPPUS

Good.

Wait for me here outside,

While I go inside with my friend.

(LAIUS steps forward.)

LAIUS
This way, my lord.

CHRYSIPPUS
Alright, if you insist.

LAIUS
I do.

(CHRYSIPPUS and LAIUS enter the Hall.)

EKION *(Still outside)*
Yes, Sir.

Inside

BOWL
I am a prophet too, I see.

Here comes a handsome lad to worship you,

And his mysterious attendant.

So.

Give him some goddess, girls.

(Aside to FIREWOOD.)

Though, by his looks, he has much of his own.

(All three girls rise respectfully.)

GLASS
My lord.

BOWL
No, not like that.

No goddess bows to anyone.

WATER
Be still.

BLOOD

38

Prince Chrysippus.

BOWL
I see.

The pretty prince.

Good, good.

BREAD
We only came to have a little fun.

CHRYSIPPUS
And so did I.

BLOOD
I think that we should go and leave the prince in peace.

CHRYSIPPUS
Gods, no more peace for me.

I drown in peace.

Please stay.

BOWL
Quite right, my lord.

If I know anything I know

A prince must find what Cadmus found,

Harmonia's Balance.

BREAD
What is that?

BOWL
When love, respect, and trust

Live equally between a king and queen.

CHRYSIPPUS
Can we forget I am a prince?

BOWL
With wine you can.

I, more than once, have seen it done.

39

BREAD
Come sit with us.

BOWL
Some wine, a fire, three lovely girls,

Why be a prince when you can be a god?

CHRYSIPPUS
A god?

BOWL
Why not?

Now let me look at you.

Apollo's eyes and shoulders

Don't you think?

And yet an undeniable amount

Of Aphrodite in the rest,

Now that would mean a scandal, wouldn't it?

BLOOD
Oh, Aphrodite and Apollo,

Think of it.

BOWL
And Zeus, of course,

Will pop up somewhere I suppose.

CHRYSIPPUS *(Laughing)*
Wise priest, go on.

BOWL *(Looking at LAIUS)*
And here, Hephaestus?

No, wait.

This one is somehow neither god nor man.

LAIUS
Be careful, fool.

GLASS
He toys with you.

BREAD
But means no harm.

BOWL
It is my solemn duty now

To offer you a Dionysian mystery.

Shall I go on?

(Coughs dryly.)

CHRYSIPPUS *(Filling BOWL's drink)*
Please do.

BOWL
What we do next

Is in itself a celebration of the god.

Some say an invocation, yes,

It is believed that Dionysus finds the fires where

People meet in pleasure's name,

And there appears in different forms.

LAIUS *(Sitting aside)*
Bring wine for me.

He talks too much.

BOWL
Sometimes he fills the room with joyful life:

Outrageous, wild, and passionate.

Those nights are memorable, I think.

GLASS
You do not know?

BOWL
I have been there,

But I remember little,

Thanks to wine.

BREAD
How strange.

CHRYSIPPUS
And other nights?

BOWL
Like all the gods, he has his darker moods.

LAIUS
Oh yes he has.

BREAD
You are Cadmean, then?

LAIUS
Yes, more than any man.

(Pause.)

But now, of course, I serve Prince Chrysippus.

WATER
So.

This is fortunate.

This wine we drink tonight

Has just arrived from your home town,

As you, of course, must recognize.

Let us now drink,

As true Cadmeans do,

To Cadmus and to Harmony.

BOWL
Harmonia.

WATER
Of course.

BLOOD
What do you mean “drink to”?

BOWL
Look in the wine until you see them there,

Greet them, and drink.

(They do.)

Now they are part of you.

LAIUS

To Cadmus *(he drinks)*

Labdacus *(again)*

And Laius. *(throws his cup into the fire)*

BREAD

Cadmus I know, and Labdacus, who was the last?

BLOOD

Laius, you know,

He killed his father and then ran away.

BREAD

Oh yes, of course.

GLASS

They say he died in Athens years ago.

Trampled by sheep, I think.

BLOOD

A justice, I suppose.

LAIUS

They say?

Well they are wrong.

He is alive and strong,

And will return to take the crown

Which rightfully is his.

BREAD

Yes, yes, of course he will.

Prince Chrysippus, we have met once before,

But we were children then.

CHRYSIPPUS

Yes, I recall.

43

So much has changed.

Come, sit with me.

BOWL *(To LAIUS)*
You are a prophet then?

GLASS
What fun.

BOWL
Oh, many are at home,

Are they not, ancient one?

LAIUS
I am not old.

BLOOD
Please close your eyes and tell us what you see?

LAIUS
What?

BLOOD
Please, for me.

LAIUS *(Closing eyes)*
I see…

You, naked, all of you.

BLOOD
Oh, my.

LAIUS
And then I see… blood, everywhere.

Much fear and agony and death

Right here.

BLOOD
We ought to go.

WATER
Please stay, and look with open eyes,

We are a peaceful company.

BOWL

I think I understand.

This is, forgive me sir, not prophesy

But smell.

Our noses tell us what has happened here

Where many thousand beasts have died

And twice a year they celebrate

the Slaughter Festival.

CHRYSIPPUS *(Eyes closed.)*

Yes, it is true.

I smell still roasting flesh,

And I smell many dancers and…

I like the Slaughter Festival.

BREAD

Then come to it with us.

If we can wait that long.

We love to dance,

And now, with wine, the dance will be like fire.

CHRYSIPPUS

And I hear drums.

BOWL

That is your heart, or mine.

I would accept if I were you.

LAIUS

I will come too.

WATER

It is a public festival.

LAIUS

More wine.

BOWL

Yes, yes, more wine for everyone.

WATER

Who pays?

(LAIUS throws a handful of coins into the fire.)

LAIUS

Pick that up later.

Pour the wine.

(WATER does.)

Listen to me and do not interrupt.

The noble Laius, born to be a king,

Prepared himself most carefully.

He studied peace, practiced for war,

And won by slow degrees

The love and admiration of the town.

BOWL

Something like that.

LAIUS

You interrupted me.

BOWL

Forgive me, Sir.

Go on.

BREAD

You were just saying what a handsome lad

Young Laius was.

FIREWOOD

And full of promise.

BOWL

Yes, he was.

CHRYSIPPUS

You knew him then?

BOWL

Not well, my sister was his friend.

LAIUS
She was?

BOWL
She had kind words for him.

I like to think he is as he was then.

LAIUS
You can think anything,

But still you interrupt.

BOWL
Go on.

You bought the wine.

LAIUS
Noble Prince Laius, so they spoke of him,

Became a full grown man in every way.

BREAD
I like the sound of that.

(To CHRYSIPPUS) Are you full grown?

BLOOD
Be still.

BREAD
I will.

But not for long.

(In CHRYSIPPUS' ear) Wait till the festival.

BOWL
"Noble Prince Laius…."

LAIUS
What? Not now, you fool.

BOWL
Your story, sir, go on.

"Noble Prince Laius, born to be a king"

LAIUS

Oh, yes.

Was waiting patiently until old Lycus saw-

Lycus was not his father though.

He was a distant relative who had been asked

To hold the crown—

Until Prince Laius was a man.

Which now he was.

But Amphion and Zethus

Had such skills, as I have not,

And nor did Laius have, at telling lies,

And blowing on the coals of half remembered grievances,

That even there they found a gang

Of cowards, thieves, and worse

To follow them.

For Laius led the many honest citizens

Who worshipped Dionysus in my town.

Those twin snakes feared the faith

And sought to put it down.

BOWL

That much is true.

LAIUS

Be careful, you.

They hatched a plan

To kill the kind old man

And blame the prince, who was not even there,

But in the temple,

Worshipping.

GLASS

He fled.

LAIUS

He fought, alone, heroically, for seven days,

Until the bodies piled so high that he sank under them.

But, one by one, he was betrayed by everyone.

So he escaped, wet with his many wounds,

Into the hills.

He waits somewhere still patiently

Until the time is ripe.

BLOOD

It has been twenty years.

BOWL

Those who know wine, as Laius does,

Know how to wait, and why.

LAIUS

Up to a point.

BREAD

Is all that true?

CHRYSIPPUS

I was not there, of course, but I have heard it told exactly so,

A thousand times, in my own home.

LAIUS

You see? It now is history.

BOWL

It is. Apparently.

GLASS

I have no taste for history.

It is all dust and bitterness to me.

FIREWOOD *(To BOWL)*

What were you saying about how

Dionysus comes from time to time?

BOWL

Sometimes as beast, sometimes as man.

49

In truth his spirit fills me every day.

GLASS
It would be nice if gods were more like you than him.

BLOOD
The sour one?

LAIUS
You have no taste for me?

GLASS
Not yet.

LAIUS
Well, try me on your tongue and see.

GLASS
Leave us alone.

We were a happy company until you came,

Pushing and puffing noisily.

BLOOD
Be careful.

BREAD
Why?

Prince Chrysippus is twice the man.

LAIUS
You scrap.

How dare—

CHRYSIPPUS
Prince Laius, no.

BLOOD
Did he say Laius?

FIREWOOD
Yes, he did.

LAIUS
The boy is drunk.

Do I look like a king to you?

BOWL

Perhaps a king perhaps a god,

Perhaps even a man, who knows?

Forgetting is a gentle gift.

More wine for everyone.

FIREWOOD

A little less for some.

WATER

God, king, or common man.

He is no longer welcome here.

LAIUS

I do not wish to stay.

WATER

You may return another night if you leave now

And do it quietly.

LAIUS

I will return.

(Exit LAIUS.)

FIREWOOD

Not soon, I hope.

BLOOD

Why did you call him Laius, then?

CHRYSIPPUS

Call who?

(To BREAD.)

You are so beautiful.

You would make Aphrodite weep.

(CHRYSIPPUS gently passes out.)

BOWL

He has moved on from kings to goddesses,

As I foretold.

And I am here, alone, with all of you.

I am, it seems, required to share with you

The deeper mysteries.

Such are the duties of a priest.

Now let me see,

Some nakedness was prophesied.

God Dionysus should be drawn to that.

Sit closer, girls.

Untie your hair.

Now that is better, there.

You say you like to dance?

BREAD

I will, with Chrysippus,

If he remembers me.

GLASS

He will.

You may just be our queen some day.

BOWL

Perhaps,

no one can say for certain what will be,

Life is a feast of possibilities.

(Enter EKION.)

BLOOD

Wise prophet,

See, a god has come as you foretold.

(Sees CHRYSIPPUS sleeping against BREAD.)

EKION

Oh. Is he…?

BREAD

Asleep and safe.

BLOOD

Hello Ekion.

Come sit with us.

EKION

Temptations torment me today.

I wish… but I have sworn,

And honour says

That I must take the Prince home to his bed.

(He picks up CHRYSIPPUS and slings him over his shoulder.)

BLOOD

Oh, my.

EKION

I wish..

BLOOD

Yes, as do I.

(Exit EKION.)

WATER

More wine and wood,

But first, pluck out that gold.

(Enter CLOTH, blind folded and groping.WATER goes to her.)

WATER

Come in and welcome, friend.

Here, let me take your hand

And bring you to our fire.

Will you have wine?

(Pause.)

FIREWOOD
Are you alright?

CLOTH
Oh, I am now.

Hearing your sacred verses lets me know

That I am home at last,

So far from home.

FIREWOOD
Drink this.

CLOTH
Cadmean wine as well.

And yet there is another smell well known to me.

BOWL
Sweet sister, is that you?

CLOTH
Brother? Of course.

I overflow with joy, come kiss it up.

(They embrace. BLOOD and GLASS step up beside BOWL.)

BLOOD
You are as welcome here as he.

GLASS
We are his guests, remember.

Oh, well.

Wine welcomes everyone.

CLOTH
I see that you are happy here.

BOWL
I am.

But, love, your eyes?

You are not blind?

(CLOTH removes the blindfold scarf.)

CLOTH

Not that I know of, no.

But look at you, there is still more.

BOWL

A cask or two.

(Refilling her cup.) Here.

Why the game?

CLOTH

I sought this place and you,

But,

Finding my feet on an unknown street,

I told myself,

“If all the other senses do not know

Then ask your nose to choose which way to go.”

And like a panting hound it brought me here

And I found you.

BOWL

I never know if you arrive at the perfect time,

Or if you make it perfect just by entering.

I was just telling these good folk about Cadmea

And her ways.

CLOTH

Oh, how we tend to kill our kings?

BOWL

Not that so much,

The other things.

CLOTH

The Women’s Massacre?

55

BOWL
Not yet.

GlASS
We know.

BREAD
We do?

GLASS
Enough for now.

BOWL
No.

How, with wit and wine

And shared imagining,

We bear the truth of tragedy.

CLOTH
Sad stories satisfy by ending well,

What agonies shall we, together, tell?

BREAD
But must the tales be tragedies?

BLOOD
Ours is a pleasant, peaceful history.

CLOTH
I think your cows and bulls might disagree.

FIREWOOD
Perhaps that is the point of sacrifice.

BOWL
Go on.

FIREWOOD
Well, at the Slaughter Festival,

We give ourselves a king and queen who are not real.

BLOOD
Well—

56

BREAD
Yes.

Who are not royalty.

WATER
And they enact a massacre,

Where only animals are killed.

I know,

But one thing at a time.

BLOOD
And then we smear each other with the blood,

BREAD
And see each other, and ourselves,

As warriors,

GLASS
Or murderers,

FIREWOOD
or worse.

BLOOD
And then we dance,

And wash away the blood with joyful sweat.

FIREWOOD
And get ourselves a city without tragedy.

BOWL
Good. Good.

What joyful stories do you have?

BREAD
We…

GLASS
Well…

WATER
Ours is a better place to live in than to tell about.

(A moment.)

CLOTH
I have a happy tale from home,
More of a moment really,
But it moved me so.

WATER
Good. Go.

CLOTH
Well, first.
I saw, well, overheard this
In the house of good Menaeceus.

BREAD
Of who?

BOWL
A leading citizen.

BREAD
I never heard of him.

CLOTH
In Cadmea.

BREAD
Oh.

CLOTH *(Indicating themselves)*
His daughter.

WATER
Wait. Jocasta.

CLOTH
Yes.
Famous already for her gentleness and kindness,

BOWL
Yes. And beauty too.

CLOTH
And Tiresias.

(Indicates BOWL.)

BOWL
I can do this.

I know the man.

I knew her when she was a woman too.

CLOTH
A prophet.

BOWL
Zeus.

CLOTH
And blind.

BOWL
Athena.

GLASS
Oh. This will be interesting.

BOWL
It will.

I promise you.

(To CLOTH) What do I do?

(CLOTH and BOWL whisper aside.)

BREAD
This feels like play.

FIREWOOD
Exactly so.

BOWL *(To CLOTH)*
Oh. That is beautiful.

The old ones say our souls are butterflies…

59

CLOTH
I know.

BOWL
And so—

CLOTH
Shh. Do it.

BOWL
Yes, of course.

(Enter the real TIRESIAS.)

FIREWOOD
Come in.

TIRESIAS
I will, and thank you.

But first.

Please let this be. *(A gesture)*

(CLOTH/JOCASTA laughs and then, with effort, stands silently. BOWL/TIRESIAS enters.)

BOWL/TIRESIAS
Jocasta?

Wait.

I know that you are here.

I feel your light.

(CLOTH/JOCASTA tiptoes up and kisses him on the cheek and then steps back.)

Did you see that?

A butterfly just brushed my cheek.

(CLOTH/JOCASTA laughs.)

CLOTH/JOCASTA
I kissed you, sweet Tiresias.

BOWL/TIRESIAS
I know.

But when you did, I could see butterflies again.

(Appreciative pause.)

BREAD
Oh.

BLOOD
Beautiful.

CLOTH
She is.

TIRESIAS
Yes.

Yes, she is.

BOWL *(Seeing the real TIRESIAS)*
Tiresias?

GLASS
Oh, honestly.

(To BOWL) You are Tiresias.

BOWL
I was, but now—

BREAD
Oh, Zeus. I see it now.

My mother told me how it works.

You (BOWL) are a priest.

And you invoked Tiresias,

And so, now,

here he… she?… is… are?

WATER
He is?

61

TIRESIAS
Yes, I am.

WATER
Please sit and rest.

TIRESIAS
Thank you.

(Sits. They watch him expectantly.)

What now?

GLASS
Ha!

BREAD
What?

GLASS
The prophet asks “What now?”

BREAD
Oh, yes, I see. *(She doesn’t)*

CLOTH
Shh. Let him speak.

TIRESIAS
Yes, I suppose I must.

First, thank you for that memory.

Such bits of beauty keep me in the world.

I ask “What now?”

Because I do not know.

Like you, I have a version of the past.

I also have all future possibilities,

Or they have me.

And, as we move through time, I see…

Shall we say see?

62

Those many futures sort themselves into as many pasts.

But now?

Now is…

(Some time.)

BOWL

Old friend, what brings you here?

To Elis…

Far from home…

TIRESIAS

No invocation. Just my feet.

Although that weary climb

Would have been lighter had I known

You and your sister were both here.

What news from home?

CLOTH

Oh, let me see.

The wall is built, although,

I do not know what it is for.

There were great celebrations.

My memories are muddy after that,

Then I came here.

TIRESIAS

To celebrate Jocasta.

CLOTH

Whom you foretold would be a queen one day.

TIRESIAS

I did. I do.

CLOTH

Her mother has been finding out a way.

TIRESIAS

63

So soon?

CLOTH
The king of Elis has a son,

A pleasant lad, although a little…

BREAD
Chrysippus.

CLOTH
Her mother, with a little help,

Has been developing the possibility.

TIRESIAS
What possibility?

Nowhere in all the prophesies…

CLOTH
Yes, well, perhaps a mother's hopes

Are more than prophesy.

TIRESIAS
Oh, I hope so.

CLOTH
She could make him a worthy man, a noble king,

And make Olympus smile again.

TIRESIAS
If anybody can.

BOWL
Forgive me, good Tiresias.

I know some drops of the sadness

That breaks upon you like an angry sea.

But I see now, in you,

Something that drags you even deeper down.

Before you drown,

What else from our home town?

Have you been home more recently than we?

CLOTH
Is young Jocasta safe?

TIRESIAS
For now.

Thebe. *(He is overcome.)*

BREAD
Thebe?

WATER
Cadmea's queen.

FIREWOOD
One of them.

They have two.

WATER
Two kings.

Of course they do.

BOWL
Much more.

BLOOD
Than queen?

BOWL
Oh yes.

She is a Naiad.

GLASS
What?

BOWL
A water spirit,

Of the stream that flows down through Cadmea's heart.

WATER
The river Dirce?

GLASS
Oh. A nymph.

Just like the prince's—

FIREWOOD
Shh.

Go on.

BOWL
She walked down from Olympus on the Day,

And was, before, they say,

Punished by great Poseidon—

BREAD
Oh. What for?

CLOTH
Not kissing him.

BREAD
Oh. How?

CLOTH
Her kisses washed all memories away.

GLASS
Is that a curse?

BOWL
They say she used it as a gift

To take away Cadmea's painful memories.

TIRESIAS
And kissed herself as well,

Too much.

She knew what now is,

Little else.

She had two sons but she forgot that too.

Her mind forgot.

Her body knew.

I knew her better than she knew herself,

Her past and future too.

66

Bright as a fire on a hill,

I saw that she would be a queen.

She clung to that idea

And she resolved to make it true.

BLOOD

I want to move, to dance.

WATER

Show some respect.

BOWL

No, this is Dionysus' way.

Stand up and let the words move you.

As we did.

BLOOD

But, but..

TIRESIAS

Please do.

I see it all so vividly,

Why not let everyone?

BLOOD *(Drinks deeply)*

I will.

Go on. *(Tries to express physically what TIRESIAS says)*

TIRESIAS

Harmonia gave us many things,

One is that our kings and queens

Must all be mortal,

As she chose to be.

To shed her shreds of immortality

Thebe sought out her body's living truths:

The passion, pain, and change that age demands.

She hoped for one more child,

One she could know, and love,

And raise to found a dynasty,

To guide Cadmea after she was gone.

But when… *(Overwhelmed again)*

BLOOD
I do not know..

CLOTH
Let me.

(Stands and expresses physically as she speaks.)

But when she tried with…?

BOWL
Zethus.

CLOTH
Yes, to have a child,

She found that, being mortal,

Her body had moved on beyond

New motherhood.

TIRESIAS
Go on.

CLOTH
She went, at least I would,

Back to the water that had mothered her.

She stood in the mud

She felt her blood

First cool and then grow cold.

TIRESIAS
Go on, until the end.

CLOTH *(Speaking as THEBE)*
So this is growing old.

Just as a raindrop falls and flows

A mortal life goes down,

And disappears.

Ambition and forgetfulness

A little more, a little less,

Have brought me here.

(Splashes the water.)

Death is the only gift I get

From my hard won mortality.

I can at least, now drown.

(Wades into the imaginary water. Looks to TIRESIAS, who nods.)

And yet, I dare to ask for less,

And hope forgetfulness will let me rest.

If there is justice anywhere,

I ask that my name itself be taken from the world.

Forget me, History,

And set sad Thebe free.

(Drowns herself.)

BREAD *(To TIRESIAS)*
Is all that true?

TIRESIAS
More true than anything.

(CLOTH sits up.)

CLOTH
Can we do that again?

BLOOD
I want some wine.

BOWL
As do we all.

All drink.

End of Act One

69

Act Two

the Hall. Furniture has been cleared away and rearranged to make rehearsal space.

CLOTH

And…. go.

(Enter BLOOD as Queen, with friends as attendants in awkward precession.)

BLOOD

People of Elis, listen to your Queen.

As long as this our town has ever been.

(Says "been" so that it rhymes with "in".)

CLOTH

"Been" *(Rhymes with "seen")*

BLOOD

As long as..da de da.. has ever *been*,

We have come here as we come (*indicates that two syllables are missing)* now*,*

To celebrate the slaughter of this cow.

(There is no cow.)

70

FIREWOOD
Bull.

CLOTH
What?

FIREWOOD
It is always a bull.

CLOTH
Yes, but, for the rhyme—

FIREWOOD
So, what?

We change the essence of the rite

To please the writer?

CLOTH
But.

BLOOD
Let me.

We have come here and.. look!

The square is full.

BREAD
Oh, nice.

BREAD
To celebrate the slaughter of this bull.

Now, make the something, something, heavens ring,

To welcome tall and strong and handsome Ekion, our fertile king.

(Enter WATER, dragging a barrel.)

CLOTH
No. No.

Has anybody heard from Ekion?

WATER
I know the lines.

CLOTH
Does he not want to be our king?

WATER
I know the lines.

BLOOD
He does. I know.

He must have been delayed by his new job.

CLOTH
Oh, well.

And what is that

That matters more than this?

BLOOD
He has been made Captain of the Royal Body Guard.

FIREWOOD
Do we have one of those?

BLOOD
Well, no. Not yet.

But he protects Prince Chrysippus.

GLASS
How do you know?

BLOOD
We talk. He tells me things.

WATER
I know—

(Enter EKION, rushed.)

BLOOD
Oh, good.

I was just telling them—

FIREWOOD
Too much.

EKION
Oh?

My apologies.

Where are we now?

BLOOD
The sacrifice.

EKION
Ah, so. *(Draws his blade)*

I kill the bull.

(EKION looks around, WATER indicates the barrel.)

BREAD
We though we ought to only kill it once.

WATER
It has no lines.

BLOOD
And then, catching its blood in both your hands,

You bathe my face and body with it.

EKION
Yes.

BLOOD
As I bathe yours.

And then—

BREAD
But first, a wedding,

GLASS
And a double coronation,

CLOTH
Yes.

I have your speeches here.

73

(Offers papers.)

The bath of blood and all the rest

Will happen soon enough.

BREAD

Not soon enough for some.

the palace

(Enter PELOPS and HIPPODAMIA. PELOPS is trying to do accounts.)

HIPPODAMIA

They says she is a lovely girl.

PELOPS

Six hundred minus twenty four.

HIPPODAMIA

Modest, yet proud in ways that cry out royalty.

PELOPS

They ought to know.

Two hundred more.

HIPPODAMIA

They say she even has Pentheus' eyes,

Which proves he is her grandfather.

What do you think?

PELOPS

Eight hundred- no.

His eyes?

I cannot run the state like this.

74

HIPPODAMIA
What do you think that I am trying to do?

(Enter CHRYSIPPUS, hung over.)

CHRYSIPPUS
Good morning.

HIPPODAMIA
Afternoon. *(She stands aside.)*

CHRYSIPPUS
Father?

PELOPS
Yes, my only son.

CHRYSIPPUS
Do you have time just now?

PELOPS
Just now is all we have.

(Closes his books.)

And yet this moment, here with you,

Is wealth enough for any man.

CHRYSIPPUS
Oh. But…

My head feels like a stone.

I do not understand.

PELOPS
You will some day.

Come in, my son, and sit.

What can I do for you?

CHRYSIPPUS
I need some money, father, please.

PELOPS
Of course you do.

75

What for?

CHRYSIPPUS
Why do you want to know?

HIPPODAMIA
This voice is new.

PELOPS
When have you ever spoken so to me?

HIPPODAMIA
Such arrogance lacks any dignity,

A good king breathes humility.

CHRYSIPPUS
Oh. Must you lecture me?

PELOPS
Gods, boy, such insolence.

I am your father and your king.

CHRYSIPPUS
Enough.

Laius will give me what I want

And will not wag his tongue at me for it.

HIPPODAMIA
What else does Laius give to you?

CHRYSIPPUS
More than you do.

HIPPODAMIA
You smell like him.

He gave you wine?

CHRYSIPPUS
I tasted some.

I am almost a man.

HIPPODAMIA
No. If you were

You would choose better company.

PELOPS
He is not good for you.

CHRYSIPPUS
He is my friend.

And he has time for me.

PELOPS
I work so hard so that someday—

CHRYSIPPUS
When?

I want to live today.

You are a cattle counter,

Laius is a king.

(CHRYSIPPUS begins to exit.)

PELOPS
Sit down. *(He takes CHRYSIPPUS by the arm)*

I am not done with you.

CHRYSIPPUS *(Struggling)*
But I am done with you.

(Enter LAIUS.)

LAIUS
And what have we got here?

I find a little wine will make the young ones keen enough,

But some do like a little roughness for itself.

PELOPS
What?

CHRYSIPPUS *(Breaking away)*
Ha.

77

HIPPODAMIA
What you suggest is—

No—

I—

No.

CHRYSIPPUS
Speechless at last.

Thank you, Prince Laius.

You have rescued me.

PELOPS
You, sir, insult the sacred love a father feels towards his son.

LAIUS
Perhaps I do.

I would not know.

My father is, to me,

Only a story that ends terribly.

CHRYSIPPUS
But does he lecture you?

HIPPODAMIA
Oh, Chrysippus.

LAIUS
Not much, I must admit.

CHRYSIPPUS
Well then, I envy you.

PELOPS
Go to the temple, boy,

And ask the gods to guide you

And forgive your insolence.

CHRYSIPPUS
I go.

But not because you tell me to,

And where I go is not for you to say.

(Exit.)

HIPPODAMIA
Wait Chrysippus, I want to talk to you.

(Exit.)

PELOPS *(To LAIUS)*
I have some news for you from home,

Your home.

LAIUS
You have?

PELOPS
Menaeceus has come again.

He and his patient friends provide for you.

LAIUS
That fool.

Assassins seek me everywhere

And like a donkey in its rut

He stomps a path to me.

He will betray me, sure enough.

I will be murdered in my sleep.

PELOPS
Perhaps, but not by him.

He serves you well.

LAIUS
What news?

Am I Cadmea's king again?

PELOPS
No, sir.

And you will never be.

79

Cadmea is no more.

And so no-one will ever be her king.

LAIUS

What do you say?

PELOPS

I say Cadmea is no more.

King Zethus—

LAIUS

Zethus is no king.

PELOPS

King Zethus has renamed the town

In honour of his wife,

Thebe.

LAIUS

The upstart Nymph?

PELOPS

Semi-divine, or was.

She is now dead.

LAIUS

Oh.

Well, what is that to me?

PELOPS

Your city,

Which you claim to rule,

Is now, to all the world for evermore, named Thebes.

LAIUS

What?

Thebes? That is ridiculous.

To say it is to lisp.

We will be laughed at by the world.

PELOPS

Perhaps.

Perhaps forgotten, none can say,

But Thebes it is.

There is more news.

LAIUS

What more?

PELOPS

The place itself is greatly changed.

A mighty wall of stone surrounds it now.

LAIUS

What? All around?

So quickly built?

But how?

PELOPS

They say King Amphion, yes, King,

Played on his lyre so beautifully

The stones themselves rose up

And found their places in the wall.

LAIUS

“The stones rose up…”

There is no limit to what people will believe.

Sometimes I think the more absurd it is

The more they rush to think it true.

PELOPS

That thought must comfort you,

When you hope to be king. *(Exit)*

elsewhere in the Palace

(Enter CHRYSIPPUS and HIPPODAMIA separately.)

HIPPODAMIA
How dare you act like that?

CHRYSIPPUS
I am a prince.

HIPPODAMIA
Yes, yes you are.

CHYSSIPUS
So treat me with respect.

HIPPODAMIA
You have been spending time with Laius.

CHRYSIPPUS
Yes.

He is my friend.

HIPPODAMIA
And does he treat you with respect?

CHRYSIPPUS
What do you mean?

HIPPODAMIA
Well, does he listen when you speak?

And when he disagrees with you,

Does he do so in privacy?

Does he trust you to understand his thoughts and fears?

And does he want your happiness

More dearly than he wants his own?

All this, I know, your father does.

CHRYSIPPUS
My father is—

HIPPODAMIA
Your father is a noble king, respected everywhere.

His people love him without fear.

His neighbours trust him without doubt.

82

His ways are modest, though his wealth is not.

And I love him as only he and I can know.

He is a king.

CHRYSIPPUS
But Laius is—

HIPPODAMIA
A badly aging boy,

And you are just his latest toy.

CHRYSIPPUS
Oh, I will tell him what you say.

HIPPODAMIA
Please do.

Take my advice.

No, better still, as you must someday be a king yourself,

Think for yourself.

Remember and observe both men,

And then decide

Which of the two you want to stand beside.

CHRYSIPPUS
Leave me alone.

HIPPODAMIA
I will eventually, but not today.

We may have news of interest to you.

CHRYSIPPUS
What now?

HIPPODAMIA
A queen.

CHRYSIPPUS
Chosen by you?

Thanks, no.

83

HIPPODAMIA
You will both chose and thank

When you have had a chance to meet with her.

CHRYSIPPUS
Who is this girl?

HIPPODAMIA
The daughter of Menaeceus.

CHRYSIPPUS
What? Does she look like him?

HIPPODAMIA
They say in Thebes—

CHRYSIPPUS
I heard that they had changed the name,

How very strange.

HIPPODAMIA
A king must listen.

So,

they say she has the beauty of the goddess queen

From whom her family takes its blood.

CHRYSIPPUS
Are we in school?

HIPPODAMA
Harmonia.

CHRYSIPPUS
The girl?

HIPPODAMIA
-is called Jocasta,

And Harmonia is her ancestor.

Athena, give me strength.

You are your father's son,

And that, for now, lends you some royalty.

No woman worthy of the name of queen

Will have the man you will become

Unless you find a higher path.

Do better, boy.

You must do more than laugh and drink,

Your chance to live in history

Is closer than you think. *(Exit)*

(CHRYSIPPUS pours water from a jug into a large bowl and begins to bathe his face. Perhaps a light reflects off the water.)

CHRYSIPPUS

Oh, hello Mother.

Not you too.

You never speak, I know,

Perhaps a sign to show

Who you would have me be.

(Enter EKION.)

CHRYSIPPUS

Hello, my friend.

I have been rude to you.

EKION

Perhaps a little.

Yes.

CHRYSIPPUS

Can you forgive?

EKION

It is all gone.

CHRYSIPPUS

Not all, I hope.

Tonight you will be king

Of the Festival.

EKION
I will.

CHRYSIPPUS
I will be there to bow before your royalty.

(Enter LAIUS.)

LAIUS
What happens here?

Oh, just the bodyguard.

So, shall the princes drink?

CHRYSIPPUS
Later, perhaps.

But first I have a thirst

To be alone and think.

EKION
Shall I come with you?

Sir.

CHRYSIPPUS
No, thank you, Ekion.

You have so much to do.

Shall we agree that I am safe

Within the palace walls?

EKION
If you say so.

CHRYSIPPUS
I do. *(Exit)*

EKION *(To LAIUS)*
Good night then.

LAIUS
Call me Sir… Prince…

Well, king actually.

EKION
If you say so.

LAIUS
Be careful, boy.
I am a royal guest
And so enjoy,
The full protection of the house.
Which means, that you,
Sworn, I assume, on something
That you care about,
To guard Prince Chrysippus
Against all enemies,
Are likewise sworn to me.
No, even more,
For, guarding me,
You guard the honour of the prince,
And his whole family.

EKION
If you—

LAIUS
Your honour and your oath
Demand it.

EKION
Yes.

LAIUS
Swear it to me.

EKION *(Draws blade)*
As long as you are welcome—

LAIUS
No.
Always and everywhere.

87

Or I will tell young Chrysippus

That you defied and even threatened me.

And he will lose all trust in you.

EKION

I—

LAIUS

On your knees.

(Ekion kneels.)

EKION

I swear, on my family blade,

That I will guard your life with my own

Exactly as I guard Prince Chrysippus.

LAIUS

Good. Done.

It may be lively work.

Unlike the boy, I am not safe,

Not here, not anywhere.

EKION

May I attend the Slaughter Festival?

LAIUS

You must.

I will be there and so will Chrysippus.

(Exeunt. Enter PELOPS and HIPPODAMIA.)

HIPPODAMIA

I tell you, dear, he is a poison to the boy.

PELOPS

What can I do?

HIPPODAMIA

Why, not a royal thing, apparently.

Laius comes.

I cannot bear to watch you choke his insults down.

If only the assassins of his dreams

Were half as deadly as they seem to him.

Somehow, alive or dead,

He has to leave our town.

PELOPS

But,

(Exit HIPPODAMIA.)

Yes, my love.

(Enter LAIUS.)

LAIUS

Now this is good.

Pelops without a word.

You ancient thief,

Give me my money now.

(PELOPS gives LAIUS money.)

PELOPS

Today, and every day, in every way,

For twenty years you have abused my hospitality.

LAIUS

Oh, here we go,

And so must I.

This is my cue.

There must be something better I can do

Than sit and nod at you, old man.

PELOPS

Look at yourself.

You age at twice the rate that others do.

You soon will be an old man too.

LAIUS

I am a prince.

PELOPS
And I a king.

LAIUS
A king? Of this?

This little clump of sheds and barns?

This is your kingdom?

Ha.

You are more innkeeper than king.

When I am once again Cadmea's king

I may decide to conquer Elis

Wait. Did I say conquer?

No. That is too grand a word.

I may decide to pluck it from the mud.

PELOPS
With all I am I hope you do.

LAIUS
You do?

PELOPS
I sacrifice to Ares every night

That I might meet with you in open fight

Upon the field of war,

And honourably cut you down to punish you

For all your insults and contemptuous arrogance.

LAIUS
But now I am your guest.

PELOPS
You are, for now.

LAIUS
And honour says that you must honour me.

90

(LAIUS picks up the money.)

Speak carefully, old man.

I have a feast of ways to teach you better manners.

Yes, Chrysippus, he is a handsome lad,

And very, very fond of me.

We have been keeping company,

Finding what little hospitality

This village has to give.

PELOPS

Leave him alone.

LAIUS

He comes to me most willingly.

He understands respect.

PELOPS

Enough.

Honour? Respect?

You dare to use the words?

How can they not turn bloody in your throat?

I see my way at last.

I cannot throw you out like the decaying vermin that you are,

But I can show you my respect

And give you all the honours you deserve.

You crave more hospitality?

Well, you shall have it then.

The exiled King of Thebes must have

A public welcome to our humble town.

LAIUS

You cannot, no.

PELOPS

91

I must, my duty as a host demands… a feast, I think.

Oh, yes.

Long overdue.

I will send word to all the neighbouring kings:

“Laius is here, come, celebrate with us!”

LAIUS

That feast would be my funeral.

PELOPS

Perhaps.

It will be royal though.

LAIUS

Betrayed again.

PELOPS

Revealed.

I think that you will leave my house immediately,

Although, of course,

You are most welcome here.

LAIUS

Someday, through me, great Zeus will punish you

For all your mockery of me.

PELOPS

I do not think he will.

Zeus is a father too.

LAIUS

Vengeance is mine.

PELOPS

And justice mine.

The Slaughter Hall.

WATER
What? Both of them?

BOWL
Yes, both.

GLASS
How can it be?

BOWL
Exactly as I said.

Locked in each others arms,

All cut and bruised.

Amphion's neck was broken

And his brother—

FIREWOOD
Zethus.

BOWL
Smothered under him.

GLASS
Imagine that.

BLOOD
But… why?

(Enter CHRYSIPPUS, EKION, and BREAD.)

WATER
More friends, come in.

FIREWOOD
More welcome still without your servant, sir.

CHRYSIPPUS
All friends tonight.

In service of our blood blessed royalty.

(To EKION.)

Sit Sir, here by your queen.

93

(Enter CLOTH with props and costumes, including horns.)

CLOTH

Ah, brother, good.

I may have need of you.

(They join the group around the fire.)

BOWL *(To CLOTH)*

I have just recently returned from Thebes,

This city's new found thirst demands

My efforts, but I am well paid.

CLOTH

I have been busy been here, lending my talents

To this evening's festival,

And, when I can,

I have been sowing seeds to grow a love

Such as the gods might envy from above.

BLOOD

Oh yes?

BOWL

Come, sit, and hear.

And here, drink more.

I have dark news.

GLASS

Kings Amphion and Zethus are both dead.

(Grasps BLOOD to demonstrate.)

Both strangled.

WATER

Stabbed.

BOWL

No, neither. *(They sit)*

Good.

Before the telling tramples on the tale

Listen and learn.

CHRYSIPPUS
What happened?

BLOOD
Yes. And why?

BOWL
With Thebe gone,

Their box of balance broke,

GLASS
What? “Box of balance”?

BOWL (*vainly tries to illustrate with his hands.)*
Two Cadmuses

CLOTH
And two Harmonias.

BOWL
It broke,

Spilling resentment, pride,

And blood.

BLOOD
But… blood?

BOWL
They died.

FIREWOOD
And Niobe?

BOWL
Fled, with her many children,

to her father’s house.

CHRYSIPPUS
Where they at least are safe.

95

BLOOD
What does it mean?

GLASS
To us?

WATER
More customers.

People will come to hear and talk about

This news from Thebes.

(Enter LAIUS.)

FIREWOOD
Oh. You.

LAIUS
I only crave a drink before I leave this filthy town.

BOWL *(To CLOTH but overheard by LAIUS)*
My mouth is sick of blood and dust,

Tell me about this match you make.

CLOTH
I cannot, but…

Prince Chrysippus will be a happy king.

BOWL
Oh ho, and who the happy girl?

Is she as beautiful as he?

CLOTH
She is, or will be when she grows.

Jocasta, daughter of Menaeceus.

BOWL
So soon?

Well I suppose.

She is, as I recall, a budding rose.

BLOOD *(To the group around the fire.)*
That is not what he said.

GLASS *(To BOWL)*
Tell us again.

BOWL
Exactly as I said before;

One strangled and the other crushed.

WATER *(To LAIUS)*
Give me your blade.

LAIUS
I find it helps to keep me calm.

WATER
I hope it does

(EKION nods at WATER.)

Alright.

Come in.

LAIUS
What is the news that makes them chatter so?

BLOOD
The kings of Thebes are dead.

LAIUS
What? Both of them?

BOWL
And so, again.

CLOTH
The telling of this tale will never end.

GLASS
So, who rules now?

FIREWOOD
Why, no-one I suppose.

LAIUS

97

Most wonderful.

BREAD *(Aside to CHRYSIPPUS)*
You are so quiet, why?

CHRYSIPPUS
There is so much to listen to.

BOWL
Poor Thebes.

LAIUS
Why poor?

BOWL
I have, I think, been in that town

More often and more recently than any other here.

Thebes does not have your gentle ways,

Or your good king.

FIREWOOD
We are most fortunate.

BOWL
Much blood has stained that ground.

But, with the quiet guidance of Menaeceus,

Under the rule of these two kings,

They live at peace, or did.

So I, for one, will drink their memory.

CLOTH
And so will I, though I admit

A flea dies and I drink to it.

WATER *(Pouring)*
Alright.

All drink.

CLOTH
This fellow with the angry brow,

I feel I know that face,

98

Something about the eyes, so cold,

Could it be-?

No, he would not be so old.

BOWL

I think it is, but he goes in disguise.

CLOTH

Well I, for one, am glad to leave him there.

Will he not recognize us?

BOWL

No, his vision is so twisted that he only sees himself.

BLOOD

So, here is history, Thebes has no king.

GLASS

(To BOWL and CLOTH.)

Tell us, you two,

What Dionysus asks at such a time?

LAIUS

Let us find out tonight.

All drink,

And fuel the fires that smoulder in us all.

The world is new,

And you are here with me, you lucky girls,

Let Dionysus rule indeed,

We have no need of other rules,

Of clothing or of cares.

Let down your hair and dance with me

And you will see my manhood dance with you

Most furiously.

GLASS

Let go of me.

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I would much rather take the entrails of a long dead cow

Into my arms, than let you touch me,

Now, or ever.

BLOOD
Filthy beast.

FIREWOOD
Apologize, please, sir.

LAIUS
What? Me? To her?

FIREWOOD
I must insist.

(Tense pause.)

LAIUS
Enough of this.

(To WATER.)

In Dionysus' name I now declare

No one may buy your wine tonight.

BOWL
What?

WATER
Why?

LAIUS
But all will drink. *(Throws down money)*

Tonight we celebrate.

It is the slaughter festival now, is it not?

FIREWOOD
It is, tonight.

LAIUS
I say it has begun most royally.

Who killed these first two beasts?

WATER
The kings of Thebes you mean?

FIREWOOD
They killed each other, so it seems.

LAIUS
They did? Imagine that.

BOWL
Dust drifts like ghosts across the palace floors, they say.

But many hope Menaeceus will take the crown.

LAIUS *(Sputtering)*
Who? Him?

That shadow will not move the dust.

BOWL
Menaeceus is known to be a noble, wise, and gentle man.

Thebes could do worse.

CLOTH
Some call him royal.

LAIUS
Him?

He is no more a king than Pelops is.

WATER
Be careful, sir.

FIREWOOD
No generosity forgives offence.

BLOOD
We love our king.

BREAD
Through him we are respected by the world.

LAIUS
But do you know him as I do?

CHRYSIPPUS

I do. And better too.

LAIUS

Prince Chrysippus.

Well, well.

Come here, boy,

You at least will drink with me.

BREAD

And who are you to speak so to a prince?

CHRYSIPPUS

He is—

LAIUS

An old friend of the family.

CHRYSIPPUS

Made welcome and well known for many years.

LAIUS

What do you think, young prince?

Of all this news from Thebes?

Perhaps the time has come at last for Laius to go home.

CHRYSIPPUS

Perhaps it has.

BOWL

Again, poor Thebes.

LAIUS

And why say that?

BOWL

Oh, there are stories told of him.

CLOTH

Yes, that is true.

LAIUS

What do they say?

BOWL
Sometimes.

What memories they have are …

Well, not always good.

CHRYSIPPUS
Such as?

BOWL
I do not want to say.

LAIUS
Why not?

BOWL
I thank you for the wine.

LAIUS
Give him a list, such as the one you gave Menaeceus.

Like so “I hear that Laius was…”

CLOTH
Well, liberal.

BOWL
Enthusiastic.

CLOTH
Yes.

LAIUS
These are both good.

Go on.

BOWL
Perhaps, at times, a little given to excess.

CLOTH
To drunkenness.

BOWL
And lechery,

Beyond the usual.

CLOTH
They say all flesh was one to him.

BOWL
He knew no taste or tenderness,

But just consumed all in his reach.

CLOTH
All food and wine.

BOWL
All innocence and youth, even his own.

LAIUS
But, as you say, he was young then.

BREAD
He must have thought himself a man to seek the crown.

BLOOD
But he has since had twenty years.

GLASS
Of what?

CHRYSIPPUS
Hiding, and wasting life, waiting for it to start.

LAIUS
No speculation, please.

Are there no words to honour Laius' name?

CHRYSIPPUS
Let me.

I know now, just as surely as I see you there,

That Laius is a drunken, weak, pathetic,

Boastful coward, and a liar.

Shall I go on?

LAIUS
You too?

What Laius is, is endlessly betrayed.

No one in all the world has lost or suffered more than he.

CHRYSIPPUS

I said pathetic, did I not?

BREAD

You did.

LAIUS

He has at least the fiery heart to be a king.

CHRYSIPPUS

Perhaps he once was kindling,

But he is now a sodden stick

That might give smoke but never fire.

And if Menaeceus is like my father

Then I think he should rule Thebes.

LAIUS

You do?

CHRYSIPPUS

I see my father better now, as kings should be seen,

Through these, his peoples' eyes.

While Thebes and Elis are at peace

With neighbours and the gods, as they are now,

They both deserve such gentle governors.

Ones wise enough to see,

And strong enough to say,

When someone else should take the crown.

Someday I will be king,

Your king,

So let me tell you now;

I study Laius carefully

And I intend to mold myself like clay

Around his character, so that,

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In every way, I am what he is not.

Then will I be a king.

Now I must go, my father may have need of me.

Let me pay for the wine.

(To LAIUS.)

You have, I think, a long cold journey without friends

Ahead of you.

Good night to all.

(To BREAD.)

Goodbye.

The queen it seems has found a queen for me

I hope you find a love with simple loyalties.

(CHRYSIPPUS begins to leave and EKION with him.)

No, stay, your majesty.

I am more safe than I have been

Since I was just a boy.

(Kisses BLOOD on the cheek.)

Tonight is yours.

(Exit.)

CLOTH

That is a prince.

LAIUS

What? That?

WATER

Your welcome wearies, sir.

FIREWOOD

I think that you should leave.

BOWL

And so do I.

BLOOD
I wish you never came.

LAIUS
If you touch me I swear that I will eat your fingers

One by one

While standing on your face.

WATER
Enough.

BOWL
Get out.

LAIUS
I hate the stink of frightened animals.

(LAIUS defiantly drains a large jug or bottle of wine. Exit LAIUS. FIREWOOD goes to close the door.)

FIREWOOD
Oh, look.

The torches dance towards the square.

CLOTH
So soon?

FIREWOOD
Much of the city is already there.

CLOTH
Then we must hurry.

Come: the crowns, the bull?

WATER
Outside.

CLOTH
The king and queen, attendants?

Good.

Is there no music?

Brother.

Help, a drum.

BOWL

What? *(Looks about, then improvises vocally)*

Boom?

CLOTH

Yes.

BOWL

Boom, boom *(Continues as long as needed.)*

(Exeunt in procession with animal horns etc.)

in the street, torchlight

(Enter CHRYSIPPUS.)

CHRYSIPPUS

Hello town.

May I sit down?

If you agree, I hope that we

Can meet like this each day

And speak of, everything.

Laius will leave,

Then I and this Jocasta girl, it seems,

Will start to weave our separate dreams,

Together in a cloth to keep you warm,

And safe from the many harms

That plague poor Thebes.

(Enter LAIUS.)

CHRYSIPPUS
What do you want?

LAIUS
To take my leave of you.

CHRYSIPPUS
Alright. Goodbye.

The road you need is there.

I go the other way.

LAIUS
Yes, so you said. *(Turns to go)*

CHRYSIPPUS
And Laius.

LAIUS
Yes?

CHRYSIPPUS
Know this.

I would much rather die,

Than be like you.

(Exit. LAIUS stands, seething, then turns and follows CHRYSIPPUS.)

LAIUS
If you say so, my pretty prince.

(Exit.)

a public street

(Enter the procession from before, although not yet seen by the crowd in the square. BOWL booms, crowd noises.)

CLOTH
Where is the bull?

WATER
It got away.

CLOTH
But… the sacrifice?

(FIREWOOD hands a set of horns to WATER and throws a cloth over them.)

FIREWOOD
This is your chance.

You be the bull.

WATER
But, but?

EKION
All will be well, my friend.

I promise you.

(They "enter" before the crowd which gets much louder.)

BLOOD
People of Elis, listen to your Queen.

CLOTH
Louder!

BLOOD
People of Elis!

CLOTH
Listen to your Queen!!

EKION
No good.

They cannot hear a thing.

BLOOD
What should we do, my king?

EKION

They can still see.

Just make the motions, so, with me.

(As BOWL "booms" they pantomime in rapid succession, and with great enthusiasm from BLOOD, a wedding, a coronation, and then a big build up to the sacrifice. WATER is brought forward, playing a bull. EKION draws his blade dramatically. Silence falls. As EKION mimes cutting the bull's throat. CHRYSIPPUS screams horribly off. The scream ends abruptly.)

TIRESIAS *(Isolated visually)*

Nothing begins or ends:

Roots, veins, and vines,

Lines of all kinds,

Suspend us from the past,

And hold us, dangling,

Above the future's hungry emptiness.

All ages have their tragedies,

But we who dare to peer below

See now, and know, what swings from here.

This thing done in the dark,

This is the knot that hangs us all.

Trust me, I will, eventually,

Cut free the rotting corpse of Thebes

And let her fall.

But first, we, of necessity,

Must touch and taste,

Smell and embrace it all.

the palace

(Enter LAIUS, bearing the corpse of CHRYSIPPUS.)

LAIUS

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Father, oh, father, find me here.

Our little family is lost.

We need you now

To lead us into suffering.

Where is the king?

(Enter PELOPS, as from bed.)

PELOPS

Is that you, Chrysippus?

Your voice is strange.

(Enter HIPPODAMIA.)

HIPPODAMIA

Have you been drinking wine again?

PELOPS

Oh, you, how can you dare-?

HIPPODAMIA

What have you there?

LAIUS

My little brother, Chrysippus.

HIPPODAMIA

Your brother?

PELOPS

Drunk again?

LAIUS

No, sir. Not any more.

We did drink wine, and then had angry words,

As brothers do.

The bonds of family are strong

And can contain such little things,

As you and I have spoken angrily before,

Safe in the trust that makes us one.

HIPPODAMIA
You too are drunk I see.

PELOPS
You are no son to me.

HIPPODAMIA
Stand up now, Chrysippus, and be a man.

LAIUS
He never will.

Sweet Chrysippus is dead.

HIPPODAMIA
What?

No.

PELOPS
Give him to me. *(LAIUS does)*

My son is dead.

How can four little words box in such emptiness?

LAIUS
Together we must give him to the gods.

HIPPODAMIA
Speak clearly, Laius,

Tell us how he died?

LAIUS
There is a place not far from here

Where wine is served.

PELOPS
The slaughter hall,

We know.

HIPPODAMIA
You go there frequently.

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LAIUS

And so, more recently, did Chrysippus.

We would go there as friends, as brothers, actually,

And share their hospitality.

We went tonight.

I was so sad to have offended you

I drank unhappily and then had words

About some foolishness with Chrysippus.

He left, and I, full of remorse, went after him.

And then…

PELOPS

Go on.

LAIUS

Oh shame.

HIPPODAMIA

Your shame?

LAIUS

In that I hesitate to say.

The light, already strange,

Twisted the truth, drums thundered

And a monster came, in form a man, perhaps a god,

Who knows?

Leaped from the shadows, no,

Crawled from the deepest darkness of them all

And seized the helpless boy.

I watched, as if from high above,

I could not move.

Somehow my hands were not my own.

I had no hands.

All I could do was watch and shriek frustrated rage.

Right there, in front of me,

As close as he is now,
The beast took Chrysippus,
His body brutally, his innocence,
And then at last, his life.
The thing, I cannot ever call it man,
Then vanished and I held the boy
And brought him home to you.
Oh, father, please, what shall we do?

PELOPS
All love is lost and nothing moves me now.

(Enter MENAECEUS.)

MENAECEUS
King Laius, all my life I have
Both worked and waited for this day.
It is my privilege to say—

HIPPODAMIA
Peace, good Menaeceus.
Look and see.

PELOPS
My son is dead.

MENAECEUS
Oh, sir.

PELOPS
This day,
It is a crack across the bottom of the world
And everything has drained away.
My friend, such dreams an old man has.
Your beautiful Jocasta married here to him,
A palace full of giggling,

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And two grandfathers, you and I,

Behaving foolishly.

It will not be.

My son is dead.

What can I do?

My life is over now.

LAIUS *(Aside)*

Menaeceus,

Respect demands that we leave quietly.

MENAECEUS

Yes sir.

And yet, may I suggest that you remain in Elis?

LAIUS

Why?

MENAECEUS

Until the funeral of the prince.

Respect, you said.

Attend this solemn festival,

Not hidden in the crowd but as the honoured guest you are.

PELOPS

Laius, oh Laius, come.

You too Menaeceus.

Do this with me, we royal three,

Let us invoke the justice of the gods.

(They pray together.)

Oh Zeus,

May perfect punishment contain this crime,

Or it will pour its poisons across time.

We ask for justice only.

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A justice subtle, complex, and immense,

And matching every aspect of offence.

Rain suffering upon this murderer,

Whoever it may be,

And on his family,

Such as will scrub their lives from history.

LAIUS

May Zeus be merciful—

To us, and grant your prayer.

(EKION kneels and offers his blade to HIPPODAMIA.)

HIPPODAMIA

What is this?

EKION

I failed.

My life is forfeit.

I was not even there.

HIPPODAMIA

King Laius says it was no man,

But something from a darker world

That did this awful thing.

You are forgiven Ekion.

HIPPODAMIA *(To the UnNamed who wait and watch off)*

Come in, come in, attend the king.

He needs his people now.

Help us to bear the prince's body to the public square

For all to wash with tears.

LAIUS

We will attend you there.

(Falling behind, he speaks privately to EKION.)

You failed utterly,

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And now your only hope for honour lies

In guarding me.

(To MENAECEUS.)

Make this man Captain of my Royal Bodyguard.

A hundred men, at least.

MENAECEUS

The best that can be found, I will.

And with them by your side, wait here a week or two.

I will return to make the necessary plans in Thebes—

LAIUS

Cadmea.

MENAECEUS

Sir, may I respectfully suggest you leave things as they are,

Too much, too soon, and you may go too far.

LAIUS

I will, and I will stay,

But not for long.

I tired of patience long ago.

MENAECEUS

I know.

LAIUS

And you will find,

Rebellion, riot, and revenge are never far behind,

But sniff at crowns like dogs.

There will be enemies to kill and bills to pay.

MENAECEUS

You have no enemies in Thebes.

LAIUS

Or so you say. I will be judge.

Cadmea – Thebes –must have her king, and soon.

MENAECEUS

Tradition, your most loyal counsellor, also decrees

That she must have a noble queen.

One worthy of Harmonia's crown.

LAIUS

Yes, yes, of course.

Tell me, Menaeceus, Jocasta is your child?

MENAECEUS

She is almost a woman grown,

Both wise and loving, as her mother is.

LAIUS

And might she make a queen?

MENAECEUS

Indeed it has been prophesied.

I think it is Athena's will.

LAIUS

No doubt.

Some truths remain.

And yet so much has changed, so much is safely in the past.

I am so happy to be going home at last.

End of Play

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