Jocasta

A play

Part six 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
BREAD
CAPTAIN OF THE GUARD
CLOTH
FIREWOOD
GLASS
SHEPHERD
WATER

The Named
CREON
JOCASTA
LAIUS
MENAECEUS
OEDIPUS
TIRESIAS

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Jocasta

There are three main playing areas: the royal apartment, (above), with bed and balcony; the front steps of the palace facing onto the square (before); and a public tavern with a fire pit (tavern).

Act 1

the tavern

(WATER, FIREWOOD, BOWL, and GLASS.)

GLASS
It is the truth!

I swear by this good Theban wine.

BOWL
What do you swear?

GLASS
That Laius said he would return.

(Others pause to listen.)

The dead and wounded piled so high he could not fall

Despite his own deep wounds.

FIREWOOD
Dead women: I was there.

It was no battle but a massacre.

GLASS
But with his last half conscious breath

Before they dragged him down

Into defeat and exile's loneliness

He said he would return to free his town.

My mother heard him.

BOWL
Oh?

Your mother was so near the prince?

GLASS
My father was, I think, a Sown Man of Thebes.

BOWL
A Sown Man? Sprung from the serpent's teeth?

It may be true; for I have seen you rise up from the ground—

-on mornings after drink.

GLASS
No jest, my mother said, and she knew Laius very well.

FIREWOOD
Your mother knew the young prince then?

BOWL
She "knew" him? Well.

Perhaps, then, we should hail you as royalty.

Your mother was, if I recall, like Thebes itself,

Where all are welcome.

GLASS
Oh! You go too far.

WATER
Peace friends.

FIREWOOD
It may be true, what he claims Laius said.

Menaeceus says he was a noble youth.

WATER
And he should know.

We could do worse.

BOWL
And often have.

Come, drink again, my friends,

To Cadmus, father of our town,

(A traditional toast.)

Who killed the serpent with his hand

ALL
And cast its teeth upon the land

BOWL
Where sprang the Sown Men, warriors tall,

ALL
Who are the fathers of us all.

BOWL
To Cadmus.

ALL
Cadmus.

FIREWOOD
Cadmus and Harmonia,

A man alone may strangle dragons all he likes,

And strew stuff on the ground, but he is father to none.

Without both king and queen our city would be barren.

WATER
Well said, my love, of course.

Cadmus, Harmonia, Laius, Jocasta, and Thebes.

All drink.

(They do.)

BOWL
Enough of names. (*Rattles a cup*)

Who dares to game with me?

GLASS
Which will you throw. The stones or bones?

BOWL
The stones of course.

I'll hazard anything on chance

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But prophesy is far too rich for me.

Let the bones be.

(Enter SHEPHERD.)

WATER

Welcome friend.

Lay by your staff and join us in a cup.

GLASS

Mind your footing though.

Our bowl is deep and many are half drowned.

BOWL

Come now.

Why stand so still?

I know that we are loud and rough,

But with good will and to the purpose of a celebration.

FIREWOOD

He shakes.

WATER

Here, warm your face with this, and join us by the fire.

FIREWOOD

Has it grown cold this early on the hills?

WATER

The grapes are not yet ready to come in.

(A silence.)

BOWL

This is dramatic.

A terrifying tale should follow on such thick anticipation.

SHEPHERD

I have no news but fear.

In truth, I have no cause for fear but fear alone,

And yet I have more fear than just my own.

BOWL

A riddle then, oh good.

Though for myself I like a shaking ghost.

GLASS

No. Never ask for ghosts.

FIREWOOD

Go on.

SHEPHERD

Forgive me.

I do not mean to speak in mysteries.

I speak now for the first time, here, in days.

I spend my time with sheep.

BOWL

No riddle there. The nose knows all.

SHEPHERD

Again I say forgive me.

You look to call this night a memorable feast,

And I come, damp with dew

That sets untimely on my skin, to chill your joy.

I sat by my own fire, contented with the company of sheep,

Who turned in folds around me like a heavy cloth.

We know and trust each other, night and day,

Such is the silent comfort of my trade.

Far down the valley, three or more slow slopes of land away,

Dim through the swirl of sparks that rode my breath,

My drifting eye began to see a light, or many lights,

In line, upon the coming road.

A little thing can hold a watcher in the night.

My flock, first one then many heads, then all,

Looked up and joined me in my gaze.

And then, though still the summer holds the ground,

A rattling cold ran through me,

As if my body were a draughty house.

The staring beasts drew back, then scattered to the hills.

My fire died as if struck down by force,

And I stood there an hour or more, alone.

Only in the moments when that string of distant lights

Dipped in a shallow of the earth could I unfix my eyes.

I fled from there and now am here,

But still the cold and fear attend me.

BOWL

A prophet I.

Ghosts I foretold and ghosts we hear.

And bravely told.

SHEPHERD

No ghosts in this.

Not something hanging between life and death.

I know not what will come,

But it is larger far than death and life and all their family.

GLASS

Well. I am sober now.

BOWL

That will not serve,

I twice have seen you sober

And am not fool enough to wish a third encounter with the beast.

Quickly, with wit and courage we can still escape.

More drink, and sing a song with many rousing choruses.

FIREWOOD

(Sings, other join in.)

You'll not find a bottle that matches with these.

So, raise up your cup, and another one, please.

Keep raising cups ‘til you’re down on your knees,
For Thebes makes a hell of a wine.
Yes, Thebes makes a hell of a wine.

Cadmus left Athens and followed a cow.
It gave up the ghost where our city stands now.
We’ve lived and we’ve loved and we’ve died here, and how!
For Thebes makes a hell of a wine.
Yes, Thebes makes a hell of a wine.

The teeth of the serpent were cast on the ground,
And the Spartoi came out of the dirt with a bound,
And each of them fought with whomever they found,
For Thebes makes a hell of a wine.
Yes, Thebes makes a hell of a wine.

Harmonia taught the whole world how to read.
A queen such as she was is all that we need
For ever since her we’ve done nothing but bleed,
For Thebes makes a hell—

(Enter BLOOD, interrupting.)

BLOOD
Laius comes.
He and a hundred torches are seen above the town.
He will be in the square within the hour and all is not prepared.

BOWL
Come friends, light up the night to meet the king.
Tonight we make the shining heavens ring.

(All begin to leave.)

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WATER

Wait friends.

The cost. The cost.

One round is mine, the rest remain unpaid.

GLASS

Keep total and be true.

This cost will seem but little when the score is done.

But know, as I am Theban, that we all will pay.

(Exit GLASS, BOWL, FIREWOOD, WATER, and BLOOD.

above, in JOCASTA's chamber

(JOCASTA, CLOTH, and BREAD.)

CLOTH

Stand still or you will never be prepared.

Listen to me.

Who ever was prepared to be a bride, to be a queen?

BREAD

No child of sixteen years, I know,

Though I was younger by a year or two when first –

CLOTH

But things were different then.

BREAD

Why I remember nights when Dionysus ruled indeed and I myself—

CLOTH

Well,

let me dress your hair, your mask and costume

As much at least as lets you play the role.

BREAD

The king will soon enough undress it all

And you and he can roll and play without my interference.

CLOTH

Stand still. I say. Stand still.

JOCASTA

Stand still yourselves,

I beg you,

And let me stand here, still, a while.

As you are still and always in my heart,

You need not always prove your presence

In my hair and ear and eye.

See how my father, honoured man of Thebes,

Stands back and turns his head

As if entangled in a spider's web

Or pressured by a cloud of angry bees.

Your loving hands and words do this,

And though no harm is meant by them,

I must say, I too cannot breathe or think or move.

Please dearest souls,

I beg you leave us for a breath or two.

I want your counsel, but I want his too.

CLOTH

The queen, I see, has now arrived.

BREAD

We will depart.

JOCASTA

Wait, hearts. Take no offence.

This is familiarity and easy love that speaks to you.

I always am that child you know so well.

Now, that fresh child desires a moment

With her father on her wedding day.

So much has changed so suddenly.

I need you now.

Be kind to me.

BREAD
Embrace and hold my hand.

CLOTH
We have no time for all this sentiment.

BREAD
There is so much undone and none but fools to do it.

CLOTH
We will return when we have time,

BREAD
For now, attend yourself.

(Exit CLOTH and BREAD.)

MENAECEUS
Thank you Jocasta.

I think that I am happier to stand as public arbiter of trade

On any harvest market day than even mildly to cross those two.

JOCASTA
I know.

(Pause. He watches her.)

It is my wedding night.

MENAECEUS
It is.

JOCASTA
Tomorrow's dawn will see me wife and queen,

And no more child or virgin.

MENAECEUS
I know.

JOCASTA
My mother was my age when you and she...

MENAECEUS
A little older, yes, and beautiful, like you.

JOCASTA
And frightened too?

MENAECEUS
A little, yes, I guess,

I was so lost in fear myself.

JOCASTA
I wish that she were here.

MENAECEUS
Believe me, so do I.

It was, you know, her work and hope

To see you queen.

JOCASTA
Of Elis, yes.

Bride to the fair young Chryssipus.

MENAECEUS
Think how delighted and surprised she would be now

To see you queen of Thebes.

JOCASTA
Married to Laius, yes.

MENAECEUS
Can you be happy, child?

JOCASTA
I am excited and I will, I know, be happy when I am the queen.

MENAECEUS
It is an honour to our name and house.

An honour to your mother's memory.

JOCASTA

I know, and I am honoured too.

MENAECEUS

The city burns with pride and joy and hope

That this one union can restore

The dignity of Cadmus' and Harmonia's rule.

All Thebes is blushed with love of you.

None more than I.

JOCASTA

Yes father.

Will Creon come in time?

MENAECEUS

In time, yes child, he will.

Nothing but duty could keep your brother thus away.

His is the honour to pronounce

the promise of the oracle towards

This royal match.

(Enter BREAD.)

It is my guess that he sits by the road

Rehearsing through the list of honours and delights

Olympus promises.

BREAD

Then she must be prepared.

The gods themselves may well attend this feast,

As they bore witness to the rites of Cadmus and Harmonia.

Some say that Dionysus freely moves among the crowd

And comes to bless your bed.

Pardon now father of the bride.

In brief, you block the way.

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MENAECEUS
I just—

BREAD
Kiss the girl and go.

A hundred things await your interest below.

MENAECEUS
I see. Then I must.

My love, my daughter, hope, and queen.

JOCASTA
Always your loving daughter.

(Exit MENAECEUS.)

JOCASTA *(Cont'd)*
What drives you so?

What moves you so to move my father thus aside?

BREAD
He is a good man, and a kind man,

And as wise as men can be, and so a fool.

I have not cared for you now sixteen years

To have you go into your marriage bed counselled by him.

We would wait longer for an heir

Than for a judge to reach retirement

If such as he had governance of love.

(Enter TIRESIAS.)

BREAD *(Cont'd)*
Now love.

This one first night—

JOCASTA
Tiresias. Will you sit?

Please heart,

This chair for wisdom.

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BREAD

Were he as wise as now and then is said

He would know when to leave two women thus alone.

Be seated sir.

TIRESIAS

Thanks for your kindness and your patience.

I have some knowledge of a woman's heart.

JOCASTA

It is so easy to forget that you were once a girl.

TIRESIAS

A woman, young, but not a child.

Allow me, please,

A little piece of this most vital hour to visit with Jocasta.

BREAD

Had I not twenty pots to stir

I never would abandon so this royal oven.

I will return.

TIRESIAS

I know you will.

(Exit BREAD.)

JOCASTA *(Kisses him on the cheek)*

Hello, Tiresias.

TIRESIAS

Hello, my Butterfly.

(Pause.)

JOCASTA

Are you the bearer of sad news that weighs your tongue to stillness?

TIRESIAS

I do know sadness, love,

But none of it is new.

JOCASTA
Oh good.

I have enough sad news.

My mother and the boy I hoped to love…

Tell me, you know the futures of our lives…

TIRESIAS
We are, my precious Butterfly,

Not helpless but not free.

Subtle but strong, necessity embraces and entangles all,

But more, the tangle tightens when we move.

Yes, I can see its lines,

But only when I am completely still.

JOCASTA
I do not understand.

TIRESIAS
I see a little farther, like a sailor on the mast,

But if I draw in breath to call out what I see

That breath becomes a breeze

That moves the waves and changes everything,

And in the end all that I really know

Is that I have already done and said too much.

JOCASTA
May I ask questions?

TIRESIAS
Yes.

I cannot promise answers though.

JOCASTA
Is this a good match, wisdom?

TIRESIAS
It is a great and potent match, Jocasta, queen.

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JOCASTA

Will I be happy in it?

TIRESIAS

You will know happiness, my child,

And all of history will speak your name.

But history must wait for you to make it.

So let us be alive and speak of here and now

And breathe the rich intoxication of our dreams.

What do you dream Jocasta?

JOCASTA

That I am truly queen,

Trusted and loved as such by all of Thebes,

Known for my judgment, strength, and heart.

Mother and wife to honoured kings,

Mother of queens like great Harmonia,

But still, before and after that,

Myself, true queen of Thebes.

But other nights,

Especially when winter's frosty dawn comes late

And leaves us rolling in our wakefulness,

I dream of love, of passion,

And of grasping both against me in my arms.

TIRESIAS

Trust in your dreams, Jocasta.

(Enter CLOTH.)

CLOTH

So many dream and few enough wake up before the sun

To work and worry and to get things done

That life can barely keep ahead of sleep.

Have you now gathered in enough of wisdom's clouds

To stay confused until you have more time for all of this?

TIRESIAS

With simple honesty, your favourite spice,

Stir up your thoughts and tell us plainly here,

Your plain opinion of this evening's match.

CLOTH

Well…

JOCASTA

In just such honesty,

I know you can do better than just well.

CLOTH

Jocasta, must I?

Strange sir, I love the lady,

I cannot, for the present, offer more.

TIRESIAS

No more is askable of any one.

JOCASTA

Your love is both my anchor and my sail.

Peace, love, and claim your privacy.

I will be well.

CLOTH

Thanks lady, love.

Good sir, I go.

(CLOTH takes TIRESIAS aside.)

CLOTH *(Cont'd)*

But first,

You know I am a priestess of a kind?

TIRESIAS

Of Dionysus, yes, I do.

CLOTH

I am no prophet,

But I have some skill with auguries.

TIRESIAS
I know that too.

CLOTH
Of course you do.

And I remember Laius as a lad.

I liked him then,

But now the signs say, well…

Strange sir,

If you have any power to trim the world

Against this beauty's suffering,

I give my life, my heart, my lonely place in history

To buy its action.

TIRESIAS
I have only the power of a blind old man.

JOCASTA
Good night, dear friend.

CLOTH
May goodness guide this night, my love.

(Exit CLOTH.)

TIRESIAS
I know far less than rumour would believe

And yet, I've learned, with age, when I should leave.

JOCASTA
One question more.

Will I find love, Tiresias?

(Enter MENAECEUS.)

TIRESIAS
Love waits for you in every street of Thebes.

MENAECEUS
Impatient for your happiness, the people crowd the square.

(Enter BREAD.)

BREAD

No sleep tonight.

I hear a handsome soldier, shining like a blade,

Strides eagerly towards the palace even now.

JOCASTA

So soon?

MENAECEUS

Handsome, they say? Good, good.

You first, Tiresias, as we discussed.

Jocasta, take his arm.

Just so.

(They go out.)

the palace steps

TIRESIAS

Ladies and gentlemen, good citizens of Thebes.

It is my privilege to introduce,

His Honour, First High Judge,

First Minister of Government,

Director General of Public Services,

Arbiter General of Public Trade,

Commander Ceremonial of Fire Brigades,

First Taster of the Wines,

MENAECEUS

Enough, I blush.

Must we be grand? You all know me.

I am Menaeceus to my friends, and we are friends.

I am, at heart, a private man who values modesty,

But I must say that I am proud today in several ways;
Proud of our town,
No more the village that Harmonia knew.
We have so grown and changed,
Known loss and gain,
And here we are together now,
Thebes, A city of the world.
We have lost much, two kings at once,
Sadly and suddenly.
But life goes on,
And we must lift our eyes and face the dawn
Or lose our way.
Today the public mourning ends,
For we have much to celebrate.
This is, I think,
A fitting moment to announce that this, my child,
Jocasta, here, my greatest pride,
Whom you all know and love,
Will be the first to welcome home our one true king,
Direct descendant, son to son,
Of Cadmus and Harmonia themselves.
King Laius comes to marry her
And make her Queen of Thebes.

(Enter the CAPTAIN OF THE GUARD.)

MENAECEUS *(Cont'd)*
So let us drink and celebrate
The restoration of the Theban state.

CAPTAIN OF THE GUARD
Jocasta?

26

JOCASTA
Yes.

Prince Laius?

MENAECEUS
No.

CAPTAIN
I am commander of the royal Body Guard.

Though I was born in Elis,

I am descended from a Sown Man.

I serve King Laius and so, you and all of Thebes.

BREAD
Did I speak truth?

Is he not beautiful?

CAPTAIN
My words and breath are rushed

For I press on before the eager king

Who now is through the gates

And hurries here to meet his bride.

Is all in readiness?

BREAD
Most ready sir.

JOCASTA
Please, some restraint—

(Enter LAIUS. Silence falls.)

LAIUS
Can no-one speak?

I am your king.

MENAECEUS
Laius, permit me—

LAIUS
No.

27

You talk too much, Menaeceus,

You always did.

So.

Where is she?

JOCASTA

I am Jocasta, Laius, king.

Daughter of sage Menaeceus.

I give you welcome home.

Thebes, city of wine, is ours to rule,

As I am sworn to be your bride.

LAIUS

You are, are you?

Well I am sworn that you will do.

BREAD

My lady!

LAIUS

Silence.

JOCASTA

Please.

The king is tired

And wishes rest and food and soothing silence

For an hour or so within the welcome of the royal bath.

Thebes waits to wait upon you sir.

LAIUS

Come here and do it then, my queen.

TIRESIAS

If I may speak.

LAIUS

Who is the groping one?

MENAECEUS

This is Tiresias, honoured priest and ancient seer.

LAIUS

Ah yes, Tiresias. Still not dead?

Well, blind man, what do you see?

TIRESIAS

I hear the king of Thebes and welcome him.

But nothing in my ear or heart tells me that we yet have a queen.

LAIUS

What is Jocasta?

TIRESIAS

She is her father's youngest child,

Grand daughter of a Theban king,

Offered in trust to wed another Theban king.

But she is yet a maid until the proper rites and vows are solemnly concluded.

LAIUS

Conclude them then, for I will have her soon.

JOCASTA

We cannot yet proceed.

My brother, Creon, has not yet returned,

Expected as he is,

So we must wait until—

LAIUS

Denied.

MENACEUS

My lord, I must protest.

LAIUS

Silence.

JOCASTA

But Laius—

LAIUS

NO.

Am I not king?

By Zeus, I am, and I will have my will,

Or wash my journey's dust by swimming in the best of Theban blood.

TIRESIAS

And Zeus will have his too.

LAIUS

What blind defiance is this?

TIRESIAS

You are the king,

And we have waited much too long for your return,

But Zeus is king of all.

His will is not commanded,

It moves itself below the tides, above the spinning sky,

And none defies it without consequence.

No match of such significance as this can be concluded,

Until the voice of Delphi speaks.

LAIUS

And what does Delphi say?

TIRESIAS

We wait to hear.

The one who went to ask has not returned.

LAIUS

And who was he?

JOCASTA

My brother, Creon.

LAIUS

Ohh!

Make her my queen and do it now.

By Zeus, I have no taste for disobedience.

JOCASTA

You heard the king.

Move all and quickly,

Now, prepare the seven ceremonies.

Would you do Laius honour now with any less?

MENAECEUS
Seven?

Daughter?

JOCASTA
The seven sacred rites that mark the unions of the Theban crown.

LAIUS
I grew up here but all of this is new to me.

What rites are these?

MENAECEUS
And how can we prepare -?

JOCASTA
When only those initiated to the mysteries can say what happens next.

MENAECEUS
I see.

So we must ask the Dionysian Sisterhood.

JOCASTA
Your wisdom still exceeds your silence, father.

CLOTH
Some say they are the very rites

That Cadmus and Harmonia once shared

With all the gods.

Like ancient treasures hid away for better days

These ceremonies are—

BREAD
I know the marriage rite.

TIRESIAS
No doubt you do.

Which of the seven rites shall we share first,

Jocasta?

31

BREAD

Let me.

It is, good king, expressed in wine.

LAIUS

In wine?

I may find patience for this, priest.

So. Do the thing.

BREAD

In Thebes, wine fills the heart of everything.

(BREAD performs the ceremony.)

Three cups, two wines, one red as blood, the other clear as fire.

A marriage is composed of three.

Each owns a share of all.

Out of two lives, distinct and separate, we fill three vessels

This is the power of love.

One each for those who come together and one combining both,

An equal partner in the work and joy.

Pour each and each one drink

From every vessel and of either wine

That all may see and know

That you create and honour this, your other third.

Drink deeply, to yourselves, each other and your unity.

LAIUS *(drinks all three glasses)*

I can drink deeply to myself and answer that, and back again.

CLOTH

The thing is done.

CAPTAIN

Drink all,

to Laius and Jocasta and to Thebes.

(All Drink. The crowd, at a distance, sees and cheers wildly.)

JOCASTA
Thanks Captain.

CLOTH
Yes.

LAIUS
What next Tiresias?

TIRESIAS
These ceremonies rests in women's hands.

LAIUS
Well, woman, speak.

What wine do we drink now?

CLOTH
The second ceremony.

Well, it is not easy to explain.

I must prepare, I mean…

JOCASTA
While you collect your sacred memories

I will go gather up the blanket from my bed

As you have often told is needed for this ritual.

LAIUS
Hold girl and stay.

Am I a fool?

You set your will at mine,

To hold proceedings for your brother's coming,

In this is royalty, but know that I am king and I will have my way.

The last great ancient ritual is mine.

This wine is Theban wine and so my own.

(He throws the wine on Jocasta.)

I mark you so with it that all will know

That Laius has returned to claim his queen.

33

BLOOD

Look, Creon comes!

CLOTH

The gods be thanked.

MENAECEUS

Laius, my king, our king, all now is satisfied.

My son, your brother, comes

To bring the blessings of Olympus for this match.

CLOTH

Heap up the fires, fill every vessel with the best of wine,

Bring food and song and dance.

BREAD

A thousand vintages of Thebes are sown tonight.

(People bustle about, trying to reestablish a sense of celebration. Perhaps the Drinking Song is heard in the distance. Laius, Jocasta, Tiresias, and eventually Creon, stand still amid the business, until focus is restored.)

JOCASTA

Brother, as much as you know that I love you,

I can say now that I have never been so pleased to greet you home.

LAIUS

I too have waited for you.

CREON

Sister. Father. King.

I have been hastened by the proof along the way that Laius went before me.

I fear that I have come too late.

LAIUS

Not soon enough but not too late.

What says the oracle?

MENAECEUS

Give us, my son, word of Olympus' pleasure,

So we may celebrate your sister's rise to royalty.

CREON

I am a messenger, and what I have to tell comes not from me

But through me from the oracle.

To hear but half a prophesy is interruption of the gods.

LAIUS

I am not known for patience,

But what you come to tell

Stands full between me now and what I most desire.

Tell all and quickly.

CREON

I went to Delphi.

The rites performed, I heard, without dispute or doubt,

The clearest truth we are allowed to know.

The fruit you hope for, father, cannot be

Or it will foul the crop and eat the tree.

LAIUS

More twisting still?

A family of fools.

JOCASTA

The gods are loved not for their brevity.

Creon must speak until his tale is done.

Continue brother.

LAIUS

To your end.

CREON

Father, I—

MENAECEUS

Tell us, my son, what Delphi says.

CREON

Jocasta, sister,

Since first you breathed I eagerly would breathe no more if,

35

By my stillness, I could spare you pain,

But every duty presses me to tell.

JOCASTA
Tell.

LAIUS
Tell, now, or not at all.

CREON
Tiresias, what should I do?

TIRESIAS
The truth is all we have.

CREON
There is a king, not very far from here,

Who guides his people royally.

Some time ago, a guest came to his home

And was made safe and welcome,

As all guests ought to be.

The stranger grew familiar,

And took advantage of the old man's character

And of the prince’s innocence.

And then he took the prince’s life.

LAIUS
This is not prophesy but gossip, guess, and lies.

CREON
The king now grieves in anger and calls on Zeus for justice.

The crime unthinkable of which I spoke

Is answered with a judgment and a curse.

LAIUS
Speak carefully.

CREON
Plain as a blade, clear as Jocasta's eye,

The oracle predicts a son,

Born of this wedding bed, will kill the king.

MENAECEUS
-his father.

CREON
Yes.

The words clot in my throat like blood.

This same son will return to this same bed,

Full grown monstrosity, and, lying with the queen—

BREAD
-his mother!

JOCASTA
Me? How can I- ?

LAIUS
NO!!!

If I must crush the oracle and eat its tongue,

This will not be.

I am the king and I will have my will.

This will not be.

My queen, my feast, my city, and my will.

Come Captain, drink with me.

The gods be damned.

I swear this will not be.

(Exeunt LAIUS and CAPTAIN.)

CLOTH
Close up your mouths, more than enough is said.

Lock gates and hearts.

The queen will go to bed.

(Exeunt CLOTH and JOCASTA. BREAD flees to the Un-Named.)

CREON
Forgive me, father, I—

37

MENAECEUS
Be still, my son, and come to me.

You have just been as close to death as I would ever have you go.

Whatever happens next, we are a family.

(Exeunt.)

the tavern

BOWL
Well.

Am I mad or is it colder in than out today?

GLASS
Both.

BOWL
What?

CLOTH
Give peace and pour the wine.

BREAD
So.

He is back.

What do you think of him?

FIREWOOD
I think that I expected something else.

BLOOD
The gods have given us a real king: bold, strong, and firm.

BREAD
You think him so?

BLOOD
Did you not see the downcast eyes and quick response to every word?

He speaks and things are done.

This is a king.

GLASS
This is our king.

FIREWOOD
He spilled the wine.

BOWL
We all spill wine.

BREAD
Not at the height of ceremony.

GLASS
He will spill more than wine.

WATER
Who knows what time will bring?

BREAD
Well I know this,

I will not serve this king,

Not in the household anyway.

WATER
Then stay with us.

The crops are rich, the weather kind.

SHEPHERD
The wine is excellent.

BOWL
Always, whatever else, to Thebes!

ALL
To Thebes!!

(All drink.)

BOWL
Now.

Who plays? Who drinks? And who dares both with me?

39

GLASS
Always both, they dance like king and queen.

BREAD
I'll throw with you

above

CLOTH
Sleep, love.

Your bed, as always, waits for you.

JOCASTA
My bed? Jocasta's bed?

What is that now?

CLOTH
Are you a queen?

Then rule your bed at least.

JOCASTA
Does heaven hate me so?

CLOTH
Listen to me.

You are as free from guilt in all of this

As you are inexperienced.

The punishment is his.

Believe me, love, the oracle speaks riddles

jJust as much as truth.

There is a way from here to happiness,

Now go to bed.

JOCASTA
I cannot be alone!

(Enter CREON, and TIRESIAS.)

Hold me now, Creon, as you used to do.

CREON

Peace, sweetness.

Breathe.

CLOTH

Love holds you always, child.

TIRESIAS

You never are alone, and will not be.

(aside) That far into the darkness I can see.

MENAECEUS *(Entering)*

She calls, my baby calls.

CREON

Shh, father, sit and be still.

She cannot sleep and so we stay with her.

the tavern

BOWL *(to SHEPHERD)*

Come closer to the fire, you shiver still.

Make room for him.

SHEPHERD

Thanks, no.

I cannot look at it.

I dare not see.

BREAD

I am cold too.

BOWL

Then share my heat.

WATER

The closer we sit the warmer we are.

You are most welcome friend.

41

FIREWOOD
All strangers are.

BLOOD
They say,

From time to time, the great god Dionysus comes,

Sometimes as man, sometimes as beast.

GLASS
Sometimes as man that smells like beast.

FIREWOOD
It is our ancient custom, so, to welcome all who come.

SHEPHERD *(Sits reluctantly)*
No matter how they come?

BOWL
Not all stay welcome.

SHEPHERD
I am no god.

BOWL
And I no prophet.

But when I cast my bones down like a seer

(Sits.)

And pour libations to the gods

(Drinks.)

I am not pleased with what I see.

GLASS
Your stomach and your feet?

BOWL
Rarely my feet.

I see a town that Cadmus would not recognize.

BLOOD
But it was hoped,

We all hope still that Laius will—

BREAD
—just go away.

BLOOD
Be careful.

BREAD
What? Of you?

Oh, now I shake with fear.

FIREWOOD
Peace friends.

No one can say how much our town has changed tonight,

But it is ours and we will live and die in it together.

WATER
And not, I hope, by neighbour's hands.

outside the tavern

LAIUS *(holding up a bottle)*
Empty! (*smashes it*)

Wine! Captain!

Oceans of wine, until we sail or drown.

CAPTAIN
I see a likely harbour.

Let us haul in our sails and go ashore.

(Pulls Laius' cloak around him.)

LAIUS
Let go of me.

I burn with many heats already.

CAPTAIN
I know. I know,

43

But let us save the brilliance of your fire for royal company.

inside the tavern

(LAIUS and CAPTAIN enter, cloaked.)

LAIUS
I know this place.

CAPTAIN
You do?

BOWL
I am myself near death from thirst.

More wine.

WATER
I pour no more without some payment.

As many rounds remain unpaid as there are drinkers here.

I will not open—

LAIUS
Silence clod and pour, now, or I will—

CAPTAIN
Not before me.

This round is mine.

A fresh cask, host, and throw the plug away.

Our coin is of a foreign stamp,

But gold, I trust, is welcome everywhere.

(CAPTAIN pays.)

GLASS
All strangers, we just said, are welcome here.

CAPTAIN
Drink with us then.

(Pours.)

Here, yes? and here,

What health and honour shall we drink together now?

BOWL

Cadmus and Harmonia.

ALL

Cadmus and Harmonia

(All drink.)

CAPTAIN

To Thebes!

ALL

To Thebes!

(All drink.)

FIREWOOD

To Jocasta!

LAIUS

To Laius and Jocasta!

CAPTAIN

To Laius and Jocasta! *(Drinks)*

GLASS

You have a stronger stomach, sir, than I.

LAIUS

You do not drink?

BOWL

This is a new...wine.

Let it just breathe a while before we drink.

FIREWOOD

Too much too fast and we may go too far.

LAIUS

What do you mean?

CAPTAIN

Though we have only recently arrived

I hope to be a citizen of Thebes,

And I know this,

It is not mine to choose

When I give honour to my king and queen.

BOWL

A last, best, health, then each to his own cup.

ALL

Laius and Jocasta!

(All drink.)

WATER

There now, all honours done,

Sit friends and warm yourselves.

LAIUS

And bring the cask.

I am not finished drinking to the king.

CAPTAIN

Let each drink to his own health.

BOWL

Or past it.

GLASS *(To LAIUS who stares at her)*

Do I know you?

LAIUS

I drank here in my youth.

GLASS

I like to think that I still do.

LAIUS

Your form and face…

Did we, perhaps…?

46

GLASS
My mother, possibly.

BOWL

(To the SHEPHERD.)

You say you are no god and I believe you.

But you have powers as well as mystery.

SHEPHERD
Who? What? I?

BOWL
Unless you sit over a secret hole

You must be like the underworld itself

Where all goes in but nothing ever leaves.

SHEPHERD
I do not understand.

BREAD
Relieve yourself, my friend.

SHEPHERD
I wish I could.

GLASS
Stand up and think of streams.

SHEPHERD
I think of nothing else.

Streams of fire and streams of blood

Flow through my hollow heart

Since first I saw those torches flow towards this town.

I drink and drink and still I think of nothing else.

Is Laius here?

LAIUS
What?!

CAPTAIN

He has arrived in Thebes tonight.

WATER
Were you not there?

SHEPHERD
Then I must drink until I cannot hear.

His name twists in my soul like wire or worse.

Its very sound to me is like a curse.

LAIUS *(rising)*
Is every idiot a seer in this pathetic place?

Tell me, prophet, did you foresee your head before you in the fire?

I will relieve you of your streams of blood! I will!

(Draws sword.)

WATER
Enough!

BOWL
Not here!

Rough as it is, this is a temple of a kind.

No roughness here!

LAIUS
Be still! You foul fat fool!

(LAIUS moves to strike BOWL who knocks him down.)

BOWL
As you command. (*Sits on him*)

He makes a warm throne.

(LAIUS struggles weakly.)

CAPTAIN
Yes.

Too hot, I think, to sit on long.

BOWL
Not hot, but lumpy.

(BOWL Slaps LAIUS.)

There, that softened it.

(The CAPTAIN moves in. BOWL draws his knife.)

BOWL *(Cont'd)*
Stand back.

I may yet need a stool.

CAPTAIN
Perhaps I can furnish you better service than my friend.

(His cloak is open.)

BREAD
An officer!

BLOOD
Of Laius' Body Guard!

WATER
Can you forgive us our offence?

CAPTAIN
You gave me none.

Peace serves us all and we must all protect it.

BOWL
Forgive me if I don't get up.

CAPTAIN
I wish you would.

I give my word,

This man will feel the full displeasure of the king.

Your hand.

BOWL
Am I commanded?

CAPTAIN
We have drunk wine together.

I offer you my word that he will suffer for this night.

49

BOWL *(getting up)*

He has already, I should think.

He now is nicely quiet though.

WATER

Not dead?

BOWL

Not yet.

And yet his storm has little wind.

See, though, he moves.

CAPTAIN

Then I will take him now while all is still.

He will, I think, remember none of this.

BOWL

A shame, he might have learned and come again.

(Picks up Laius.)

WATER

Come back alone, or else in better company.

CAPTAIN

I will. Good night.

(Exit CAPTAIN carrying Laius.)

above

(MENAECEUS and JOCASTA sit. CLOTH and TIRESIAS play a game of chance to pass the time.)

MENAECEUS

Jocasta, child.

Is this…?

Should we all go?

JOCASTA

No, no. Stay please and play.

Both chance and hope help keep my fears away.

TIRESIAS

Stop shaking them and throw the stones.

CLOTH

A little patience Prophet.

How much more will you win tonight?

TIRESIAS

Nothing, unless you throw.

CLOTH

So. No-one speak. *(throws)*

Read them, Tiresias.

JOCASTA

Please!

His wisdom fails without his honesty.

TIRESIAS

You know that I am blind.

CLOTH

But not how much you see.

Which is more dark to you, what is or what will be?

TIRESIAS

I know that I have lost this throw.

CLOTH

You see?

I knew. I told you so.

TIRESIAS

I did not know until I heard you put your hand onto the coins.

And, trusting you—

MENAECEUS

Ha!

51

CLOTH
You play with me.

TIRESIAS
I do, but only stones.

CLOTH
So, what exactly can you see?

TIRESIAS
The world of here and now is black to me.

I am a blind old man who needs his friends to do the simplest things.

What will be is much darker still.

CLOTH
I listen better than I understand.

TIRESIAS
What can you say you know will be?

Without a doubt?

Without a chance of failing?

CLOTH
Only that I will die.

JOCASTA
Where is Creon?

MENAECEUS
Your brother guards your door, or did,

I think he sleeps.

JOCASTA
Not on the stones?

(She goes out to CREON.)

TIRESIAS
I too will die.

(He stands and seems to stare into the dark.)

Death is the greatest truth,

And those who want the truth must go to it

And leave a part of who they are

In fair exchange for what they take away.

I am an old man and much of me is dead already.

I will not trade what I have left to cheat a friend at games.

CLOTH

Thanks. Wisdom then?

TIRESIAS

Yes, what I have.

CLOTH

How do you know to speak or hold your tongue?

TIRESIAS

The hardest question first?

I hope to know before I die.

So, shall we play?

CLOTH

Your throw.

JOCASTA *(with Creon)*

Wake brother, wake.

The hour is late.

The stones are cold.

A bed more worthy waits inside.

CREON

A cold bed waits for all.

What is the hour?

(Noises in the distance.)

JOCASTA

Between the last drinkers and the first farmers.

Good brother?

53

CREON
Yes?

JOCASTA
Remember how, when we were small,

I earned our father's anger but you bore the blame?

CREON
His anger is a modest thing.

JOCASTA
You lied then to protect me.

CREON
I did. I would again.

JOCASTA
Tonight you told us, him,

This marriage is forbidden by the oracle.

Did you, perhaps invent a prophesy?

CREON
With all I am I wish I had.

LAIUS *(Far off)*
She dares to not remember me?

The stony whore.

I will rip open all of Thebes like dogs a sheep,

And having gorged will roll myself inside and... yes, I will!

A VOICE *(off)*
Roll up and die then, dog.

But do it quietly!

LAIUS
Who wants to die!?

Come down and do it now.

I am—

(Loud crash off. TIRESIAS, CLOTH, and MENAECEUS come out.)

CREON
Tomorrow has come early.

(Enter CAPTAIN carrying LAIUS, also CLOTH.)

CAPTAIN
This is our king.

JOCASTA
Yes.

CLOTH
Is he dead?

CAPTAIN
Dead drunk.

LAIUS *(Struggles, falls, and tries to stand)*
Where is it?

Where is the fresh green branch that I must bring to fire?

I have left blazes on my trail before and know too well

What work is needed to make wet wood burn.

Is that my queen?

I grow still more alive.

(Staggers.)

I stand erect to serve her.

(Falls.)

MENAECEUS
Quick! Help the king!

LAIUS
No! Stay!

(He draws the CAPTAIN'S sword.)

Is this blade mine?

CAPTAIN
It serves you... Sir.

55

LAIUS

I need no other help.

A naked weapon and a virgin bride.

All else now leave.

The sweating sun drags in the day

And I am king, and I will have my way!

Leave us now,

GO!

CREON *(To MENAECEUS, as they exit)*

This cannot, must not be.

MENAECEUS

What can we do?

CREON

Nothing, as always, nothing.

CLOTH

We hope and watch and wait and never, never act.

(Exeunt CREON, CLOTH and MENAECEUS.)

LAIUS *(seizing JOCASTA'S arm)*

Come girl.

JOCASTA

I am, apparently, the queen of Thebes.

If conquest comes—

LAIUS

It has.

JOCASTA

Then I will meet it as a queen.

(Breaking free.)

Let go of me.

(Exits within, LAIUS follows.)

56

the tavern

BLOOD
All year I dream of harvest time.

Ripe, so ripe they strain the skin.

BREAD
The grapes are good this year.

BLOOD
The grapes?

Yes I suppose, but I was thinking of the limbs,

Bare shining legs and arms like yours

Out sweating in the sun.

BOWL
All drink!

FIREWOOD
This is our town.

above

JOCASTA *(with CLOTH)*
I am, to him, a table spread with fruits and meats.

Half unaware, he gorges on my flesh,

Picks at my pride, and wallows in his sweaty appetites,

While I, his wooden wife, groan silently.

tavern

GLASS *(Entering)*
Come!

All come, oh please,

All come and chase the birds away.

WATER
Are there not hawks enough to scare the swallows from the fields?

GLASS
No hawks at all.

BREAD
What can it be that frightens hawks but swallows dare ignore?

GLASS
I know not.

Come, come, or all is lost.

(They rush out.)

above

JOCASTA *(Holding her abdomen)*
It has begun.

What have I here?

What horror happens in my womb?

CLOTH
Your baby, child.

before

CAPTAIN
The wine of Thebes,

the living blood of Thebes

is royal property and forfeit to the crown.

Only the army drinks.

Serve or go dry.

So says the king.

(The following sequence jumps between three settings: "above" is within the royal apartment, "before" is a place in or before the palace that overlooks and addresses the city, and "tavern" is self explanatory.)

above

JOCASTA
My child is not revenge, nor curse, nor tool of prophesy.

CLOTH
Nor necessarily a boy.

The oracle spoke of a son,

And yet the auguries predict a line of queens.

before

CAPTAIN
All Thebes will swear direct allegiance to the king,

Above all other loyalties.

So says the king.

tavern

WATER
They say that Cadmus nightly walked

Through and around the town

Searching to offer justice,

And when at last, while others rested deep,

He came against the palace gate,

He asked permission of the stones to enter in.

This was our town.

above

JOCASTA
How can they still love me?

CLOTH
They love you more.

You suffer for them all.

JOCASTA
The strongest tip and sharpest edge are hardened in the fire.

CLOTH

None doubts your strength nor fears your hardness, queen.

before

CAPTAIN

This land is seized.

So says the king.

tavern

FIREWOOD

I can no longer sleep

Without the sound of armoured bodies marching in the street.

Who dares to guess what sudden silence brings?

This is our town.

before

CAPTAIN

These judges are deposed.

So says the king.

tavern

BREAD

My mother's father took me on his knee

And spoke with pride of living here.

He promised me that same pride would be mine,

That I would gather children to me saying,

Look, this is our town.

before

CAPTAIN

The power of punishment without appeal rests with the King’s Police.

So says the king.

tavern

BOWL
I'd sell the world for just one drink.

(GLASS enters.)

WATER
How are the vines?

GLASS
The winter wind was cruel.

The rows are gapped and broken

Like a line of battle in the hour before defeat.

BREAD *(to BLOOD)*
Or like your son's front teeth since yesterday.

BLOOD
I have no son.

The boy has taken the king's wine.

BREAD
What? Joined the King’s Police?

(An awkward silence.)

BOWL
A few good cuttings will replace the missing vines.

FIREWOOD
But not the teeth, or son.

GLASS
Make room beside the fire.

above

JOCASTA
I am a city under siege.

LAIUS
You are,

My only enemy within.

61

And when he ventures out

I am prepared to deal with him.

JOCASTA

Chance says, and so does augury,

You have no son nor enemy.

Are you afraid of girls?

tavern

(GLASS and BLOOD with pruning hooks.)

GLASS

That was a string of heavy days

For wine we never will enjoy.

BLOOD

For king or crowd the pruning must be done.

WATER

Someday we all will drink again.

(To BLOOD who sharpens his tool.)

Why do you grind your hook?

The job is done as well as ever for this year.

BLOOD

It is.

But for the someday that you speak of

I keep my cutter sharp.

There may yet be some bloody pruning done.

BREAD

An eager girl, rushing to love,

Was knocked into the dust by Laius' chariot.

All day, beneath the sun, she wept until she died,

But none would offer help,

Unsure of how the royal wrath would fall.

This is our town.

above

JOCASTA

(Jocasta begins labour.)

CLOTH
Attend the queen!!

tavern

WATER
The queen has not been seen for days.

BREAD
Such beauty now is rare in Thebes.

GLASS
I wish the king were half so rare.

BLOOD
Quiet.

GLASS
And who will make me so?

WATER
These are your friends, but not all Thebans are.

FIREWOOD
One word too much can silence anyone.

above

(LAIUS stands, CLOTH rushes out.)

CLOTH
A boy! A prince!

Perfect and plump and-

(LAIUS strikes her down.)

63

LAIUS

Silence slop mopper!

You have no right to speak,

No, not to breathe unless I bid it.

Go, silently, and offer comfort to the queen.

Her grief is great.

CLOTH

Her grief?

(Exit CLOTH within.)

tavern

BOWL

What?

Shepherd, early up or still up late?

SHEPHERD *(Staring into the fire)*

Shepherd that was.

My sheep have gone, I think.

WATER

He guards our fire in double watches now.

No log falls but he mourns its loss.

BOWL

The high priest of our lowly order.

Come host.

More wood at least.

Somehow we must stay warm.

(Above.

(Enter MENAECEUS.)

JOCASTA *(in bed with her baby)*

Father.

Welcome always.

Come close and see my son.

MENAECEUS
How can I..?

JOCASTA
Sit with us and hold my hand.

Why so far off?

Come sit.

Is he not beautiful?

What? Are you shy?

MENAECEUS
No child. In truth, afraid.

The judgment of the gods,

the fury of the king,

The torment of the state,

and all your suffering:

Mine was the voice that called for this sad song.

So now—

JOCASTA
Shhh. Father. Peace.

MENAECEUS
More than my life I wish for peace.

JOCASTA
Then, please, do this for all of us.

Forget your fear and hold my son.

I am your child and he is mine.

Is he not beautiful?

What else could stand against the hurricane of horror you describe

But such complete and perfect innocence?

MENAECEUS *(holding the child)*
He is the wonder of the world.

65

LAIUS *(entering)*

And he is mine.

Give him to me.

(Takes the child.)

Now leave.

MENAECEUS

I-

Yes my king.

Of course.

JOCASTA

Please father, not too far.

LAIUS

When next a wet faced fool is wanted,

I will call.

(Exit MENAECEUS.)

JOCASTA

He is your son, Laius.

Can you not love him?

LAIUS

I have escaped assassins every day

Since I was..*(Gestures at the baby.)* this.

And if the oracle, and Creon, have not lied

He is the last great danger of my life.

JOCASTA

Perhaps they did.

LAIUS

Perhaps?

I am a soldier not a gambler.

JOCASTA

He is a helpless child.

LAIUS

He is a threat to both of us.

I would be mad to have my enemy,

To hold him helpless in my hands

And not to press the moment on to victory.

JOCASTA

He is no warrior.

This is no battlefield.

He is your baby in your arms.

In this unending war that rages in your heart

Do you kill unarmed prisoners?

The wounded? and the old?

LAIUS

I kill my enemies.

JOCASTA

There can be more than battles.

There must be, and you can know it.

Look forward into history,

What will the world look back and see?

LAIUS

The world will have to see me as I am.

I am the king.

JOCASTA

And what is that?

Where is the victory if nothing good is won?

What god can watch a father kill his son?

(Silence.)

Are we not here because you killed a child?

How is this justice now?

67

LAIUS
I will not kill the child.

JOCASTA
Thank heaven.

LAIUS
But he will die.

Zeus wants my blood

And he will have yours too.

Where is my Captain?

CAPTAIN
I stand attendant, king.

LAIUS
Do this for me…

(While JOCASTA speaks, LAIUS ignores her and speaks quickly and privately to the CAPTAIN, who salutes and leaves.)

JOCASTA
All blood is his already,

And, like the waters of this world,

Will fall and flow and rise again.

This child is ours.

He is our selves,

And if we cannot love him, Laius,

Then we are far more lost than cursed.

LAIUS
You love him now?

JOCASTA
With all I am.

LAIUS
And when he is a man?

This is no curse, it is a warning, queen.

And when the gods are kind to us

68

We owe them sacrifice.

Do you not see?

The boy belongs to Zeus,

and not to you or me.

tavern

BLOOD

What do you think?

Has our Jocasta given birth?

BREAD

If not yet, soon.

GLASS

Or not at all, Dionysus be kind.

(The CAPTAIN enters.)

BOWL

Peace friends,

We have a bodyguard.

Most welcome warrior.

Here sit with me.

(*Privately)* Do you have wine?

CAPTAIN

The fearful shepherd.

Where is he?

(Silence.)

One or all must go with me.

SHEPHERD

What crime-? No matter.

I doubt I will return.

Thanks friends.

(Exeunt Captain and Shepherd.)

69

above

JOCASTA *(Nursing the baby)*

Sleep, sleep, my little love.

So small.

So small a life.

So brief a visit in this world

Then back again onto the bosom of the stars.

This, now, is all of life that you will ever know

And all of heaven for me.

(Enter LAIUS.)

JOCASTA *(Cont'd)*

You said an hour.

LAIUS

The hour has come and gone.

Give him to me.

(Pause.)

He is no longer ours.

Together we will give him to the gods.

It is the only way.

(JOCASTA gives the baby to LAIUS.)

LAIUS *(Cont'd)*

Give him a taste of Thebes before he goes.

(JOCASTA pours wine through a cloth into the baby's mouth.)

JOCASTA

Sleep little warrior and dream of victories.

Well son, the world is cruel.

This much I know and this is all your father has to teach you.

(LAIUS binds the baby's feet with wire.)

JOCASTA
No! No!

Not torture too.

(She collapses.)

LAIUS
It all is torture.

JOCASTA
No.

(Enter the CAPTAIN with the SHEPHERD.)

LAIUS
Well?

CAPTAIN
I have the man.

LAIUS
Escort the queen.

She is not well.

(Exit the CAPTAIN and JOCASTA. The SHEPHERD throws himself on the ground.)

LAIUS *(Cont'd)*
Stand up.

Come here to me.

You know the paths of Cithaeron?

SHEPHERD
As well as—

LAIUS
Good.

I have a job for you.

My flocks on Cithaeron need care

And you have come to my attention.

SHEPHERD
Sir, I am honoured.

71

LAIUS

Silence.

One more thing.

Take this, exactly as it is,

And lay it on the mountain's farther side,

Do not return.

SHEPHERD

Sir—

LAIUS

Say nothing. See no-one. Go. Now.

(Exit SHEPHERD with the baby.)

LAIUS *(Cont'd)*

So. Such is mercy.

The taste is weak to me. *(drinks)*

(Exit LAIUS within.)

tavern

BLOOD *(entering)*

All come! All come! The king requests us all!

All come attend the king before the palace steps.

All come!

BREAD

Request? Attend?

BOWL

What next? Poetic invitations?

GLASS

So sheep are called to slaughter with a song.

72

(The SHEPHERD, carrying his bundle, walks slowly through the gathering crowd and perhaps the audience,on his way out.)

LAIUS

Captain. Stand back the guard.

Come closer, Thebes,

Within my voice's fall.

Come share my loss, there is enough for all.

I am, today, not king nor general.

I am a father - No, I am not that.

The gods will not allow.

Are you a father? You?

Then you are richer men than I.

My son is dead.

Our prince is dead.

He breathed in once and never will exhale.

No angry army in retreat

Could ever cause such suffering.

Whatever I have done,

And every soldier has a wounded soul,

I know that I am punished now.

A month of public mourning I declare.

A month?

One teardrop on this tide of pain.

I am a man whose only son has died.

I hope, at least, the gods are satisfied.

Go quietly.

I must attend my wife.

Your queen most needs me now.

(Exit LAIUS.)

73

above the town

SHEPHERD
So says the king.

End of Act One

Act Two

(The Twenty-first Year of Laius' Rule. The tavern, without wine. BOWL and GLASS are playing stones.)

BOWL
Silence!

This is my moment now.

(BOWL prepares to throw.)

BREAD
Now is your chance.

BLOOD
Please, friend.

Ignore the chattering

And tell your tale.

CLOTH
I will, and so—

74

(BOWL loses to GLASS.)

BOWL

Oh, bloody blood!

Oh, torture, death, and worse!

See now how chance despises me.

GLASS

Chance knows no names.

BOWL

I must be cursed then.

Excess of virtue in my youth I guess.

CLOTH

A hint of peace, I beg you.

BREAD

We talk of gods.

WATER

We do, always we do.

Now, who will join me in a drink?

BOWL

What, wine?!

FIREWOOD

One taste could cost your life if it was stolen from the King's Police.

GLASS

My life is barely worth the spare change from a copper coin.

I would be glad to pay the price.

WATER

Keep it friend.

I have no wine.

BOWL

No wine? You tease my tongue.

WATER

No joke but still no wine.

75

GLASS
I do not understand.

WATER
We can still celebrate I think.

With water.

BOWL
What?

WATER
Come, all drink.

BOWL
Water?

CLOTH
Without it nothing lives.

GLASS
But fire.

BOWL
But, water?

No, not me.

(BOWL does not participate.)

CLOTH
Well?

FIREWOOD
The tears of Harmonia.

CLOTH
The sweat of honest labour.

BLOOD
The water of our River Dirce.

WATER
The rains of Cithaeron.

(They go to drink.)

76

CLOTH

Jocasta’s many tears.

ALL *(but BOWL)*

Jocasta’s tears.

(All drink.)

BOWL

Oh well then.

Some water by the fire for me.

CLOTH

And for a taste of what might be,

Take this. *(A grape)*

This grape, look into it and tell me what you see.

BOWL

A drop of next year's wine?

CLOTH

Three drops at least.

But see, by colour, weight, and size,

Picked now, two moons beyond the longest day,

I prophesy a crop a third again as rich as last year's harvest.

A sweeter wine, but lighter on the tongue.

But this *(Another grape)*

Picked and then left to wait too long

To be made anything,

Rots from inside and is first vile, then dangerous.

I knew him.

BOWL

Who?

Oh, him.

CLOTH

I met a lively youth who wanted to be worthy of his lot.

I watched his sweetness rot in Elis.

77

I knew him and I said nothing.

BOWL

And if you had?

above the town. Perhaps where the SHEPHERD stood at the end of Act 1

OEDIPUS

So this is Thebes?

Built, so they say, to stand forever,

Against all wars and weathers.

Against these walls

A man might hurl his will and never make a mark.

So great a town so dark so early in the night?

I hope these same dark walls hold in some light.

the tavern

BOWL *(Drinks the water)*

A little bitter, but it sways both head and heart.

Pour out your story then, and please,

Forgive the interruption.

Come! All… hear!

CLOTH

My chance to speak has gone.

My daughter will now tell our tales.

GLASS

I will? Oh well

—And so, Great Zeus, bound by his word—

BREAD

Can Zeus be bound by anything?

78

GLASS
Oh yes, his word is truth itself and cannot be denied.

So, as I said, bound by his word,

He showed the girl himself.

BREAD
Imagine that.

GLASS
As she had asked.

FIREWOOD
As Hera urged her to.

BREAD
What was her name?

GLASS
She told you, Semele—

BREAD
Daughter of Cadmus.

GLASS
Yes, and of Harmonia.

FIREWOOD
So, as you say,

Her story is our own.

GLASS
It is.

So, Semele—

BREAD
Pregnant by Zeus disguised.

GLASS
Yes, yes.

Well, when great Zeus revealed himself to her—

FIREWOOD
Wasn't she burnt up all at once, so fierce a blaze it was—

79

BREAD
His one true self?

GLASS
Exactly, yes.

She was consumed like that

(Kicks at the fire, it blazes.)

But Zeus—

FIREWOOD
Poor child.

GLASS
What now?

BREAD
Why poor?

And why a child?

We all will die, but she, at least, was lover to a god.

GLASS
But Zeus, as quick as lightning,

Quicker probably, sticks in his hand and pulls out—

BREAD
Dionysus.

(GLASS, lost, looks to CLOTH.)

CLOTH
Yes, Dionysus—

FIREWOOD
So—

GLASS
There's more.

WATER
Go on.

GLASS

And so, Zeus, with his sword—

BOWL

Held in his other hand.

GLASS

What? Yes, his other hand.

He slashes open his own thigh—

BREAD

And stuffs the baby in.

CLOTH

You know this one?

BREAD

Yes, I forgot.

My mother used to tell it by the fire as you do now.

You tell it well though.

CLOTH

Well, tell it so yourself when you have listeners upon your knee.

(Rises.)

WATER

You will not leave so soon?

CLOTH

Keep your cups full with ancient memories.

I will be back.

BOWL

Be safe, in Dionysus's name.

(CLOTH exits cautiously.)

I thirst.

Who tells another round?

81

a street

JOCASTA *(entering, cloaked and consulting a list.)*
This is the house. ‘Land lost and father killed’.

The only riches here are hungry now,

Too weak to make much sound

As, every night, they cry themselves to sleep.

I speak to darkness.

(Leaving.)

Come, the day is weary.

(Enter CREON and CLOTH.)

CLOTH *(Carrying a basket of packages and simple toys.)*
My lady, so am I.

JOCASTA
So are we all.

This one last house, today, is all I ask.

CREON
In any hour of any day your wishes move our hands.

JOCASTA
Go both of you and take them these.

(Some food and toys.)

We all may hope to sleep a little better when you have.

CREON
Will you not come?

A visit from the queen...?

JOCASTA
This house has tears enough.

(Exeunt CLOTH and CREON, leaving the basket.)

JOCASTA *(holding a simple doll)*
I held a baby once, for just an hour.

My arms ache with the memory.

If I could say they ache from fighting for his life

The pain might hope to fade.

But no, I let him go.

No-one can know how torn my grip is now.

(Pause.)

Oh, childish queen,

By every fire in every town a mother knows.

A thousand, thousand grips have torn before

When women sent their babies off to war.

Be now their queen.

(To the doll.)

My little warrior, the war goes on.

With you, my soldiers made of straw,

I fight for Thebes.

She cowers before the king, and so do I,

But I will make her mine before I die.

BREAD *(entering hurriedly)*

Where? Where? Oh come to me.

Oh Where?

JOCASTA

Stop, wait, old friend.

What fills your voice with tears?

BREAD

My little one, my lamb.

So young, so small to be alone so late.

JOCASTA

You have not lost your child?

BREAD

My child?

83

No. Jocasta, queen.

May Zeus prevent I ever know such loss.

My lamb, my little wooly lamb broke free.

CLOTH *(entering)*

My hands are empty and I bring you thanks.

JOCASTA

Good, come with us,

We have a frightened little animal to catch.

BREAD

Poor little thing.

She must be so afraid.

(Exeunt.)

OEDIPUS *(entering)*

When I was still a child this game was good,

Mazes and riddles, hiding and running home.

(Finding the doll.)

But I am not alone.

Hello, straw guardian.

Could you, perhaps lead me towards...

But no, your duty waits for you.

A little dream awaits your company.

No matter,

If what they say is true,

My nose and I will find some Theban Hospitality.

(Exits.)

84

the tavern

(A secret knock, the door is opened. Enter BOWL and GLASS.)

WATER
Quickly, quickly, mind the light.
The King's Police are out and angry.

BOWL
Drunk and angry.

GLASS
Drunk and stupid.

BOWL
Ah, drunkenness.
I cannot quite forget its sweet oblivion.

FIREWOOD
I hoped, that while king Laius is away,
They would relax a bit.
But tyranny makes tyrants of them all.

WATER
Well, bar the door and keep your voices low.
Sit by the fire, relax with friends,
and leave all tyrants in the cold.
Our warmth is still our own to share.

(A ragged knock, almost the code. Silence. The knock again.)

WATER
And who knocks now?
Declare yourself.

OEDIPUS *(Outside)*
My name is Oedipus, son of-
I hope to be a friend.

GLASS
Any man unsure of his father is a brother of mine.

85

Let him in.

WATER *(Opening the door)*
Welcome.

Come quickly in and quietly.

(WATER looks around outside before shutting and barring the door.)

OEDIPUS *(Coming in)*
Am I?

Such silent streets, so many doors shut tight,

So little light?

Only in the depths of public mourning

Have I before seen such a gloom.

Your king, I trust, is well?

GLASS
Well...

FIREWOOD
Laius lives.

GLASS
Thebes mourns the loss of what it might have been.

BLOOD
Careful.

OEDIPUS
I should leave now, I think.

WATER
No, stranger, friend.

We have forgotten who we are.

FIREWOOD
Stay, sit, be warm.

OEDIPUS
I will and thanks.

In truth, my legs give me much pain.

I will impose upon your quiet sadness

Only to the depth of one cup of wine,

And then will go.

WATER

We have no wine.

OEDIPUS

No wine?

I thought…

WATER

This was a tavern once,

Some say the first that ever was,

But now the law forbids it.

The wine of Thebes is for the King,

the King's Police and army.

We share only our history.

OEDIPUS

Small wonder that you mourn.

No matter,

I have a little of my own and gladly share.

(He opens his cloak to pull out a flask.His sword and armour show. They stand back from him.)

BLOOD

Keep it. We want none.

OEDIPUS

To sit in friendship by a fire and not want wine?

This town is sad, and far less friendly than the world has said.

I go, thanks for the fire's warmth at least.

BOWL

Wait, please.

BLOOD

And, may I ask, how have you come to Thebes?

OEDIPUS
By foot, along the mountain trail.

BLOOD
Not by the road along the sea?

OEDIPUS
That is a dangerous way, I found.

BLOOD
It is.

Few come that way.

OEDIPUS
And yet a man may go wherever courage takes him.

BOWL
You are a soldier, sir.

But not in Laius' service?

OEDIPUS
My sword and I serve no-one but the gods.

BOWL
Thanks for your offer.

I will drink with you.

You gave a name?

OEDIPUS
My name is all I have, and yet I give it proudly.

I am Oedipus.

BLOOD
And your parents are..?

You almost said before.

OEDIPUS
So many questions.

Polybus and Merope.

BLOOD
The prince of Corinth! Well!

We are not often honoured so by royalty.

OEDIPUS

My parents are both good and gracious monarchs,

But my state is low.

I never can go home.

(The knock again.)

No more of me for now.

(WATER lets in BREAD.)

What news in Thebes?

Tell me, what swells the common heart?

GLASS

Not much.

FIREWOOD

We love our queen and she loves Thebes.

BREAD

She leads through service, as king Cadmus did.

OEDIPUS

Her name escapes my tongue.

BLOOD

She is Jocasta, daughter of Menaeceus,

Grand daughter to Pentheus, once our king.

OEDIPUS

Pentheus, yes,

Who died for mocking at the rites of Dionysus.

BLOOD

Yes.

OEDIPUS

Is Dionysus honoured still?

BLOOD

Whatever else, this is still Thebes.

OEDIPUS

And if my mother taught me well,

Both hospitality and wine are sacred here?

BOWL

More sacred since more rare.

OEDIPUS

Then honour me, yourselves, your god,

by drinking this with me.

BOWL

A handsome bottle.

OEDIPUS

More so the wine within, although Corinthian.

Here, share the wine and keep the bottle friend.

WATER

We drink your good Salt Wine most gratefully.

OEDIPUS

Salt Wine?

FIREWOOD

Seasoned with honest sweat from those, today yourself,

Who carried it to Thebes across the rocky mountain trails.

The wine that grows here is all captive to the king.

For twenty years a monstrous thing

Has blocked the road beside the sea.

BLOOD

The Sphinx.

OEDIPUS

The Sphinx?

And what is that?

BLOOD

Some say it is the tortured spirit of the infant prince.

90

OEDIPUS
A ghost?

WATER
It cannot be.
It is, in face at least,
I have heard tell,
A Theban woman, proud and beautiful,
But with the body of a lion,

BREAD
And eagle's wings.

GLASS
It wrings the necks of all who challenge it.

OEDIPUS
How strange.
But tell me more about your queen.

looking out from the palace above

JOCASTA
Perverse and cruel strangler,
Beguiling, smiling monster of mad mockery,
Look down on me and laugh.
My city hates and fears you, then swears its love for me,
And never sees that you <u>are me</u>
Reflected in the furious eye of outraged motherhood,
Hera's most perfect punishment.
I know you, monster-woman-thing, as deeply as a mirror,
As surely as a mother knows her child.
You see?
You are not needed here.
I am my own exquisite torturer.

91

(Enter CREON unseen.)

Pick up you heart, Jocasta.

When horror rules the waking world sleep holds less fear.

Who stands so near?

Oh Creon, watch with me.

CREON *(Looking out at the city with her.)*
So many houses, hearths and hearts.

JOCASTA
So little hope.

CREON
Not much, but it is there, and more than that

The richest hopes of Thebes rest here in you.

JOCASTA
In me alone? Poor town.

CREON
Supported, loved, advised, but, yes, in you.

Sweet nuisance, playmate, friend, and queen,

The people's hope is not a burden but a torch that you must bear.

JOCASTA
And I have born much already.

CREON
Believe me love, I know.

Laius is far away, the night is deep.

Lay down your heavy head and go to sleep.

JOCASTA
Your love sustains my hope.

CREON
May both sustain us all.

Sleep well.

92

JOCASTA

I will. I hope I will.

(Exit within.)

CREON

The night is deep

And somewhere in its folds

A child still dreams and lovers breathe together.

It must be so.

No world could be as cruel as this one seems.

Despite my aching fears,

it is not horror that so wraps the town,

But only night, and dawn will come.

(CLOTH moves quickly by.)

Stop! Stay!

Who moves in secrecy so near the queen?

(CLOTH steps from the shadows.)

CLOTH

A restless heart that longs to laugh.

CREON

You have a place to go

Where friends speak freely

and where laughter eases grief?

CLOTH

I have.

CREON

Will you spare a coin of such great wealth?

CLOTH

You are richer than you know.

Your works and name both make you welcome anywhere in Thebes.

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CREON
More welcome where you lead, I hope,
Than I have been in corners of this court.

CLOTH
Come then, but quietly,
The King's Police are out and explanation is a second choice,
Even for royalty.

the tavern

OEDIPUS
My father is… forgive me friends.
My tears are such as only orphans know.

WATER
But Polybus yet lives.

OEDIPUS
He does, but not for me.
Oh, what a wise and gentle king.
One time, another youth,
Who's father had just died,
Brought forth a suit against his mother for their farm.

BREAD
Un-natural.

OEDIPUS
Perhaps, but custom is the basis of the law
And ancient practice gave some credit to his claim.

BLOOD
But could king Polybus not change the law?

OEDIPUS
The law must lead the state, not drive it.

(Nods of agreement.)

94

And change takes time.

GLASS
Now that is true.

OEDIPUS
The mother had, however,

worked the land alone for years

While father, yes, and son

Had passed their days, well,

Somewhere much like this.

BOWL
Oh shame on them.

BLOOD
What was the judgment of king Polybus?

OEDIPUS
He heard all sides and listened carefully,

And then, you understand, in his slow way, said to the son.

"Well then, the land is yours and welcome

but the crops belong to her!"

(All laugh.)

WATER
Laugh all and welcome, but with little voice.

The King's Police, too drunk to serve, may yet still hear.

OEDIPUS
Good host, you offer welcome and protect your guests.

I raise my empty hand to honour you.

(They drink an imaginary toast.)

BOWL
And we to you.

The air is lighter since you came.

(The secret knock, with flourish.)

95

OEDIPUS
More friends?

BREAD
The elder sister of our family.

(WATER opens the door. Enter CLOTH. CREON stays outside.)

BLOOD
Quickly. The door. The light.

BREAD
Respect! And do not rush her age.

CLOTH
My age!

I still can end your youth with half my hand!

I bring a guest, who waits for invitation.

CREON *(Outside)*
I come from court and know, better than some,

that not all things that come from there are gratefully received.

BOWL
I know this voice.

Prince Creon, come inside.

BLOOD
Yes, come and close the door.

WATER
Well, what a day!

Two princes at my fire.

Another log I think.

CREON
Two?

OEDIPUS *(Rising and offering his hand)*
My name is Oedipus, just come today,

I was a prince in Corinth.

96

BOWL

And still a prince in Thebes.

Try as you may, good sir, you cannot shed your royalty.

For you have gently conquered all tonight.

CLOTH

Careful.

BLOOD

Quiet.

CREON

No. Not tonight.

If we, together, cannot welcome such a man,

Then I am prince of dust.

Oedipus, your hand

(They shake hands.)

GLASS

This is nobility.

Were half of either man our king,

Thebes would be happy.

WATER

Too much, too far.

FIREWOOD

You speak now open treason in the presence of the prince.

CREON

Peace all, please.

(To GLASS.)

Your feelings are your own and you are free to have them.

(To FIREWOOD and WATER.)

Yet you are wise to caution him/her

against the jealous fury of the age.

I know the king.

97

BLOOD
We know him too.

CLOTH
Too well.

CREON
I know the weight behind his hand,
the deadly weight that follows on his word.
I also know the weight upon his head.
When I was young I struggled with my grammar
And bruised my knees by learning how to dance.
My father says, when he was that same age
Prince Laius fought, and bled,
For seven days without a pause.

BREAD
He was no older than my son is now.

CREON
Deep wounds he bore in leg and chest that pain him still.

CLOTH
The deeper wounds that scarred his heart grew dark and foul.
And now my friends, we all can feel his pain.

OEDIPUS
But kings must rule, ruled by their hearts,
despite all wounds.

BREAD
And if they have no heart?

BLOOD
By what he says, and he should know,
they should not rule at all.

CREON
Now I should leave.
I cannot tell what I have never heard.

98

OEDIPUS

Your pardon, sir.

I have not learned the trick of reigning in my tongue.

In Corinth all speak freely to and of the king.

This freedom is his greatest power.

CREON

And you and I may yet so speak, in privacy.

But neither you nor I can offer safety to these citizens,

Except to say that we will not betray them.

Come with me to the palace, friend,

And meet my father and my sister, our good queen.

That fire could use your welcome company.

OEDIPUS

But every friend I have in Thebes is here.

WATER

And we will stay your friends.

CLOTH

Leave us for now

and take our love and friendship to the queen.

CREON *(to CLOTH)*

Then you will stay?

CLOTH

For now.

OEDIPUS

I feel I have this night become a son of Thebes.

Thanks all.

(Exeunt OEDIPUS and CREON.)

FIREWOOD

Courage and caution, wisdom and wit.

Life, I think, is not dead yet.

99

CLOTH

Not yet, but we have much to do to keep it so.

The last Police patrol has passed.

Secure the door and come around the fire in Bacchus' name.

Now, one by one, report.

BLOOD

(Pulling out a pruning hook.)

Last night, three drunk policemen met with fatal accidents.

GLASS

A pity.

Only three?

BOWL

How drunk were they?

BLOOD

Why,

Drunk enough to not get up.

BOWL

Did any wine remain?

BLOOD *(holding up several bottles)*

A little, yes.

GLASS

You hid them, why?

BLOOD

It was not safe, I thought.

Then I forgot.

BOWL

Quickly then, my sloppy heroes,

And help destroy the evidence.

Forgotten wine?

Do you remember anything?

in the palace

(JOCASTA sleeps)

MENAECEUS *(Keeping watch)*
Asleep, my child, as if at peace.

(Enter the bloody ghost of LAIUS, unseen by MENAECEUS.)

MENAECEUS *(Cont'd)*
This bed, this trap I led you to,
That should have been your refuge from the world,
Has been the stony altar of your sacrifice for twenty years.
Well, love, Laius, tonight, is far away,
I too will go and give you this new dawn alone.

(Tucks her in.)

Kind dreams, Jocasta.

(Exits.)

LAIUS' GHOST
What kind of dreams, Jocasta?

(She is disturbed.)

How many deaths have waited for me in your schemes?
Your plots with Creon?
The wilted flower of your family.
Were he the shadow of the man you are
I would be dead a dozen times a dozen years ago.
Well, now I am and you have not escaped me.
No blade nor blow can touch me,
And I will touch you, take you, time and time for all of time.
My widow, wife, and whore.

(It climbs on top of her.)

101

JOCASTA *(Wakes screaming)*

No. No.

Not now, no more.

Not ever. No.

(The ghost steps back. Enter MENAECEUS, sword drawn.)

MENAECEUS

What danger comes?

I stand between all hell and her!

(Enter TIRESIAS.)

JOCASTA *(pointing at the ghost)*

There. There.

Oh horror hanging on the air.

MENAECEUS *(Flailing his sword. TIRESIAS tries to dodge him)*

I cannot see. I cannot see.

GHOST *(laughs)*

These are the men of Thebes.

I will withdraw, but I will never leave.

(Exit.)

TIRESIAS

There is another darkness here.

What did you see, Jocasta?

CREON *(Entering, while OEDIPUS waits outside.)*

Is she safe?

Is good Jocasta safe?

TIRESIAS

As safe as those who live can be.

What did you see?

JOCASTA

The king.

I saw the king and he is dead.

CREON

I too have dreamed of this

but slept more soundly for it.

JOCASTA

No. No.

He came to me, on me,

His bleeding flesh pressed hard against me here.

(Enter CLOTH.)

MENAECEUS

But see? The sheets are clean.

CLOTH

Stand back and let me hold her.

Men.

She needs our love and calming words,

Not three old lawyers picking at a deed.

Go honoured fools, and let me hold the child.

JOCASTA

I am no child.

Alive or dead, king Laius is away

and I am queen of Thebes.

The sun is up.

There are, I know, petitions, suits and claims to be addressed.

Thanks heart, I will be well.

I cannot fear my dreams.

What waits?

CREON

I do, my sister.

We have a noble visitor today,

son of our neighbour state,

Who waits to greet our queen.

My honour and my pleasure bring him here.

JOCASTA

Well bring him in.

No. More.

I go to meet him. *(Exit)*

on the balcony or steps

OEDIPUS, hearing that he is welcome makes to enter as does JOCASTA. They collide; her clothes catch on his armour.)

JOCASTA

Oh, sir.

OEDIPUS

Your pardon, lady. I…

I am a clumsy fool

who nervously awaits a meeting with the queen.

And then, I stumbled.

JOCASTA

And so did I.

Well you have met her now.

OEDIPUS

Jocasta, queen.

I bow before—

JOCASTA

Stand still.

OEDIPUS

As you command.

JOCASTA

I ask.

Please, do not bow.

Your armour catches at my clothes, here by my heart.

Stand still.

Please honoured guest.

Unless you seek to rip my dress.

OEDIPUS
Oh, no. Good queen.

I would much rather die

Than tear the cloth that wraps your royal beauty.

JOCASTA
You would?

OEDIPUS
Now I am caught indeed.

JOCASTA
We may yet be released.

Just bend to me, more, there.

But gently, sir, the fabric is so weak.

OEDIPUS
It seems the tangle is too tight.

JOCASTA
It is only a dress, and under, only nakedness,

So use your sword,

And set all free.

(He reaches around her and draws his sword.)

OEDIPUS
Jocasta, I—

JOCASTA
Do what you must.

I hold my breathing, cut before I faint.

(He cuts her free. As she steps back, laughing, she holds her dress together.)

JOCASTA *(Cont'd)*
I am undone.

CLOTH *(entering)*

Jocasta! What—

Oh sir.

Is all well?

I heard you... call.

JOCASTA

You heard me laugh.

Remember it.

Some day I may again.

(The others come out.)

OEDIPUS

The queen laughs with me at my awkwardness

And proves the truth of reputation.

Gracious, beautiful and wise are married to her name.

JOCASTA

And, married as I am,

I may not linger over compliments.

Creon, please, make me acquainted with this gentle warrior.

This is the prince of whom you spoke?

OEDIPUS

My name is Oedipus.

I was a prince, but I am conquered now.

JOCASTA

Welcome to Thebes,

And yet I guess that Thebes already welcomes you.

Well, welcome all the more.

CLOTH *(Aside, to CREON)*

Her tongue stumbles.

CREON

I am within my power, I think,

To offer you such comfort as we have here in the palace

For as long as serves your purpose and your pleasure.

JOCASTA
Oh yes!

Completely in your power.

Oedipus, please stay.

I wish to hear of...?

CREON
Corinth.

JOCASTA
Yes.

OEDIPUS
Could Zeus resist?

JOCASTA
May I point out the beauty of our town?

OEDIPUS
More beauty?

Do I dare?

(They walk together to where they can overlook the city and have a private conversation. They laugh and she points.)

MENAECEUS
This is not... is it?

Is this good?

CREON
Is what good?

CLOTH
Well, she laughed today.

TIRESIAS
And so did Zeus.

the tavern

BREAD
You didn't? Say you didn't?

BOWL
Most excellent, right in his wine?

BREAD
And did he drink it, then?

BLOOD
Of course he did,

what does he really know of wine?

He will drink anything.

GLASS
And everything.

BLOOD
He is the king.

The wine is his, the air is his, the ground is his,

And so, of course, my piss is his.

BOWL *(standing)*
Stand up, stand up, dishonest citizens.

Our king has gone to Delphi,

but we must still pay tribute to the crown.

(He undoes his pants to piss into the fire.)

ALL
So says the king.

above

(OEDIPUS and JOCASTA are laughing warmly.)

OEDIPUS
"-the land is yours and welcome, but the crops belong to her!"

JOCASTA

It seems that all your life

you have been training for the crown.

OEDIPUS

I have.

I was.

JOCASTA

How you must feel its loss.

OEDIPUS

I do.

But more than power or privilege

I have now lost the honour of continuing my parent's work.

They shared a dream of Corinth as a better place.

JOCASTA

Most wonderful.

More wine?

CREON *(looking down)*

Limping and dragging, bleeding and incomplete,

The royal bodyguard comes to the square.

the street or square before the palace

(Enter the CAPTAIN OF THE GUARD.)

CLOTH

So many wounds.

(JOCASTA, OEDIPUS, et al. come down.)

CAPTAIN

Not so many as it seems, for there are none behind.

JOCASTA

Tend to him now; bandages, oils, water, and wine.

CAPTAIN

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My men—

CREON

Call out the royal household.

Go to the square.

See to their needs and comfort.

OEDIPUS

I will, if you allow, withdraw and help in this.

My father, gentle though he was,

Taught me to act when actions are required.

(Exit.)

JOCASTA

Support the Captain quickly or he falls.

(CLOTH does so.)

CAPTAIN

My message, not my weakness, weighs me down.

I throw myself, deserving none,

Before the mercy of the queen,

For I have failed her in my greatest trust.

The king is dead.

JOCASTA

Dead?

Laius is dead?

When? Where and how?

CAPTAIN

Three days ago,

We were surrounded and attacked by robbers,

Trained, in numbers, and well led.

Less than a day's quick march from here

For healthy soldiers coming home.

First with arrows, thick as bees,

They cut our ranks and broke our line of march.
One of the horses pulling Laius' chariot
was wounded in the eye.
The frantic beasts dashed madly from the scene.
I rallied men, those who still stood,
Half in rear guard, defensive of the king, half in pursuit of him.
So, scattered and exposed,
we managed neither.
The marks and losses that they bear are tributes to their faultless fight
As much as damning proof
of how completely I have failed.

JOCASTA
And Laius?

CLOTH
Dead you say?

CAPTAIN
Oh yes, my lady, no hope there.
We found him where the shattered chariot lay,
And there, within the circle that his blood made in the dust,
We held our ground until the bandits,
Weary of the fight, fell back into the hills.

MENAECEUS
Where is he now?

CAPTAIN
That, mortals cannot say.
His corpse, rolled in his robes,
is with my men, below.

MENAECEUS
The king of Thebes lies bloody in the square?

CAPTAIN
Three wounded died today to bring him there.

111

JOCASTA

Laius himself would say he was a warrior;

first, and before all else.

What greater glory could he ask

Than thus to fall in open fight,

And so to lie in state steeped in the blood of heroes?

Know first, good captain,

That I see only courage, honour, and high sacrifice in this from you.

You and your men did all and more than honour asks.

Thanks sir, from Thebes and me.

CAPTAIN

Thank you, my queen.

(He falls, CLOTH goes to him.)

These are but scratches.

I have much to do.

My men—

CLOTH

-are in good hands, and so are you.

Rest, Captain, rest.

CAPTAIN

Your hands are cool.

JOCASTA

We will today prepare a fiery funeral

to suit a fiery king,

There, where he lies on Theban earth

Made sacred with the stain of Theban blood.

This honour is his due.

See all prepared before this day is done.

(Aside) He has been dead, already, three days in the sun.

Go now.

Do as I say.

The House of Labdacus is ended.

The House of Pentheus must mourn and think of Thebes.

Creon, and father, come.

(JOCASTA, CREON and MENAECEUS move inside.)

CLOTH

You wound yourself again,

See how the bleeding, ripe and red, swells up?

(Tending the wounds.)

Three days, you say,

have passed since you received them?

CAPTAIN

One lie, one lie in all my life

and my own blood condemns me for it.

It cannot lie to you.

CLOTH

These wounds are new, a day at most,

Yet Laius, by his colour and his smell...

CAPTAIN

Died as I said.

A mile or more ahead upon the road.

CLOTH

A hero warrior in death

That never lived.

CAPTAIN

You knew the man?

CLOTH

I knew the boy.

He was less man than warrior.

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CAPTAIN

He was an angry child,

and far more so when coming from the oracle.

He made his driver beat the horses bloody in his rage

and would not wait for us.

We found both bodies as I said.

The driver stabbed and Laius, tangled in his reins, broken and dead.

There was no battle, only dust and blood.

How could we bring his body home and we untouched?

Some would cry treason, others cowardice.

For two days in the groves of Cithaeron,

In ranks and then alone,

We faced each other, deadly games,

Until our wounds and losses matched the tale we had agreed to tell.

I have, myself, killed men in my command

to hide a lie to hide my failure.

So much is honour now.

CLOTH

Your secret and your self are safe with me.

Rest both here in my arms.

You are a man indeed.

in the palace

(JOCASTA, CREON and MENAECEUS confer.)

MENAECEUS

So, here is history.

We have no king.

CREON

We have a queen; skilled, wise, and deeply loved.

I say Jocasta rules.

MENAECEUS

And I agree.

You rule the common heart already.

JOCASTA

I have been queen for twenty years.

CREON

And so most suited.

JOCASTA

No brother.

More than ever, now,

Thebes needs her queen.

A queen is different from a king

as shield from sword or wine from food.

Both parts are needed, but they are not the same.

It has, you know too well,

Been no small struggle to have played my role

while Laius ruled.

Let me be queen in peace, if peace will come.

Father, you should be king, as son of Pentheus.

MENAECEUS

Son of a king, but elder uncle to the state.

I am respected for my age and fondly smiled at for all else.

No child, I fear your friend,

I never could be king.

CREON

You know my life belongs to Thebes,

Whether in many years of patient service

Or if it comes in savage moments on the battlefield,

But not as king.

I am my father’s son.

115

MENAECEUS
If we delay—

(A growing noise of many voices is heard off.)

JOCASTA
Laius is gone.
His bodyguard, who might have seized control,
Lie weak in arm and numbers.
The King's Police, as usual, are drunk.
We must act now.
As I have said before,
No king nor queen alone is royalty.
As Cadmus and Harmonia taught, but few have learned,
The balance is the whole.
I have preserved, as best I could,
my portion of the trust
But now we must,
If Thebes is to be free,
Find her a king,
Frankly, to equal me.

MENAECEUS
We need a hero first, and presently.
The Sphinx—

JOCASTA
Must serve us now.
Thebes cannot live, and nor can I, while that outrage persists.
So, shall we take as our new king
The man who tears her talons from our throat?

CREON
Yes.

MENAECEUS
Yes, agreed.

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JOCASTA
Good then.

So let us go and speak as one,

So Thebes will know we are a royal family.

CREON
Yes, queen.

And now? Tonight?

Such passions lash the crowd

That we, or everything, might wash away before the dawn.

JOCASTA
Then calm the waves with wine.

the square

BOWL
Hello Tiresias.

TIRESIAS
Hello old friend.

There is a foreign vintage on your voice,

A little salty, I would say.

(BOWL proffers the bottle that OEDIPUS gave him.)

BOWL
Wine for wisdom?

TIRESIAS
In exchange or as a cure?

BOWL
Is wisdom illness?

TIRESIAS
Is it worth giving in exchange?

BOWL
I give wine freely, to a friend.

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(He gives the bottle to TIRESIAS.)

TIRESIAS

As a friend, I spare you wisdom.

(They drink in silence. Enter OEDIPUS, carrying bandages.)

BOWL

Ah, Prince Oedipus,

have you a breath or two to meet with prophesy?

OEDIPUS

The present presses, can the future wait?

TIRESIAS

It does, for now.

OEDIPUS

Your hand and pardon, sir.

These bandages are needed.

BOWL

And I will take them, friend.

This is Tiresias.

OEDIPUS

My thanks.

It is an honour, Wisdom, meeting you.

(Exit BOWL, with bandages.)

TIRESIAS

Yes, meeting wisdom is,

But I am just a man and you, I think,

were born to be a king.

OEDIPUS

I was a Prince, of Corinth, in my youth.

But I cannot go home.

TIRESIAS

Go on, then.

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OEDIPUS

So, I went, as many do, to seek the promise of the oracle,

But what I heard…

TIRESIAS

Go on.

I am a priest of privacy.

OEDIPUS

…That I would take my father's life, my mother's bed.

I left, confused, angry at first

But then resigned, determined never to go home.

TIRESIAS

I see.

OEDIPUS

I have, I know, done nothing to deserve all this,

And yet the shame consumes me.

TIRESIAS

I know.

I hear it in your voice.

But Oedipus, know this.

And find what comfort in it that you can.

When all of this,

This storm of crimes and consequence has passed,

There will be peace at last.

I promise you.

(Exit.)

OEDIPUS

How strange.

I shiver like a child.

119

the palace, looking out

(JOCASTA, CREON and MENAECEUS come out. Enter BLOOD below.)

BLOOD

Look, all look.

(The crowd gathers.)

JOCASTA *(above)*

Cadmus gave us a home,

and here we live and die.

Harmonia gave us a heart,

And with it we must love, and mourn, and hope.

Laius is dead.

Laius, the king of Thebes, is dead.

Laius, whose bed I shared, is dead.

But Thebes is still alive.

And she deserves a hero for a king.

And we of Pentheus' line are many things, but heroes?

No.

MENAECEUS

We stand together, family and friends, to tell you this.

CREON

Whoever kills the Sphinx and ends our isolation

Shall wear the crown of Thebes.

The gods have given us this test to find our king.

OEDIPUS (*below)*

Let no-one speak.

I stand here ready for the task and will go first,

Or fight with any man who seeks to go before.

(BOWL steps up to him.)

You challenge me?

BOWL

No, sir.

I only want to mark my memory with your face.

I think I like you and I fear

That I will wish that I had known you more.

OEDIPUS

I will be back my friend,

and I will be your king.

(Cheering.)

JOCASTA

And I the queen,

of any man who kills the Sphinx,

If he will have me.

If Thebes will have me

as her queen again.

(More cheering.)

MANY

Forever.

OEDIPUS

Hope for me, Queen.

JOCASTA

I will. I do.

(Exit OEDIPUS, cheered by the crowd.)

CREON

City of Thebes. City of wine.

All claims for vineyards, vessels, vats,

Seized by the state will be resolved before the coming spring.

But now, you know, the vintage of this year is in,

And cannot be divided and returned,

So bring it out and share it equally.

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Let us together drink a cup of rich red Theban wine,

And for tonight, let Dionysus be our king.

*(LAIUS' pyre is lit, much celebration. MENAECEUS and TIRESIAS above**.** TIRESIAS drinks from OEDIPUS' bottle, won from BOWL.)*

MENAECEUS

No word from you in all of this, Tiresias?

Thebes is a different place since last we spoke.

TIRESIAS

The same road further on.

MENAECEUS

Well, wisdom, brother, friend;

The sky is low and rippled red from Laius' pyre.

He burns most royally.

All this I see.

And you?

TIRESIAS

More death.

Always more death.

But sometimes, like today,

It twists itself in shapes and shades that smell of truth.

MENAECEUS

Shadows that smell?

TIRISEAS

As tastes can sing or words can burn.

MENAECEUS

And did this swirl of senses make any sense to you?

TIRESIAS

All deaths will come, and yet I smell a needed death.

MENAECEUS

Accident or age, murder or sacrifice? Who? How and when?

TIRESIAS

What voice is this in you?

MENAECEUS

The voice of Thebes, her screams of pain.

Help me Tiresias.

I am the author of her suffering.

TIRESIAS

I see…

As you well know, old friend,

My visions are not clear,

And yet I fear, and think I know.

(He takes a long drink.)

One man, one Sown Man,

Descended from the first great bloods of Thebes,

Will sacrifice himself, his life and name,

And so will end the curse that hangs, low, hot and angry

As this night's red sky above our town.

MENAECEUS

One man, one death, then peace and happiness?

TIRESIAS

Perhaps, at least,

A chance to live like other towns.

I cannot say.

Both smoke and wine compound the chaos in my mind.

Come, friend, and drink with me,

What do you say?

MENAECEUS

I say, goodbye, old friend.

I must, it seems, perform a little sacrifice today.

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TIRESIAS
No, wait.

MENAECEUS
For what?

Thank you, Tiresias.

(Exeunt separately.)

the tavern

(Enter BOWL, GLASS, BLOOD, BREAD, FIREWOOD, and WATER, all very drunk.)

BOWL
Where are we now?

(WATER carries as much wine as possible. Putting some down on the floor.)

GLASS
This seems, somehow, familiar.

(Falls down.)

Ah yes, I know it now.

(BOWL trips over GLASS and also falls.He lands face to face with a bottle.)

BOWL
Hello, old friend.

We meet again at last.

BLOOD
That was a funeral.

BREAD
Such a fire; the night was made red day.

WATER
Laius is gone.

BOWL
All drink.

FIREWOOD
The smoke still stays.

BREAD
It will not blow away.

BLOOD
The old king lingers for a cup.

BOWL
All drink.

And now, old stink, be gone.

GLASS *(Staring straight up.)*
Laius, well, we meet at last,

You, as a smutty stain across that dark old wood and I—

BOWL
-A stain across the floor.

GLASS
The floor? This is the floor?

Too bad, I hoped to vomit on the king.

BREAD
A harsh old man is dead, and burned,

My lungs rebel,

my stomach churns to think of what I breathe.

Is this a better world?

FIREWOOD
Not yet.

Perhaps your children will help to make it so.

BOWL
All drink?

BREAD
All drink.

(Enter CLOTH and CAPTAIN.)

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WATER
Stand if you can and drink our hero's health.

CAPTAIN
I am not worthy of the name.

WATER
Perhaps you are, I cannot say.

We drink to honour her. *(CLOTH)*

Through twenty years her strength sustained us.

She is the cask that kept for us the wine of ancient ways.

I give you all: the blood of Cadmus.

FIREWOOD
The tears of Harmonia.

GLASS
The sweat of honest labour.

BLOOD
The water of Dirce.

WATER
The wine of Bacchus.

ALL
The wine of Bacchus.

(All drink.)

CLOTH
My only wish is to deserve such love.

(Indicates the CAPTAIN.)

But, see these wounds?

I bound them up myself a

nd know their depth and number,

And every one cries hero in its pain.

BREAD
We have no cause to mourn the suffering of the guard.

CLOTH

The King's Police, no doubt, is friend to none.

And Laius, though our king, was not well loved.

BLOOD

Well, I would love to— *(A graphic violent gesture)*

CLOTH

Yes,

But he is gone.

I served his queen and this man,

Captain of the Royal Bodyguard,

Served Thebes most loyally for many years by serving him,

As was his duty.

Can anyone lay cruelty or greed,

Or any other crime against his name?

I thought not, no.

And so,

I give you, friends,

an honest soldier and a loyal friend.

BOWL

All drink.

CAPTAIN

Please wait.

I choke on such high praise.

Much more than modesty demands that I refuse this honour.

(He begins to tear off his insignia.)

Laius was king, my duty, to protect him,

But honour has in all things been my god,

and I have failed her.

(He throws his badges in the fire.)

I take your honest welcome as I am,

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No title, rank or deeds will speak for me.

Accept me friends, I ask, as one of you,

A man and citizen of Thebes.

WATER

We do.

Sit brother, drink, and rest.

(Some sleep, some drift away. CLOTH and CAPTAIN are alone by the fire)

in the palace

JOCASTA is alone as dawn breaks.)

JOCASTA

"You will know happiness, my child,

And all of history will speak your name" he said,

And turned away as if he saw and could not bear to see.

Now I have tasted happiness,

I felt it brush my heart, just once,

No twice, in all these years.

That first touch was so tiny in my hand.

The second, here *(Touches where OEDIPUS' armour had caught)*

Oh Oedipus,

Be what you seem to be.

Another day begins.

The town awakes and sighs, and finally the smoke is gone.

Thebes is so beautiful.

Despite her pain.

Despite her loss.

(CLOTH and the CAPTAIN enter.)

CLOTH

She is.

JOCASTA
What, early up?

CLOTH
There are not many dawns I do not see.

But now I owe some service to myself.

JOCASTA
I understand.

We have, together, nursed our town through many wounds.

If Oedipus succeeds,

she will be well again,

and if he fails…

I wish you happiness.

CLOTH
We all must make our happiness.

This honest man and I intend to find our ease together.

With him I will sleep late and,

nestled by a modest fire,

Sing ancient songs against the winter's wind.

JOCASTA
Go heart, and let love be your queen.

CLOTH
She is the queen of all.

We go.

(TIRESIAS, who has entered unheeded, embraces each as they leave, giving the bottle to the CAPTAIN as a parting gift.)

JOCASTA
Still more alone.

(Deep, slow drumming in the distance.)

What can this mean?

Except that Oedipus is dead?

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So, I am strangled too.

Beat, drums, for me.

Good morning, wisdom.

I thought I was alone.

TIRESIAS
I know. I heard.

JOCASTA
We have not spoken much since - all of this.

TIRESIAS
Jocasta.

Sit with me.

JOCASTA
What now?

TIRESIAS
I did not see this, butterfly.

JOCASTA
What then?

TIRESIAS
Your father…

JOCASTA
No.

TIRESIAS
Is dead.

JOCASTA
No, wisdom, no.

TIRESIAS
His was a heart too full,

With love, and with regrets.

He felt that he had failed in everything.

JOCASTA
I know, I know.

Oh wisdom, say the words.

TIRESIAS

The one who saw it says he stood so tall,

Arms high and shoulders back,

That only by his clothing could she know him.

There on the southern wall, facing the sea,

He looked Zeus in the eye

and challenged him to set our city free.

So calm, so certain of his cause, so sure his step,

He seemed as he would fly before he fell.

His body fell, Jocasta.

His courage, love, and name

rise up to meet the sun.

JOCASTA

Thank you, Tiresias.

TIRESIAS

You owe me none.

(He touches her face.)

I know one thing,

more surely than I know your face.

The time has come for me to leave this place.

JOCASTA

What?

Must I be alone in this?

TIRESIAS

You will know happiness, my precious butterfly.

Remember that.

Goodbye.

(He embraces her and leaves.)

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JOCASTA

I am so deeply set in sorrow nothing moves me.

Oh father,

What wreckage have you dragged down with your fall?

Girl, daughter, mother, monster, wife:

All women I have ever been lie broken with you now,

And only this remains.

More grief.

Prepare, again prepare a funeral,

Your funeral, my father's funeral pyre.

A brighter, warmer fire,

A sweeter smoke to tease some other eyes,

that still can weep..

My city comes to share my loss

and I must go to her.

In this, at least, I am still queen.

in the square

(A crowd enters following CREON bearing the corpse of MENAECEUS.)

CREON

Jocasta, sister, queen and loving daughter.

I bear our father,

honourable, honoured, and good.

Gentle as spring and sure as dawn.

JOCASTA

Let Laius' funeral fire but mark the way.

Here was a man for Thebes.

For more than most of us have been alive

He has been judge and guide,

calm voice and calmer mind.

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(Swelling drums interrupt her.)

What frantic drums are these?

BLOOD

A shouting crowd comes, bearing Oedipus.

JOCASTA

Prepare his fire beside Menaeceus,

each honours both and all.

(Enter OEDIPUS carried by the crowd.)

OEDIPUS

What rites are these?

JOCASTA

You are not dead.

OEDIPUS

Not yet.

The Sphinx, however, is.

(Cheers.)

GLASS

He sprang towards its perch as if he swam downstream.

He looked that wild horror in the eye—

OEDIPUS

-and talked with it.

The fearful challenge of the Sphinx

was just a riddle.

JOCASTA

Is that all?

OEDIPUS

A riddle such as might amuse a child,

or charm a lady’s smile.

BREAD

Or kill a hundred noble sons.

OEDIPUS
Was this high funeral prepared for me?

JOCASTA
My father died today.

OEDIPUS
Oh loss.

In peace I hope?

JOCASTA
In hope of peace.

OEDIPUS
Jocasta, I—

WATER
What of the Sphinx?

GLASS
What of the riddle?

JOCASTA
My father always was a patient man.

Please tell.

OEDIPUS *(out)*
You know the Sphinx.

BLOOD
Most terrible.

OEDIPUS
And yet her face,

had I not met Jocasta,

I would say it was the finest face in all the world.

She asked my name

and then she said

"What thing is this that has four legs when dawn first breaks,

Two legs at height of noon,

and meets the sunset stood on three?"

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Three times I breathed in silence,

Then, just as she began to reach for me,

The answer came, no, more than that,

I knew I was,

I am

and always will be the answer.

Just what I am …

JOCASTA

A man.

OEDIPUS

Just that, a man,

And being said

the word tore into her like blade or spear

And I knew I had won.

(Cheers.)

CREON

The beast is dead.

The road is clear

And Thebes now has her hero and her king.

OEDIPUS

I am not one of you by birth or habit,

Rite or common memory,

But I have watched a good king rule

And known a good queen's strength.

As lately I informed the Sphinx,

I am a man,

and stand here firmly on my own two legs,

And I will stand and face you every day

And offer all the justice that I can.

And I will stand before you any day,

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on any field,

To fight and die for Thebes,

if you will have me.

Am I your king?

(Cheers+.)

JOCASTA

A worthy king for Thebes.

And

as I promised here just yesterday

I am prepared to be his queen.

OEDIPUS

Thank you, but no.

JOCASTA

What?

Oh.

I see, well, kings must have their will.

OEDIPUS

And love must have its way, free from all promises.

The world is new today.

JOCASTA

You have a love?

OEDIPUS

I have,

and she, I think, loves me,

And so I hope she marries me

and is my wife and queen.

JOCASTA

I see.

OEDIPUS

Do you?

I want no prize.

Jocasta, freely from your heart,

will you be queen?

JOCASTA

I will, most joyously.

(They kiss. Cheers ++!)

Hear me.

Oh Thebes,

your new queen speaks!

As our new king has said, the world is new.

This fire that, like the sun,

Illuminates the face of everyone,

Burns for us all.

My father, with his death, our peace has won.

At last, the circle of the curse is done.

Into his funeral pyre I throw

All secrets, curses, crimes, and mysteries.

(She feeds the fire.)

I lay them on the light for all to see.

They blaze, they are consumed,

And Thebes is free.

A king of Thebes once killed a boy,

And heaven raged.

To answer Zeus, he killed his only son,

And all of nature rose against this town.

That king is dead,

The Sphinx is dead.

And so, at last, the tragedy is done.

The hero enters and all hearts are won.

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(Uber-cheers.)

OEDIPUS

What to do now?

I am no priest.

A solemn funeral, a wedding, and a coronation.

Processions, pyres, and prophesies.

Great feasts and private tears.

JOCASTA

No more will anger glare down from above,

Olympus smiles as one upon our love.

Light festive torches from my father's fire

and dance within its glow.

Let wine and tears both flow.

Our joy was purchased with his precious life.

Come king and make me now your queen and wife.

(By the rising light of the pyres, CREON crowns OEDIPUS and JOCASTA and OEDIPUS enact the ceremony of the three glasses of wine. JOCASTA is impatient. Pausing for a moment to throw the dregs of a glass of wine onto the fire, she leads OEDIPUS up and into her chamber.)

BOWL

Come friends, come enemies, come all.

Never will this night come again.

We roll our stones against the stars,

who rolls their bones with me?

All love! All dance!! All feast!!

ALL

All drink!!

(A passionate Bacchanalia ensues.)

End of play

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