Thebe

A play

Part three 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
BREAD
CLOTH
BOWL (father aned son)
FIREWOOD
WATER
GLASS

Named Mortals
ANTIOPE slave to DIRCE
DIRCE wife/partner to LYCUS
LABDACUS young prince
LOCRUS Half brother to THEBE
LYCUS
MENAECEUS
THEBE (a Naiad)
TIRESIAS

Also. Briefly, ATHENA (the same actor as DIRCE) and DIONYSUS (the same actor as LABDACUS)

Thebe
Act One

Morning. A barn with the addition of a prominent hearth, the space serves variously as: a tavern, a daycare centre, a library, a school, and a community centre.

Prologue

(BOWL and GLASS sit by the fire. GLASS leans in.)

GLASS
No! She did not!

BOWL
Upon my name she did.

GLASS
Who would have thought, to see her now.

So as a ...

BOWL
… wisp of mist...

Thebe was... more wet back then.

GLASS
Perhaps.

They say she still gets wet,

Whatever that may mean.

BOWL
What? Who says?

GLASS
Oh, you know, “they”.

BOWL
And they are fools who listen to that “they”.

GLASS
Yes, sir. If you say.

So. Thebe overheard Athena?

BOWL
And young Dionysus too.

Up on Olympus, back before The Day.

GLASS
All this she told to you?

(BOWL nods.)

So, tell me, word for word.

BOWL

It took you long enough to ask.

(ATHENA [DIRCE] and DIONYSUS [LABDACUS] move into place to enact the memory as BOWL mimes telling it.)

DIONYSUS

And what if I refuse?

ATHENA

A grand decree by Zeus himself?

Supported by the Gods, united only once, in this?

Dionysus, please, be wise.

Leave mortals and their world alone.

DIONYSUS

But I was having so much fun.

And so was Zeus.

ATHENA

Yes, well. No more.

DIONYSUS

“No more” as of when?

ATHENA

What do you mean?

DIONYSUS

Well, in which time, ours or down there?

ATHENA

Go on.

DIONYSUS

We all have bathed, or pissed into, their “stream of time” at every pool down to the sea, whatever that is in your imagery.

And Zeus himself has many grapes to squeeze down there that, as we know time, he tasted long ago.

ATHENA
Go on.

DIONYSUS
You are, of course, the clever one,

But even you cannot undo what Zeus has already done.

ATHENA
All true.

Still, if, on Olympus, we stop pouring poisons in that stream,

Then time itself, their time, will wash even your piss away eventually.

And you will be an odour on the air, a story, then a name alone, and finally forgotten.

DIONYSUS
As will you.

ATHENA
Olympus is enough for me.

DIONYSUS
Of course it is: you have yourself for company.

When does this grand decree begin?

ATHENA
After the Fire.

DIONYSUS
Which fire?

Oh, Pentheus, and all that.

So soon?

(ATHENA opens her mouth to speak, but can't.)

GLASS
And then?

What did Athena say?

BOWL
No one will ever know.

Thebe was interrupted by, well, me, I think.

And then forgot it all before we spoke again.

But trust me, child,

The gods are gone and yet are with us still.

GLASS
It is a riddle you made up.

BOWL
Perhaps. Who knows?

Am I that clever though?

(Noises off.)

Go play before somebody teaches you.

(Exit GLASS. FIREWOOD enters and begins to transform the room from bar to a school/ drop in centre, all without looking at BOWL.)

FIREWOOD
Alive?

(BOWL belches. WATER enters, perhaps with a bucket and mop, and gets to work, indicates BOWL.)

WATER
Awake?

BOWL
No. Thirsty, yes.

(WATER pours wine for BOWL and waits.)

What?

WATER
Payment?

BOWL *(Gestures at the place)*
Rent?

FIREWOOD *(Pours)*
Soon.

BOWL *(Raises cup)*
To “soon”.

(He drinks. Enter MENAECEUS with a bag of books or equivalent.)

MENAECEUS
This is all wrong.

BOWL
Perhaps not all.

(Holds out hand. MENAECEUS gives him a document and a pencil or equivalent. He begins to read carefully, making marks.)

Go play.

Have fun in Dionysus' name.

MENAECEUS
I am having fun.

BOWL
What? How?

MENAECEUS
I am in school.

(WATER and FIREWOOD complete the transformation. WATER finds notes and prepares to teach. FIREWOOD looks out the door.)

BOWL
Here, lad. *(Hands back the school work)*

Good work.

A little trouble with the names is all.

MENAECEUS
Oh.

Thank you, sir.

WATER
It seems we have a class of one,

So shall we start our numbers there.. at one?

MENAECEUS
That is the best joke I have heard today.

WATER
If seven citizens drink seven rounds and every bottle can fill up five cups,

How many bottles will be left out of a case of twelve?

MENAECEUS
None.

WATER
Wrong! I mean, the answer is *(Looks at notes)*

One cup more than two... bottles... left.

MENAECEUS
Yes.

Almost ten bottles sold, one spilled or broken or

(Glances at BOWL)

Just gone,

And one consumed behind the bar.

And so the prices should reflect—

BOWL
Ha.

WATER
Show me here. *(The paper/slate)*

(MENAECEUS and WATER sit down as tutor and pupil. Enter THEBE.)

BOWL
The boy will rule us all some day.

Someone remind me I predicted it.

THEBE *(Sitting with BOWL)*
Not me.

BOWL
Of course not, Thebe dear.

A busy night?

THEBE *(engaging muscle memory and looking at her clothes etc)*
Apparently.

FIREWOOD *(Bringing food)*
You do not have to do it, love.

THEBE

Do what?

Oh that.

I have no memory myself of what they say,

But still, why would they say...?

BOWL

Of course there is no way that young men

Eager to impress themselves,

would ever lie about a thing like that.

THEBE

You think?

FIREWOOD *(To THEBE)*

He jests.

But all the same, some of the women say...

The ones who think there is some truth in it...

That now, because you do, if you do,

The things you do,

There are tonight still fewer men who,

Thinking on Pentheus and The Fire,

Clutch hatred in their their hearts.

And so they honour you, well, in their way.

MENAECEUS *(Who has been listening)*

She does not...kill them?

FIREWOOD

No.

BOWL

Quite the opposite.

FIREWOOD

They say... *(Looks at THEBE, who shrugs)*

She takes away the bitter memories that eat their hearts by—

THEBE

Kissing them, and all that that involves.

And when dawn comes, I kiss myself.

(She almost kisses her own palm, but doesn't.)

It is, apparently, a gift I have:

Kissing... the rest, and forgetfulness.

MENAECEUS

I see, I think.

(To WATER.)

Is that why you forgot to multiply- ?

(Enter LABDACUS.)

THEBE

And here at last is.....?

LABDACUS

Labdacus..? Prince...? King to be?

Oh, surely you remember me.

(THEBE shrugs.)

WATER

And he is late for school.

LABDACUS

The king cannot be late.

Time waits for him.

FIREWOOD

What did you say?

LABDACUS

I - just - it was a joke.

A rude and disrespectful joke I will not make again.

MENAECEUS

And yet, the second best so far today.

BOWL
Where is your piece about Harmonia and the early days?

LABDACUS
A dog—

BOWL
Again?

LABDACUS
I mean, I thought to talk to those who lived back then, before ...

BOWL
I did, more then than now.

THEBE
And so did I, apparently.

But I can give you nothing now.

LABDACUS
You could give me such memories...

BOWL
Speak carefully, my boy.

THEBE
Well, bed for me. *(Embraces herself)*

This woman cannot wait to sleep with me,

That much I know.

(THEBE embraces WATER and FIREWOOD, musses MENAECEUS' hair, and kisses BOWL. They smile reassuringly at each other. LABDACUS watches all of this.)

LABDACUS *(To himself)*
I cannot wait...

FIREWOOD
Neither can school.

WATER
We are having fun with numbers over here.

Menaeceus, will you explain?

LABDACUS
Gods, kill me now.

(To BOWL.)

So, sir.

You say that you walked down with Cadmus on the day?

BOWL
And Harmonia, good Thebe, and a relative of everyone you know.

LABDACUS
And before that?

BOWL
I was a cook, in Ares' hall.

FIREWOOD
Ha. Listen to him.

This voice calls Aphrodite "cute".

You sit beside the finest artisan of food Olympus ever knew.

His sauces have brought tears of joy to Zeus himself,

So Hera told my mother once, before the Day.

BOWL
It stirs my heart to hear that she said so.

FIREWOOD
Hera is just.

BOWL
I meant your mother, dear.

FIREWOOD
Yes, well.

WATER
My grandmother was there as well, although, as you say...

BOWL
Cadmeans are a simple recipe.

Just two ingredients: those from the Day and Serpent Warriors.

CLOTH
Seasoned with demi-gods and spiced with Naiads.

FIREWOOD
And stirred over a blazing fire.

CLOTH
Good morning, Father.

How are you?

BOWL
Recovered.

CLOTH
Good.

BOWL
Injured again.

CLOTH
Oh dear.

BOWL
Oh well. You are here now.

Embrace me, child.

How fares the farm?

CLOTH
Vines, home, and family all growing gloriously.

There still and always is a special chair for you beside our fire.

BOWL
I know.

I will stay here, where I belong.

(BLOOD is waving a document.)

So, Labdacus?

You are impatient with the chores of school?

LABDACUS
I am.

BOWL
And you would rather do the duties of a king to be?

LABDACUS
Yes, please.

I mean, I am. I do. I would.

(BOWL gestures to BLOOD.)

BLOOD
Prince Labdacus.

An urgent matter waits upon your royalty.

LABDACUS
Of course it does.

(To MENAECEUS) Watch this.

BLOOD
Your grandfather, Nycteus, sends a messenger.

LABDACUS
Oh yes? And where is he?

BLOOD
The messenger?

Waiting outside.

Here is the message... Sir.

LABDACUS
Well?

What does it say?

(It is a lengthy document.)

BLOOD
He, as your Regent, is, in point of law, Cadmea's king until—

LABDACUS
Not king.

BLOOD
Well, legally.

LABDACUS
What does he want?

BLOOD
Reports.

LABDACUS
On what?

BLOOD *(Referring to the document)*
Well, everything: the state of repair and costs of ... everything, the Civil Guard, the population, trade, and laws, the current mood of the citizens,

Your own expenditures.

LABDACUS
Or what?

BLOOD
Excuse me, sir?

LABDACUS
What can he do if I refuse?

BLOOD
Well, I would not suggest—

LABDACUS
Enough.

My other duties call.

Prepare something and show it to me soon.

(Exit.)

WATER
You may go too, Menaeceus.

MENAECEUS
Go where?

BOWL
To play this game.

(To BLOOD) Give him the list.

(To MENAECEUS) So, just for fun, find all the treasures on this list.

MENAECEUS
Alright.

By when?

BLOOD
It will take months.

BOWL
Three days.

And spelling counts.

MENAECEUS
Oh good. Excuse me then. *(Exit)*

BOWL
So, school is out, and yet the teacher is unpaid.

FIREWOOD
Alright.

Today he has earned up until...?

WATER *(Checks notes)*
Er… last year's Harvest Festival.

BOWL
That was an education in itself.

(Enter BREAD followed by GLASS.)

WATER
Ah, right on time,

Our latest graduate returns to join the circle of adults.

(To BLOOD) Give her a cup.

BLOOD
With pleasure, here.

BREAD
I, well, alright. A small one, then.

I thought that school had just begun.

I led a lost sheep home. *(Indicated GLASS, who gazes at BLOOD)*

BLOOD
Entangled in your charms?

BREAD
No. Lured here by your name.

You have a young admirer.

BLOOD
And so do you. I—

BREAD
Who? Labdacus?

BLOOD
I meant to say, I—

BREAD
That is not admiration.

BLOOD
No.. But... Excuse me, I... I have to go. *(Exit BLOOD)*

FIREWOOD
Be kind.

He only stumbles when he speaks to you.

BREAD
What? Oh, I see.

How nice. *(Exit)*

FIREWOOD *(To WATER, rattling a cup)*
So.

One throw to see who goes to Market?

WATER
Yes.

(FIREWOOD rolls the stone. WATER loses.)

Again? Go rest, and I will join you when I can.

FIREWOOD
Wake me up, carefully.

(They embrace and exit separately.)

CLOTH
Father?

I have a wagon full of grapes out in the sun.

You will be here, of course, when I return. *(Exit)*

BOWL *(Rising painfully)*
"You will be here of course"

I will die here, no, there,

Where Dionysus gave to me, to me,

The first wine ever tasted in the world.

(Shuffles off, fumbling with his "flies".)

"I have a wagon full of grapes."

the public market square

(Enter THEBE, evidently uncomfortable, she tries to bathe herself in a puddle that need not be visible. Enter TIRESIAS.)

TIRESIAS
Ah Thebes.

So young and always beautiful.

No. Wait. Cadmea still.

THEBE
Cadmea? Who is she?

TIRESIAS
Thebe?

THEBE
Yes, me.

That much I know.

TIRESIAS
This town.

THEBE
What of it, dear?

TIRESIAS
Is called Cadmea, after—

THEBE
Cadmus, yes.

I am confused.

Do you mind if we start again?

TIRESIAS
I wish with all I am we could.

I am Tiresias.

THEBE
Oh yes? Are you a visitor?

TIRESIAS
No. Coming home.

And you are Thebe, Water Spirit.

This puddle fills from the spring where you—

THEBE
Yes, yes. If you say so.

Forgive my rudeness, dear.

And welcome home.

I must go sleep or die.

TIRESIAS
Of course.

(Enter LABDACUS.)

LABDACUS
Thebe. Alone at last.

Oh, who are you?

THEBE *(Proud of herself)*
A citizen returning home.

TIRESIAS
And you are Labdacus.

(LABDACUS registers that TIRESIAS is blind.)

LABDACUS
I am. How do you know?

TIRESIAS
When I last saw you, you were just a child.

LABDACUS
I am an adult now.

Soon to be king.

TIRESIAS
Oh yes?

LABDACUS
And I have adult business now with Thebe here.

So... Leave us.... please.

TIRESIAS
I cannot.

LABDACUS
Why?

TIRESIAS
I have nowhere to go.

LABDACUS
No family? You are a citizen?

THEBE *(Taking TIRESIAS's hand.)*
Come home with me and keep me company.

I know so little but I feel I want to know you better, dear.

Oh, look. I think I know the way.

TIRESIAS
You do. *(Exeunt)*

LABDACUS
But, but... I am...

(He moves after them and steps in THEBE's puddle.)

Oh, *(Swearing)* Dionysus' blood.

(Enter BLOOD.)

BLOOD
Do you need help?

LABDACUS
Do I...?

I am.

Yes. Yes, I do.

BLOOD
What can I do?

(Enter BREAD at some distance. She begins to open a bread stall while discretely observing.)

LABDACUS
More than I can, apparently.

Girls like you.

BLOOD
Girls, yes.

But not, it seems, the woman I desire.

LABDACUS
Who cares?

BLOOD
I do.

LABDACUS
As long as someone young and beautiful desires you,

You will not lack for love.

BLOOD
If I may say, you do not understand.

LABDACUS
I understand all that too well.

Well, maybe not.

Tell me, you are… experienced?

BLOOD

You mean...?

No, actually.

LABDACUS

But you have slept with Thebe, though,

As all Cadmean men have done?

BLOOD

No, I have not.

Nor do I know, beyond the smutty smoke of rumour,

That any others have.

I make no judgements without evidence.

May we speak, please, of other things?

LABDACUS

Alright, alright.

You are a student of the Law?

BLOOD

And History, I am.

LABDACUS

Tell me, your future king.

Why should I care about Harmonia?

BLOOD

She is the Mother of the town.

LABDACUS

Yes, and?

BLOOD

Well, as you know.

She gave up immortality for love,

And wore an equal crown beside King Cadmus,

Sharing all things.

Harmonia's Balance is the basis of—

LABDACUS
But it is not a law.

BLOOD
No. But—

LABDACUS
Tell me about Pentheus' Law.

BLOOD
Pentheus' Law.

Well, it decrees that the king will be the oldest living son

Of the king...

The one before.

LABDACUS
And did Pentheus have a son?

BLOOD
Well, no.

At least...

Some say that young Menaeceus...

But no one knows for sure.

LABDACUS
Some say too much.

But Cadmus, Father of the Town, my father's father,

Named me for the crown.

BLOOD
He did.

And no one questions that, of course.

LABDACUS
Of course.

And so, what of Harmonia's thing?

Does it not go against the law?

BLOOD
Or balance it.

LABDACUS
Can I make laws? When I am king?

BLOOD
Of course,

But once decreed, a law is hard to change.

BREAD
I would take his word, if I were you.

BLOOD
You would?

BREAD
Yes, yes I would.

He is a good and honest man.

(LABDACUS observes the growing connection between BREAD and BLOOD and grows frustrated.)

LABDACUS
It is not fair.

(Begins to leave and turns back.)

I will be king some day. *(Exit)*

BREAD
I wrote a piece about Harmonia in school,

But I would like to better understand what it all means.

Were they a perfect couple, then?

What does that mean?

BLOOD
I, um, would gladly talk with you about... it ... all,

I have to go.

BREAD
Over a cup?

Later perhaps?

(BLOOD cannot speak but nods enthusiastically, then leaves. DIRCE begins to enter but, aware of the approach of LOCRUS, steps into shadow or Eq. Enter LOCRUS.)

BREAD
You seem hungry, Sir.

LOCRUS
I do?

BREAD
You do to me.

LOCRUS
Then I must be.

My name is Locrus.

BREAD
“A name is clothing, but a face is nakedness”.

LOCRUS
Excuse me, Miss?

BREAD
Just something that the old man says,

To hide forgetfulness.

(LOCRUS buys something. BREAD looks at his coin.)

Athenian. And you?

LOCRUS
I studied with a master builder there.

BREAD
Oh yes? A runaway apprentice then?

LOCRUS
My studies were complete.

BREAD
What brings you here?

LOCRUS

I—

You are curious.

BREAD

I am.

LOCRUS

I have, I think, some family in town.

(Enter DIRCE followed by ANTIOPE carrying a lot of luggage.)

DIRCE

Oh sir, I see by your clothing you are civilized.

I need your help.

LOCRUS

Of course.

Although, I am a stranger here.

DIRCE

And so am I, of course.

We have been travelling for days.

LOCRUS *(Moves to help ANTIOPE)*

Let me.

DIRCE

Not her, sir, me.

She is my slave.

BREAD

Not here.

DIRCE

And did you speak to me?

BREAD

We have no slavery.

DIRCE

You have it now. Right there.

BREAD
But, but..

DIRCE
Is it a law?

BREAD
It is our way.

DIRCE
And you are in my way.

LOCRUS
No doubt we all need food and rest.

(To BREAD) Is there a place?

BREAD
The barn.

DIRCE
What did she say?

BREAD
It was a barn, then Dionysus came and...

All of that.

LOCRUS
Oh yes. I heard.

BREAD
Now it is many things: a school, a meeting place,

A place to eat, drink wine, and celebrate.

DIRCE
What do you celebrate?

BREAD
Ourselves.

DIRCE
Oh dear.

I will wait here.

BREAD
Good. Serve yourself.

LOCRUS
I had wine once.

Where is this Barn?

And will they have a bed for me?

BREAD
Somebody will.

It seems you are my only customer today.

Help me pack up and I will take you there.

(He does.)

You mentioned family?

LOCRUS
My sister, yes.

Thebe, by name, and her son, of course.

BREAD
What son? Ah, yes.

It is so easy to forget she is the oldest living...

Person in our town.

And has led other lives.

LOCRUS
Yes, we are old.

BREAD
Ah, so, you too are a Naiad of some kind?

LOCRUS
Not really, no.

The Naiad part is a mother daughter stream,

Sons sink, or snag, or swim ashore as I have done because

I am... well...

BREAD
Yes?

LOCRUS
A son of Zeus, in fact.

BREAD
With eyes like that you just might be. *(Exeunt)*

(ANTIOPE has been looking off in the opposite direction.)

DIRCE
What are you staring at?

(Enter LYCUS. ANTIOPE turns away from him.)

DIRCE
I have been waiting, Lycus, love.

LYCUS
Yes, I know.

What do we know so far?

DIRCE
Well, you tell me.

That letter was a good idea.

LYCUS
Why thank you, Dirce dear.

My brother loves to put his name on things.

They will, of course, not answer most of it.

We will learn more by watching while they try.

What have you learned?

DIRCE
Much as we heard:

Wine, women, and the written word have power here.

LYCUS
And?

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DIRCE

Well, look around.

Unfinished works in stone are overgrown with vines and wooden huts and sheds.

LYCUS

Why do I care?

DIRCE *(To ANTIOPE)*

Go to this barn,

And when you have arranged a bed, a bath, some sort of food,

This wine they talk about, come find me.

Go.

(ANTIOPE holds out her hand. DIRCE is about to strike her...)

How dare—

LYCUS

Use this. *(Gives ANTIOPE money)*

See to yourself as well.

DIRCE

And to my other baggage, go.

(Exit ANTIOPE.)

There is another newcomer, a master builder,

From Athens,

If his boasts to a girl can be believed.

LYCUS

Yes, and?

You have a plan?

DIRCE

This is the field of play, such as it is.

It is too soon to tell the players from the pieces.

LYCUS

But we win in the end.

DIRCE
That all depends.

LYCUS
On what?

DIRCE
When is the end?

(Enter WATER.)

WATER
Oh, Hello. *(Looks around quickly.)*

So much for market day.

DIRCE
The bun girl left.

WATER
Who? Oh, I see. Oh well.

Home, then. *(Goes to leave.)*

DIRCE
We have just come to town.

WATER
Oh, yes?

Well, welcome then.

DIRCE
Are we?

LYCUS
We seek a place you call The Barn,

Known far and wide for wine and welcoming.

WATER
It is? You do?

I own - I mean, I run - at least...

We run the place.

DIRCE
Really?

LYCUS
Well, we would be your guests.

DIRCE
Our feet are weary and our mouths are dry.

LYCUS
Our pockets full.

WATER
Cadmea welcomes you.

DIRCE
How nice.

And after all of that,

Can someone take us for a tour of the town?

I do love local History.

WATER
I know just the lad for you.

DIRCE
A lad for me?

How nice.

You go, Prince Lycus dear, and send the fellow here.

I know you have important work to do on behalf of...

LYCUS
Yes. Yes, I do.

So, friend. The Barn?

And may I buy you wine?

(Exeunt WATER and LYCUS.)

WATER *(Off)*
You are a Prince?

LYCUS *(Off)*
Yes, of a kind.

(DIRCE looks about, steps in the puddle, realizes that it flows from somewhere and follows what remains of the stream off stage. Enter THEBE and TIRESIAS.)

THEBE

No, stop. That smell.

We have returned to where we started from.

Where were we going?

TIRESIAS

Home.

(Throughout this scene THEBE plays with the water in the puddle.)

THEBE

My home. Such as it is.

I sleep in the palace.

TIRESIAS

Oh?

THEBE

What is it, dear?

TIRESIAS

I glimpsed something, no, never mind.

You say, Queen Thebe, that the palace is your home?

THEBE

What did you call me? Queen?

TIRESIAS

I was confused.

THEBE

We are, in that, so much alike.

TIRESIAS

The palace?

THEBE

Yes. It has been empty since Pentheus died.

Oh look. I know all that.

TIRESIAS

Who knows how much you know?

THEBE

Or you, apparently.

What is your name again?

TIRESIAS

Tiresias. I was a young man whom you knew.

No, not like that.

And then Athena blinded me.

Zeus burned that darkness with the gift of prophesy.

THEBE

A gift you say?

But wait, you were a man?

TIRESIAS

And then, well, snakes.

THEBE

Ah, snakes...

And now you are a girl?

TIRESIAS

Like you, I am no girl.

Our bodies both have given birth.

THEBE

I have? I thought I felt something.

Imagine that.

Somewhere out there I have a child.

TIRESIAS

Perhaps a woman grown.

THEBE

Perhaps.

Who knows.

Oh, gods protect me from that tragedy.

TIRESIAS

To have a child?

THEBE

To lose one in forgetfulness.

Tell me about this child of yours.

Oh dear. Such sorrow.

Is your child lost to you as well?

TIRESIAS

My childhood is.

THEBE

I feel so cold.

My past is gone.

What can my future hold?

What is this gift of prophesy?

TIRESIAS

My eyes are blind, but in my heart and mind

I see all time at once,

But like a shattered mirror sinking through ripples

On a burning stream.

THEBE

Oh dear. Are you mad?

TIRESIAS

Some say, but no, not yet, not now.

THEBE

This now? With me?

I would be mad.

I know I would.

And so you know my life, both past and yet to be?

TIRESIAS

I see it like…

(Enter GLASS, who hesitates then starts to leave.)

THEBE

Stay child. Please.

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TIRESIAS *(To GLASS)*
You have no need to fear.

(GLASS sits on ANTIOPE's bag.)

GLASS
Excuse—

THEBE
But do not interrupt.

TIRESIAS
Your turn will come.

THEBE *(To TIRESIAS)*
Go on. The gift of Zeus?

(Enter ANTIOPE.)

GLASS
Silence, a story.

TIRESIAS
Zeus sent to me,
In my last kiss from Semele,
This thing called prophesy.
A piece of himself perhaps.
Then, when Pentheus had been... killed.
I, pregnant, wandered from the town,
Lost, broken, and half mad.
I gave birth in a field in a thunderstorm, not far from here,
On the far slopes of Cithaeron.
I hoped to die,
And so I brought the child, a boy,
Back into town and left him in the care
Of the open family that warms the Barn.
I knew that he would never come to harm with them.
I wandered off again.

I found a cave, and built a wall,

And lay down on the boney ground to die.

I knew, somewhere,

How much more agony and joy still lay ahead.

But in that now, somehow,

My hope for death was all that I could see.

I was, just once, alone with my loneliness.

I opened to the emptiness, the silence, and the dark.

And then, faint as a spark across a valley in the rain,

I heard, or smelled, something: a butterfly,

Trying to find its way to me.

I felt a crack of moonlight on my face.

I tasted foods once eaten in that place,

And I chose, chose, to live, despite it all.

I fought my way, like birth, back to the world.

GLASS

And here you are.

THEBE

Shh.

GLASS

What?

TIRESIAS

Yes. Enough of me.

GLASS

I ate a butterfly.

THEBE

Not now.

TIRESIAS

But soon.

Your words will matter more than all of this.

GLASS
They will?

TIRESIAS
But first, Antiope will tell us how she came to be with us.

Of Zeus and her father, old Nycteus.

GLASS
Our “sort of” king?

TIRESIAS
And yet she stands there as a slave.

ANTIOPE
My life is not a show.

TIRESIAS
It is a story, though.

ANTIOPE
Do you command?

TIRESIAS
I? Never, no.

But you will tell the child.

(Indicates THEBE) She will forget.

THEBE
I will.

TIRESIAS
And I already know.

ANTIOPE
Where to begin?

Nycteus was my father, yes.

A sort of country king.

A farmer, actually, although the work was done by slaves.

He and his friends, half uncles or half brothers, most of them,

Devoured the hours pretending to be warriors,

Playing with rites from times before the gods,

When people tried to prove they were not animals.

Each Spring they held one of their festivals,

A feast, of course, a fire and all of that.

The young men wrestled and the old men watched.

There was a boy, it sounds so silly now, I liked.

There is a spot behind the Hall, they call it that,

But I am sure it too was once a barn.

A spot, some say, where Zeus himself was born,

And in that place no shadows show.

And anyone who was found there...

Was taken to the woods and sacrificed.

Their body torn into such bits as fit into a fist.

One little piece was mixed with the meat inside.

Whoever ate it took the spirit of a wolf,

Something like that.

I went to see my boy—

THEBE

Enough.

GLASS

But, but.. You were not sacrificed.

So. Were you saved?

ANTIOPE

I am a slave.

GLASS

This town was built by slaves who walked away.

And life, somehow, has brought you here.

Here sit and rest with me.

THEBE *(To TIRESIAS)*

You chose to live.

TIRESIAS

I did, and I did.

I broke my wall. it was a feeble thing,

And crawled towards ...

I thought at first it was the butterfly that brushed my cheek.

A young goatherd.

He carried me and bathed me,

Fed me broth and brushed my hair.

I slept safely without dreams.

And when I woke he would be carving by the hearth.

Each chip that flew into the fire sparked in his eyes.

One day I woke and knew how kind and good he was.

The morning after that I knew I loved the man.

We woke together after that.

I bore another child, a girl.

I was so fully in that happy now...

Somehow, I did not see...

A spark, a fire took him, and her, our home.

I was again alone.

But I had lived.

I had a son.

So I have come to visit family.

Is that enough?

GLASS

For me. For now.

(To THEBE) And what of you?

(THEBE scoops up some water in her cupped hands.)

THEBE

If I could hold this long enough to drown the nearest candle flame

I will have told you all I know about myself.

GLASS *(to ANTIOPE)*

Come, wine for you.

ANTIOPE
Yes.

(Exit ANTIOPE and GLASS.)

THEBE *(To TIRESIAS)*
You go.

A whirlpool has me now. *(Exit)*

TIRESIAS
But, but.

I saw us go together to The Barn,

I did. We do.

We share wine, laughter, we are family.

But no.

That truth is gone.

This is all wrong.

Did I do this?

My hopeful, helpful hints,

My vanity,

Tear open time.

What now might be?

King Laius, no.

Oh brave Antigone.

And then again, but brighter than before

Thebe as queen… of… Thebes.

(Exit)

The Barn.

A little later the same day. BOWL is asleep by the fire. FIREWOOD enters, coming from sleep.)

FIREWOOD
No one is here?

BOWL

You killed them all and fed them to the fire.

A joke.

Your mother was more fun.

FIREWOOD

I do not want to hear.

BOWL

Nothing to fear.

She flirted with the best of them, including me,

But only ever slept at home.

I miss her terribly.

FIREWOOD

Yes, well.

(Enter BLOOD all dressed for his date. Hair done.)

Well, look at you.

Are you in court today?

BOWL

Courting, I say.

But loosen something lad, before you burst.

Mess up his hair.

(FIREWOOD does.)

FIREWOOD

Much better, there.

I might just mess you up some more.

BLOOD

Is she here..?

BOWL *(Teasing)*

Who?

FIREWOOD

Not yet.

BOWL

My guess is she will be worth waiting for.

(Enter CLOTH, much disheveled by hard work and stained with grapes.)

CLOTH *(To BOWL)*

What a surprise.

BOWL

What? That I waited in this unpleasant place for you?

A father makes these sacrifices, child.

Embrace me properly?

Some wine? *(To FIREWOOD)* One bill.

CLOTH

Yes, mine.

BOWL

These are my friends.

CLOTH

Of course. Good host, a round.

My father's friends are family to me.

(CLOTH helps FIREWOOD serve. Enter LABDACUS.)

LABDACUS

Give me a cup of that.

Oh. Please.

FIREWOOD

You are too young.

BOWL

There was no wine when I was young.

So many wasted years.

Give him a cup.

No, let him buy a round.

LABDACUS

May I?

FIREWOOD
The next one, yes.

BOWL
And three more after that.

FIREWOOD
Oh yes? With what?

LABDACUS
When I am king.

I will make a law that everyone in town must come in here

At least three times a year,

To honour Dionysus' name.

CLOTH
And when I own the place I will make sure they do.

FIREWOOD
What did you say?

BLOOD
Thank you, and welcome, friend.

CLOTH
Cousin, in some way, I suppose.

(CLOTH offers and BLOOD reluctantly accepts a crushed grape hug that leaves his outfit ruined.)

Oh, look. I always make a mess of everything.

(Enter BREAD.)

BREAD
Ta da!

Let the games begin.

I bring such beauty as could start a war.

FIREWOOD
Oh, yes, you do.

LABDACUS
Yes please.

BLOOD
Hello.

BREAD
Meet Locrus *(Enter LOCRUS)*

Newly come to town.

A son of Zeus, as you can see.

But more, half brother to sweet Thebe, whom we love.

FIREWOOD and CLOTH together
Welcome, Sir.

CLOTH
Oh. Please forgive me.

FIREWOOD
No, you are the host for now.

(CLOTH moves to give a hug to LOCRUS who avoids it gracefully.)

BREAD
He is Athenian.

BLOOD
Yes so I see.

Also a son of Zeus, you said.

BOWL *(To LOCRUS)*
Your sister is not here.

She has gone home, to bed, alone.

FIREWOOD
Let us take care of you.

BREAD
I thought that there would be more women here.

He needs a bed.

FIREWOOD
And you?

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BREAD
I sleep with my dreams again tonight.

BLOOD
And me.

I mean, so do I.

(Enter WATER.)

WATER *(Greeting the room)*
My dear, my friends,

CLOTH *(Giving wine to WATER)*
Here, friend, and welcome.

WATER
But. Welcome?

Who are you?

BOWL
The ripe fruit of this fertile vine.

And first in line to all my property.

WATER
Oh.

FIREWOOD
Yes.

WATER
I see.

CLOTH *(To BOWL)*
I like this place.

I think I see now why you stay.

And yet, old man, you need your family.

My brother needs something to do.

Perhaps there is a way.

WATER
Oh Dionysus! I forgot.

(Takes out a piece of paper and reads from it.)

"Cadmeans all.

Allow me now, to introduce

Our Regent's brother, Lycus, who-"

BOWL
What is his name?

WATER
"Lycus, who-"

BOWL
And yours in Locrus?

LOCRUS
Yes.

BOWL
And you are Labdacus?

LABDACUS
You know I am.

BOWL
Of course I do, and I will learn to know them too,

But never by such names.

Lolabyculculus,

Go on.

WATER
Yes. Locrus, who—

LOCRUS
Yes?

LYCUS *(Off)*
Oh. In the names of all the gods.

(Enter LYCUS.)

Prince Labdacus, I am your mother's uncle, Sir.

Lycus, my name.

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I have been sent to guide and counsel you,

Prepare you to be king.

And until then, to act on your behalf,

In all the little matters that concern the crown.

See, here it is all written down,

And there, Nycteus name, in his own hand.

(BLOOD examines the document.)

BLOOD
It does. He is—

BOWL
Our king.

LABDACUS
No.

LYCUS
No.

BLOOD
Well, in a way.

LYCUS
I am just here to help.

Enough of that for now.

Is this that "wine" the poets sing about?

(He glances discretely at notes.)

Pour out enough that Dionysus would be pleased.

And drink with me to… Cadmus and Harmonia.

CLOTH
All drink. *(They do)*

LYCUS *(To LABDACUS)*
We have so much to talk about.

Perhaps, after a glass, we: you, my wife and I, and her slave,

Can seek the welcome of your palace for the night.

LABDACUS
The palace?

LYCUS
Yes, is that alright?

LABDACUS
Not really.

LYCUS
Oh?

LABDACUS
I have two rooms in the house next door.
The palace has remained unoccupied
Since King Pentheus died.
Well, not entirely unoccupied,
They say that Thebe—

BOWL
Who is half divine.

GLASS
The ancient spirit of the place.

FIREWOOD
And much beloved by all of us.

LABDACUS
That much is true.

BOWL
Lives there.

LYCUS
I see. I think.
Well, things can change.
A king, or his representative,
Deserves a proper place to live,
One grand enough for all the feasts and functions of the crown,
Where kings from all around will come and be impressed.

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LABDACUS

My palace, yes.

I want to see it now, and claim it back.

Come friends with me.

The Prince will entertain at home tonight.

(He takes a bottle. Exit. No one moves.)

LOCRUS

As you were saying? Sir.

LYCUS

Let us restore the palace first.

And then work outward through the town

To finish all of Cadmus' plans.

We need a man, a master builder who—

LOCRUS

Sir, I—

LYCUS

Oh good.

Tomorrow early we have much to do,

But for tonight, let us enjoy this pleasant company,

For, as my mother used to say,

Our lives are stories waiting to be told.

(Enter GLASS, ANTIOPE, and TIRESIAS.)

Come, girls, we want to hear from you especially,

Ah, yes. Hello Antiope.

Your mistress, where is she?

ANTIOPE

Dirce—

LYCUS

The Lady Dirce.

ANTIOPE
If you say.

Is waiting for a lad.

WATER
Oh Zeus. That's me.

FIREWOOD
The lad?

WATER
No him. *(BLOOD)*

BLOOD
Who? Me?

WATER
She wants a tour, and talk of History.

BLOOD
But, but, *(To BREAD)* Our cup together?

BREAD
Will be here, and full.

BLOOD
I see. Well then, if you... *(To LYCUS)*

LYCUS
Yes, try to satisfy her curiosity at least.

BREAD
But first. *(Kisses BLOOD)*

Remember that.

BLOOD
Until I die.

Where is she now?

ANTIOPE
I left her in the square.

Who knows where she has gone from there.

(Exit BLOOD, trying to look presentable.)

GLASS
Where is Menaeceus?

BOWL
Avoiding happiness.

WATER
Not so.

He plays a game now, as we speak,

In which he seeks... all kinds of things.

If you can find him, he may let you play.

GLASS
Perhaps. Which way? *(Exit)*

LYCUS
And now, from what I've heard of wine

A wise man plans where to sleep before he starts to drink.

We need some rooms.

LOCRUS
And so do I, as do these ladies, I believe.

LYCUS
That one is with my wife and me.

LOCRUS *(To WATER)*
Do you have rooms for rent?

FIREWOOD
We do. We can.

(To WATER.)

Speak to the man who owns the house next door,

Offer to buy it if you must.

Trust me. (*Emptying the "till")*

Buy beds, and bedding, everything,

Oh, this is good.

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BREAD
Can I help?

WATER
Yes, please.

FIREWOOD
And I will entertain them here until you are prepared.

What now?

(WATER kisses FIREWOOD and exits with BREAD.)

CLOTH
All is arranged.

Was ever such a happy company?

Sit friends and drink with me,

And tell me taIes I have not heard before

(To BOWL) a thousand times.

Who needs more wine?

The Old Palace. Pentheus' bath chamber. NB: This is a palace in name only. It was the home of Cadmus and Harmonia, empty for about ten years, leaves etc are strewn about. The bath has begun the long journey back to being a natural pond.

(Enter MENAECEUS backwards, unspooling a ball of string, knotted regularly, which he uses as a measuring tape. It is attached off stage. He has a notebook under his arm and counts under his breath. Enter THEBE, grateful to be home. She encounters the string and, despite here exhaustion, is fascinated by it. She follows it to MENAECEUS.)

THEBE
Hello, I am—

MENAECEUS
I know.

I mean, forgive me, Thebe, for intruding on your home.

THEBE
What are you doing?

MENAECEUS
Measuring.

THEBE
Oh. What is that?

MENAECEUS
Counting the size of things.

Each knot in the string is...

THEBE
Yes, I see. Like ripples.

MENAECEUS
Or pages in a book.

THEBE
A what?

MENAECEUS
Those, over there, under the leaves.

THEBE
My pillow?

MENAECEUS
No, well, possibly.

But.

Open it, you see?

Those scratchings are—

THEBE
Words, frozen words.

It says here, in my writing, oh.

I can read.

Harmonia herself taught me.

MENAECEUS
And write.

Well, you are full of surprises.

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THEBE

Yes.

To myself especially.

Do you mind? *(Reading)*

This is a glimpse into my life, apparently,

I cannot wait to see what happened next.

MENAECEUS

What does it say?

THEBE

Shh.

(MENAECEUS continues measuring, but also watches THEBE. He stops.)

MENAECEUS

May I ask?

THEBE

What?

MENAECEUS

This thing they say you do, the way you use the gift you have...

THEBE

Washing away anger with my love?

MENAECUS

Yes. That.

THEBE

Whatever you may hear them say I do,

I see no mention of it here,

But *(in the book*) here, and here,

And here again, in painful poetry

I love this place.

Right here is who I am.

And so,

If I could make peace here, even by doing that,

If I could ease the fear and bitterness that haunts our town,

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I know that I would do it willingly.

Perhaps my kisses can...

Who knows?

MENAECEUS

Perhaps your great love can.

THEBE

My love?

I would not count on that.

It has, so far, failed miserably.

I am a mother, no, I bore a child

And threw that truth away so utterly

That I cannot even recall the loss.

(She touches him gently on the cheek.)

MENAECEUS

And what is this?

Please, not forgetfulness.

THEBE

Just tenderness.

I am not like Tiresias.

MENAECEUS

Like who?

THEBE

A prophet, new in town. You will like her.

I know I do.

But I predict that you, some day,

Will meet your own Harmonia.

Keep close your kisses till you do.

And now, I need to sleep.

My dreams need much attending to.

Go, measure out your ripples, lad.

(THEBE makes herself comfortable by or in the bath. After a moment MENAECEUS exits counting under his breath and leaving his string strung across the stage. LABDACUS, off, gets entangled in it. It twitches.)

LABDACUS *(off)*
Dionysus' blood.

What spiders live here now?

(Sound of a breaking bottle. Enter LABDACUS.)

Ah, tragedy.

(GLASS appears and hides, making a sound.)

LABDACUS *(looks around.)*
Hello!!

Am I alone?

(THEBE sits up sleepily.)

THEBE
I wish you were.

No, wait.

(She thumbs quickly through her book.)

Have I known you and do I now?

LABDACUS
I am King ... soon to be..

My name is Labdacus.

You do know me,

And more than anything I wish you had.

THEBE
How would you know?

LABDACUS
What? Well.

Oh, I - but, wait,

I had forgotten that they then forget,

And yet, they cannot have forgotten everything

Or no one would…

(THEBES sniffs him carefully. Enter MENAECEUS unseen.)

What are you doing?

THEBE
Trying to remember you.

LABDACUS
Perhaps we could just...

THEBE
No.

LABDACUS
No?

THEBE
We have not smeared our sweats or gasped each others breath.

Not yet. My nose would know.

LABDACUS
They say you are a goddess of a kind.

THEBE
They say a lot of foolish things, I think.

I try to be kind.

LABDACUS *(Kneeling)*
Please, Thebe, goddess, sort of,

I beg of you, your future king, be kind to me,

Take me this once into your arms

And share with me your many charms

And I...

THEBE
Will what?

Make me your queen?

LABDACUS
Of course not.

THEBE
No.

LABDACUS
I ought to go.

THEBE
No, stay.

Water can flow by many ways to the same sea.

(She touches him.)

Your present longing and my loss,

Pull us together now.

I feel a future quickening.

Come here. *(He comes to her)*

Impress yourself on me.

I need to make some memories.

(She pulls away.)

Promise me this.

If I should have a child,

Because of all that we might be about to do,

That you will claim it as your own and train it for the throne.

LABDACUS
A son? With you?

THEBE
Think of it, Labdacus, all this, here, now,

And then tomorrow: free, no guilt,

No wife, a single crown,

And yet a son of your own, but also part divine,

To whom you can pass down your throne

And found a line of glorious royalty.

LABDACUS
The House of Labdacus.

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As is the point and purpose of Pentheus' Law.

(THEBE writes in her book.)

I promise this... All that, yes, I do.

What now?

THEBE

Come flow away with me.

But know, for me, this is my first time too.

It always is.

Come here and kiss me beautifully.

LABDACUS

But what if I, if we ...forget?

A king must keep his word, this much I know.

MENAECEUS

If I may suggest, Prince Labdacus,

(He steps forward with a pen and points at THEBE's book.)

Sign this.

End of Act One

Act Two

(One year later. A choreographed sequence, part fragments from the larger narrative of City of Wine, part dance invocation of the Baccannalia. A single image emerges or is revealed: From JOCASTA, when OEDIPUS meets JOCASTA for the first time. They collide. Her dress catches on his gear. Other images follow as suggested in the text.)

TIRESIAS

Oh, this is nice. *(Watching)*

Oh really now, just kiss the youth.

(From OEDIPUS. OEDIPUS tearing out his eyes. TIRESIAS echoes the gesture)

TIRESIAS *(Cont'd)*

No!! Never eyes.

What have they done to you?

But yet, if I could see…

Where would my visions be?

(From PENTHEUS. ATHENA at the pool. The last thing TIRESIAS' eyes saw. ATHENA gestures angrily and TIRESIAS re-experiences being blinded.)

TIRESIAS *(Cont'd)*

Pushed back into the dark of me?

And there I see, again, always… Antigone?

(A figure in the swirling crowd turns in response to the name. TIRESIAS reaches for her, but she is pulled away by the group and From CREON, ANTIGONE hangs herself in the cave.)

TIRESIAS *(Cont'd)*

So much hangs from my broken heart:

Each beat sets ripples ripping everything apart.

(The group movement has gained energy, scale, and focus around TIRESIAS. It has begun to resemble the events at The Fire as described near the end of PENTHEUS. The action peaks with the dismemberment of PENTHEUS, A figure walks solemnly to TIRESIAS and presses something into her hand. TIRESIAS clutches that hand to a leather pouch hung around her neck. The crowd withdraws guiltily into the shadows.)

TIRESIAS *(Cont'd)*

Apart.

If I hate anything, Pentheus love,

I hate that word.

(She takes a few small bones from the bag around her neck. She speaks to them.)

I feel your fingertips slip over mine.

I see so much,

Why can I not see you?

If only I could share it all with you

Just as I planned.

To balance you as king and man,

And bring you, straight from Zeus,

Wise counsel built on perfect prophesy.

I tried, and you died trying to understand.

If I can hold my whole self still,

(Perhaps there is a group movement response to all of this. Perhaps, if there is a vocal/ audio component, it includes, covering them at first, the sounds of an imminent birth.)

The billion bits of true things will,

I dare to hope, slowly begin

To swirl and settle on my skin

Like all the butterflies there ever were.

But then,

If I dare think, or blink, or sigh,

Chaos again.

So I stand still behind my empty eyes,

And wait for somebody to see,

Not me, but the butterflies.

(A moment of serene stillness is shattered by a childbirth scream from THEBE, off.)

What? More?

(Another, climactic scream.)

From the beginning, then.

My mother suffers indescribably and I—

(Enter THEBE with a wrapped infant.)

But no, not me.

Laius?

THEBE

What did you say?

Was that a name?

TIRESIAS

I, no.

THEBE

Well it is now,

I like the sound of it somehow.

That is his name.

Promise me, please, Tiresias.

TIRESIAS

I see I do.

So soon?

Oh Thebes, the world will weep forever for you now.

No one can see and let that be.

(She "shakes off the butterflies".)

If I do nothing more, I will break that thread

That ties that name to so many dead.

Instead,

I must fulfill a promised prophesy,

And help to welcome soon, somehow,

Thebe, our wise and gentle queen to be.

THEBE

You called me that before.

TIRESIAS

I did.

THEBE

Please tell me more.

TIRESIAS

I can, I must do more than that.

Please, may I hold the child?

(Exeunt.)

The Old Palace

(Renovations are nearly complete. Perhaps costumed stage hands have worked openly to do the work. Enter LOCRUS, checking details.)

DIRCE *(Off)*

Antiope, go back for my shawl.

This old house is so cold.

(Enter LYCUS and DIRCE.)

LYCUS *(Looking around.)*

Oh, no. This will not do.

LOCRUS

But Sir, it is exactly as we planned, and well ahead of schedule.

LYCUS

Exactly. Yes.

(To DIRCE.)

And Labdacus will see it as a sign that he is ready for the crown,

Palace and all.

There must be more to do.

DIRCE

How does the water reach the bath?

LOCRUS

Through hidden pipes.

DIRCE
But it is hot.

LOCRUS
Yes, fires beneath the floor heat the whole place.

DIRCE
Did you do all of this?

LOCRUS
The workers did, but I designed—

LYCUS
Yes, very nice.

DIRCE
We could live here.

LYCUS
But Labdacus—

DIRCE
Leave him to me.

I am, as we say here in Cadmea, no Tiresias—

LYCUS
We do?

DIRCE
But I foresee a few more years of your Regency.

Plenty of time for things to change.

Locrus, do you have time to climb with me?

Have you yet seen the place they call “Athena’a Pool”?

It has, I think, a royal view.

LYCUS
I will stay here, I think.

DIRCE *(Takes LOCRUS by the arm)*
Do you mind exploring it with me?

LOCRUS
Uh. No. Of course.

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DIRCE

Of course indeed, up stream in fact.

(Exeunt DIRCE and LOCRUS. LYCUS pretends to be a king at home.)

LYCUS

Where are the women of the royal bath?

It must be time for my massage.

(Enter ANTIOPE carrying a shawl.)

ANTIOPE

I am here.

LYCUS

Ah, yes. Antiope.

What do you want?

ANTIOPE

My life.

LYCUS

I saved your life.

ANTIOPE

And gave it to your wife.

LYCUS

Would you prefer that I had left you for

Your father's foolish sacrifice?

ANTIOPE

Instead, I was one of your toys.

LYCUS

And now you have your little boys.

ANTIOPE

Your sons.

LYCUS

The world is full of women who, like you,

Would claim a father for their spawn.

Why stop with me?

Why not blame Zeus?

It works for Locrus well enough.

ANTIOPE

This much I know of parentage:

My father never learned to read or write,

Except to scratch his name.

LYCUS

Go on.

ANTIOPE

And all of this, your so called Regency,

Is built upon a pile of paper lies.

I could just—

LYCUS

What?

Nycteus thinks that you are dead,

An honoured sacrifice to Zeus

That fills his followers with... wolfishness.

ANTIOPE

So if I go to tell him about you—

LYCUS

His pride demands your secret death.

ANTIOPE

But if I write it down,

And leave a letter with a friend in town,

Who, if I am not safe and free and far from you,

Will send it to my mother.

She can read, and has his ear.

LYCUS

Ah. I see.

How did you learn...?

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ANTIOPE

The Lady Dirce had me learn to write

So I can keep her orders straight.

I let her think I had a useless memory.

For that, if nothing else, she has my gratitude.

But I should thank you too.

My sons, Zethus and Amphion,

Deserve to know about the glorious day

When their young mother lay

With the Father of the Gods,

And why they feel his anger move in them

To urge them on to mighty deeds.

You ask me what I want, but give me what I need.

(Throws down the shawl.)

Give this to Dirce, she is cold

In ways that you could never warm.

(Exit ANTIOPE. Enter BLOOD and MENAECEUS carrying a lot of papers etc.)

BLOOD

Oh good, here you are, my lord.

These need your name,

These you should read, I think,

And these we drag from place to place in case

A case arises that requires them.

LYCUS

No more.

Take them through there.

A proper palace is now being planned.

This part of my house will serve for Government,

Have it announced, equipped, and manned.

BLOOD

Yes, Sir.

(Exit LYCUS. To MENAECEUS.)

What do you think?

MENAECEUS *(Looking into the room that LYCUS indicated)*

Shelves, tables, lamps, and many chairs.

Meetings over here and records through here.

(Exit BLOOD and MENAECEUS within. Enter TIRESIAS and THEBE carrying the baby and her book.)

THEBE

Where are you leading us, Tiresias?

(Looks up.)

Oh, this is nice.

All new and yet…

Have I been here before?

TIRESIAS

You both have, yes.

(The baby fusses.)

Poor thing.

Can you not kiss the child?

THEBE

Oh, yes, of course I can,

And yet I should not or…

(She tries to look in the book. She drops the book disturbing the child.)

Oh, I forget.

(The baby wails.)

Shh, Laius lad,

Can it be all that bad?

(She kisses LAIUS and forgets knowing him, and hands him to TIRESIAS.)

Thank you, my dear,

You have a lovely son.

(Enter MENAECEUS.)

MENAECEUS
Hello.

If you seek.. Government,

We are not ready yet, I am afraid.

TIRESIAS
I have a child of unknown parentage.

MENAECEUS
Oh, yes?

TIRESIAS
Yes. Just like you and me.

MENAECEUS
Ah, well then. Yes.

Forgive me, prophetess,

But I have much to do, before we are prepared

To keep good records of each birth and death,

I will be with you both as soon as time allows.

TIRESIAS
I understand.

(MENAECEUS sits and engages busily in paperwork. THEBE and TIRESIAS speak aside.)

THEBE
How can it be I know he is your son?

TIRESIAS
Just look at him: respected, trusted,

Loved by his whole community.

All this is his own, without me.

It is too late for motherhood for me.

But not too late, I hope,

To make you queen of Thebes,

THEBE
Of where?

TIRESIAS
Cadmea will be, somehow, renamed to honour you.

Forgive me Thebe, I can say no more for now.

THEBE
Rest, child.

(THEBES hold TIRESIAS.)

You and I, Tiresias, are, in a way, each other's emptiness?

TIRESIAS
We are.

THEBE
You know far more than you can bear alone.

TIRESIAS
I do.

THEBE
And I know almost nothing... in my mind,

But find a long life lingers in my bones.

I am not quite as empty as I seem.

TIRESIAS
I know.

THEBE
I have no memories, but I have dreams,

Feelings and scars ... Inside of me.

TIRESIAS
You have done much.

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THEBE

I have?

Yes, yes I have.

Too much and not enough.

I will go home…

But no…

This was...

Where do I go?

Downhill I suppose. *(Exit)*

MENAECEUS *(Who has overheard much after all. Stands and picks up the book.)*

Will you just let her go?

TIRESIAS

I have no choice.

Menaeceus?

MENAECEUS

Yes, Tiresias.

TIRESIAS

You are a priest of privacy?

MENAECEUS

I swear on my mother's grave.

Wherever that might be.

TIRESIAS

Thank you.

Now, may I take your arm.

I feel more blind than usual.

MENAECEUS

Of course. Let me.

(MENACES tenderly wipes tears from TIRESIAS' face.)

Do I now take you to the Barn?

TIRESIAS
Of course you do.

(Exeunt.)

The Barn. No evidence of a school. BOWL sits by the fire. FIREWOOD stands in the "bar" area.

(WATER enters looking at papers.)

BOWL
There is, it seems, a hole in my cup.

FIREWOOD
Oh, yes?

BOWL
Across the top.

All of the wine came out.

WATER

(To FIREWOOD, re. the papers.)

Have you seen this?

FIREWOOD *(Looks)*
He owes so much?

I am impressed.

WATER
I am concerned.

A third of everything that we have earned sits in that chair.

(Enter CLOTH.)

Last year, and long before,

We struggled for the rent and "lent" him wine in gratitude.

But now, all debts are paid,

On our side, anyway.

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CLOTH *(takes the paper)*
May I see that?

WATER
No. Actually.

CLOTH *(Looking)*
Oh dear.

Oh well, when I own all of this.

FIREWOOD
You never will.

CLOTH
My father owns the barn.

BLOOD
The building, yes.

But not the business we all call “The Barn”.

CLOTH
I do not understand.

BLOOD
You own the field but the farmers own the crop.

FIREWOOD
The furniture, the stock.

BLOOD
Yes, all of that and more.

BOWL
Much more.

WATER *(to BLOOD)*
You have been working with Menaeceus.

BLOOD
I have.

FIREWOOD
What is the business worth?

BLOOD

Well, let me see.

About the same as the barn itself.

CLOTH

What can you do?

WATER

Pack up and move.

CLOTH

This is ridiculous.

You have not heard the last from us. *(Exit)*

BOWL

May I suggest a simple way to settle this?

WATER

Go on.

BOWL

Wisdom is thirsty work.

(WATER pours. BOWL takes out his stone.)

Athena gave me this as a way to choose,

or settle things, when we cannot.

I won the first game ever played,

And as a prize, the goddess Eris watches over me.

BLOOD

Goddess of discord.

BOWL

Yes.

She helps to balance all this harmony.

Let us, old friends, agree on this.

One throw of Athena's stone.

And if I win, when I die,

my family inherits all of it.

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And if I loose, you do.

BLOOD
Simple as that?

BOWL
But, either way, I drink for free.

What do you say?

WATER
This is absurd.

FIREWOOD
No, I agree.

WATER
What?

FIREWOOD
I agree.

Come love, let us, just once,

Hold hands and gamble everything.

We are Harmonia's people after all.

WATER
Why not?

BLOOD
Well.

WATER
We accept.

You are a witness, yes?

BLOOD
Reluctantly, I am.

BOWL *(struggles to his feet)*
Good, over there.

Where Dionysus first—

FIREWOOD
We know, old friend.

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Whatever happens now, in Dionysus' name, let us be friends.

BOWL

Of course.

The marked for me. *(Throws)*

Ah, There, you see. I win.

WATER

But…

The unmarked side—

BOWL

Yes, yes.

The Barn is yours,

As, in a way, it always was.

I say I win because I have my chair, my friends, my fire,

And all the wine I can desire.

I win either way.

(Enter CLOTH.)

CLOTH

What if—

BOWL

Too late.

CLOTH

What do you mean?

BOWL

The deed is done. We played, I won.

And so, I think, did you.

WATER

But—

FIREWOOD

Shh.

CLOTH
What have I won?

BOWL
All this to enjoy.

Your farm is prosperous?

CLOTH
It is.

BOWL
You have enough for yourself,

And for your family?

CLOTH
I do.

BOWL
Inherit this from me,

The freedom of the guest:

To eat and drink and rest

Free from the fist of greed.

Enough is all you need.

CLOTH
So… You have lost the barn?

BOWL
No need to thank me.

Have a drink.

CLOTH
What?

Do not ever think of visiting.

Our home, our fire, your grandchildren,

Are also lost to you today. *(Exit)*

BOWL
The loss is great but brief,

For it is my belief

I will feel nothing before long.

Come friends, some wine,

A song perhaps in Dionysus' name.

I feel him near.

Great God.

Send beauty, youth, and cheer.

(Enter BREAD, ANTIOPE, and GLASS.)

You see? The gods look after me.

BREAD *(To BLOOD)*
Oh, hello, dear.

I did not think to find you here.

BLOOD
And yet you came.

(Enter LABDACUS.)

FIREWOOD
She works here now.

BLOOD
You do?

LABDACUS
You did not know?

BOWL
Eris! Enough!

This is a celebration after all.

ANTIOPE
I come to celebrate.

LABDACUS
And so do I. *(He drinks, and then drinks more)*

BOWL
Then I declare a festival. *(Hands a drum to BREAD)*

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BREAD
Oh yes?

LABDACUS
What do we celebrate?

BOWL
This place, the face and heartbeat of our town.

(BREAD begins to play the drum.)

It now rests safely in the hands of these, our friends,

Most capable of looking after it, just as it is.

A business, yes, but more.

I do not think I told you this before,

But right there, on the floor—

(BREAD steps up the beat, in volume as well as tempo.)

BREAD *(Sings)*
You'll not find a bottle that matches with these,

So raise up your cups and another one please,

Keep raising cups till you're down on your knees.

For we make a hell of a wine.

SEVERAL
Yes, we make a hell of a wine.

BOWL
Cadmus left Athens and...?

FIREWOOD
Followed a cow!

BREAD
Good.

(To GLASS.)

Now you.

GLASS

Me? Oh, let me see.

It gave up the ghost where our city stands now!

(Laughter and applause. Dancing begins. Perhaps another instrument.)

BLOOD

My turn.

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

LABDACUS

And How!!

BOWL

For we make a hell of a wine!

LABDACUS

Pentheus woke up one night in his bed,

"I'll walk for a go in the woods, now" he said,

BOWL

Well done.

LABDACUS

And... and...

My mind is dry, more drink!

ALL *(Laughing)*

For we make a hell of a wine

Yes!! We make a hell of a wine.

(They dance around the spot on the floor, singing the new song together. Enter DIRCE and LOCRUS.)

WATER

Welcome, my lady.

Please excuse the noise.

DIRCE

Oh, not at all.

I see that this is more, much more,

Than ordinary people having fun.

The dance, the drum,

This is the very spot,

Is it not? Where..

(To BOWL.)

Sir, we have not met, and yet,

I feel I know you well.

My priestess used to tell of you and Dionysus,

Here? Right here?

My knees are weak.

(She swoons a bit. The young men step forward to help her to a chair.)

I cannot speak.

ANTIOPE

Oh yes you can.

DIRCE

Hello, Antiope.

ANTIOPE

Hello.

DIRCE

No need to thank me, dear.

ANTIOPE

For what?

DIRCE

Why, for your freedom.

Yes.

Lycus and I discussed your claim,

And in Great Dionysus' name,

With full respect for our Cadmean ways,

I end your slavery today. *(An improvised gesture)*

You are now free to go away.

LABDACUS
Or, if you choose, to stay.

ANTIOPE *(To DIRCE)*
This town does not deserve your leadership.

DIRCE
Where are you going?

ANTIOPE
Far.

DIRCE
That would be wise.

LOCRUS
Excuse me, mistress.

DIRCE
Yes?

LOCRUS
There is some issue with the flow up near the source.

LABDACUS
What, more delays?

LOCRUS
I cannot say.

I had my doubts about the wisdom

Of a palace built on great Athena's pool.

DIRCE
I am a fool about such things.

Go Locrus, I will stay and sing

To the only god who has not walked away from us.

May I declare, that, for this Festival,

The wine is paid for by the Government?

LABDACUS
You may.

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DIRCE

And, please indulge me friends,

Might I be allowed to lead the sacred ritual?

LABDACUS

The what?

DIRCE

Oh, I forgot that men are not included in the rites,

Such sounds, such sights, such wild delights,

Are not for them.

LABDACUS

Why not?

FIREWOOD

Well then those rites are not for here.

BREAD

We like our men.

LABDACUS

And we like you.

BREAD

Well, some of them.

DIRCE

I only meant...

Cadmea's women have a special bond with Dionysus

Do we not?

BLOOD

They did.

FIREWOOD

We do.

DIRCE

What does that mean to you?

(FIREWOOD holds up her hands to DIRCE.)

FIREWOOD
What do you smell?

DIRCE
Must I?

FIREWOOD
You asked.

(DIRCE sniffs cautiously.)

DIRCE
Well, wine of course, and sweat, some sort of soup or sauce?

Something... unpleasant, actually.

FIREWOOD
The burnt blood of a boy.

WATER
A king.

DIRCE
Pentheus?

FIREWOOD
Yes.

DIRCE
I see.

Some day, perhaps, someone will show the place to me.

BLOOD
Why?

(Enter TIRESIAS with the infant LAIUS.)

DIRCE
I want to understand,

I was not born here, but—

TIRESIAS
This baby was.

Our city has another son.

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LABDACUS
Another one?

TIRESIAS
Yes, just like you and Menaeceus,

This boy has been entrusted to us all,

To love and raise as one of us.

BOWL
And does he have a name?

TIRESIAS
Yes, Laius.

BOWL *(In his chair)*
Oh, gods. No.

TIRESIAS
What do you see?

BOWL
I hear.

Locrus and Lycus and Labdacus.

Now Laius is left to laugh at us.

(Most gather around to admire the baby.)

BLOOD
He likes you, Labdacus.

See how he stares.

FIREWOOD *(To LAIUS)*
Is that your Uncle Labdacus?

LABDACUS
No, it is not.

BREAD
We all are aunts and uncles to the boy.

LABDACUS
Not me.

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DIRCE

Yes, well.

Babies are nice.

Where is my lad? *(BLOOD)*

Take me to Dionysus' Fire, or where it was.

It has been cold too long.

I will make him an offering and ask

How he wants us to worship him.

Why do you hesitate?

ANTIOPE

I would.

DIRCE

Are you still here?

BLOOD

I come.

BREAD

And so do I.

DIRCE

What?

Yes, and bring your drum.

GLASS

And I.

DIRCE

Yes good.

Come girls and women all.

Show me the truth of the Festival.

I have heard much,

(To LABDACUS) As have you,

It cannot all be true:

Mad naked dancing round the fire,

Wet bodies steaming with desire,

Desire satisfied, again,

And then... *(She touched LABDACUS on the chest)*

Come friends, with me.

I swell with curiosity.

(Exeunt DIRCE, BLOOD, BREAD and GLASS.)

LABDACUS *(To ANTIOPE)*
You will not join them*?*

ANTIOPE
I have no taste for sacrifice.

LABDACUS
So, you are free today?

ANTIOPE
I am.

LABDACUS
Were you expensive yesterday?

(ANTIOPE slaps him and turns to the others.)

ANTIOPE
Freedom is good.

I will stay for a while and join this happy festival. *(Exit.)*

FIREWOOD
What did you say?

LABDACUS
It was a joke.

WATER
No, it was not, apparently.

LABDACUS
Oh, Dionysus' blood.

Wait for me, everyone,

Let me be one of you.

(Exit.)

BOWL *(Sitting up suddenly and looking around)*
Eris, hello.

And Dionysus too.

(Stands.)

Is wise Athena near?

Does Zeus know you are here?

I did not think to see—

A bowl?

Of course and thanks.

(Drinks from an imaginary bowl.)

Nectar, not wine?

I see, so it is time.

(He looks around the space, staggers, and is gently caught and carried to floor by his friends, who hold him.)

Well, that was fun,

And in the end,

As I foretold, I won.

(BOWL dies on the special spot on the floor.)

The Square, including the landscaped stream

(THEBE is discovered sitting centre. She mimes throwing pebbles into a stream, watching for a while between throws. Enter LOCRUS, crossing briskly, hands full of drawings etc.)

LOCRUS *(not stopping or looking at her)*
Thebe.

THEBE *(Throws)*
Locrus.

(LOCRUS stops and turns.)

LOCRUS
You know my name.

THEBE
Locrus. *(Throws)* My brother. *(Throws)* Half.

LOCRUS
Yes. You do remember me.

THEBE *(Throws)*
I remember you… telling me about yourself. *(Throws)*

More than once. *(Throws)*

And about me. *(Throws)*

And who our mother was. *(Throws)*

How you have searched for me. *(Throws)*

(She looks at him.)

Like Cadmus. Huh.

(Throws and points.)

There, see that?

One pebble, on a pile of the rest,

Sits clear above the mud.

And so, hello Locrus.

LOCRUS
Hello sister.

(He kneels beside her and goes to put his arm around her.)

THEBE
What are you doing?

LOCRUS
Oh. Sorry. I—

THEBE
This was a mountain stream,

A laughing dream of life and light.

One pebble thrown for every man who claims

A sweaty dream with me,

Makes that much change.

But you, you rearrange it all,

You and your brutal tools

Dig up the rock and stack up palaces for fools,

And now my stream is just a decorated ditch.

LOCRUS

Why do you stay?

THEBE *(Throws and points)*

I am this place, it needs me now.

(She looks him in the eye.)

There is a prophesy, apparently,

That I will be its queen.

LOCRUS

I cannot see a way.

What can I say?

THEBE

To me? Good bye.

(Exit LOCRUS.)

Hello Tiresias.

(Enter TIRESIAS.)

TIRESIAS

My Queen.

THEBE

I have not earned that title.

When you look at me in your way,

What do you see,

Beyond what you have already said to me?

How do I come to be the queen?

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TIRESIAS
I cannot say.

Because I do not know, but also, if I did,

And told you, you would make your choices differently

And future truth would boil away.

I told Pentheus what I saw and…

THEBE
Yes, of course.

(She plays withe the pebbles left in her hand.)

What is the point of prophesy?

TIRESIAS
I truly do not know,

Unless...

THEBE
Yes?

TIRESIAS
There is no point.

Perhaps this gift that steals my life

Was, to great Zeus, like spitting on the ground,

No more.

THEBE
Would you be free of it?

TIRESIAS
With all I am.

I have more clarity right here and now than…

THEBE
Kiss me beautifully.

TIRESIAS
What?

THEBE

Do you not see?

We both have curses dressed as gifts

Wrapped in the pressure of a god's wet lips.

TIRESIAS

We have, but—

THEBE

What?

I only ask a kiss.

And offer you some peace from all that suffering.

And me,

If can taste a glimpse of what will be,

Would I not be a better queen?

TIRESIAS

But, but. You are my—

(THEBE give TIRESIAS a quick kiss. TIRESIAS is shaken and confused.)

THEBE

Forget all that.

Remember this.

TIRESIAS

You are so beautiful.

(They kiss again.)

The stars of possibility fall now like snow,

And melt and wash away,

And all I know is nothingness.

I go in search of snakes, pursued by butterflies.

(Dazed and lost, she crawls off. THEBE lies on her back, staring up.)

THEBE

Oh sweet, tormented, cursed Tiresias,

So much you bore?

(Enter MENAECEUS, busy as always.)

Menaeceus, hello.

MENAECEUS
Who speaks?

Oh, hello Thebe.

Yes, well done.

THEBE
Grandson.

MENAECEUS
To whom?

I am an orphan, family to none.

THEBE
Father of royalty.

So sad, so much blood flowing from one lad.

MENAECEUS
Excuse me, Thebe.

I have so much to do.

THEBE
None more than you.

MENAECEUS
Yes, well.

(Enter GLASS, bloody and distraught.)

GLASS
Menaeceus.

(She rushes into his arms and weeps violently. He awkwardly tries to comfort her.)

MENAECEUS
Oh dear.

I do not know..

What is it?

Are you hurt?

GLASS

It was so terrible.

Prince Labdacus...

MENAECEUS

Did what? The beast.

I feared something like this.

Oh, I could tear him—

(GLASS pushes away.)

GLASS

No. Too late.

MENAECEUS

What do you mean?

Did he..?

(Enter BREAD, also bloody. After a moment BREAD and GLASS embrace and then pull back in horror.)

BREAD

So it is true? I am not mad?

GLASS

We both were there, and you—

BREAD *(Looks are her own hands)*

I know.

And I will know that truth about myself

With every breath until I die.

(Enter BLOOD.)

BLOOD

I saw it all.

I choke on bile to think of it.

Tell me that some thing older than the gods

Devoured your hearts

And made you so.

MENAECEUS
What happened?

Someone.

Please.

THEBE *(Speaking straight up)*
Dirce.

BREAD
Led us.

GLASS
Cadmea's women.

BLOOD
Yes, and I led her.

BREAD
Up to the clearing on the mountainside,

Where, what seemed so long ago...

GLASS
Pentheus died.

BREAD
"Pentheus Died"?

So, did he lie down in the shade of an old tree

And then slip silently away?

No. He—

MENAECEUS
Pentheus?

GLASS
And Labdacus.

MENAECEUS
What?

THEBE
Patient as a pond, my lad.

It comes.

MENAECEUS *(To BLOOD)*

You say you saw.

What happened on the hill today?

BLOOD

Dirce and I arrived,

Alone at first.

I told her what my parents say

Had happened at The Fire that day.

And, as the women came,

They stepped, no, danced into the roles

As I described.

(Through the following sequence, the recounting of how a re-enactment of a remembered event morphed into the event itself, a similar conjuration begins.The women begin to mutter the chant:)

Out of the fire,

The womb the birth.

Into the fire,

The tomb the earth.

BLOOD *(Cont'd)*

The drums and dancing.

The thunder and the mud.

(Enter FIREWOOD, WATER, and ANTIOPE, also disheveled and bloody.)

FIREWOOD

I built a fire.

GLASS

It grew,

BREAD

As did the dance.

FIREWOOD

A log exploded

And hot sparks lit the ground.

BREAD
The dance,

GLASS
The memories,

THEBE
The child, the beasts,

FIREWOOD
Pentheus in the tree.

MENAECEUS
And Labdacus?

(The women react together to the name.)

WATER
Arrived.

BREAD
He did.

FIREWOOD
Shouting out something.

WATER
That he was king.

GLASS
He... Dived..

FIREWOOD
Yes.

GLASS
From a low branch,

Into—

WATER
Onto.

GLASS
The dance...

(Another collective reaction.)

Injuring some,

And pushing some into the fire.

WATER
The rest of us,

Hoping to help.

FIREWOOD
But wild with fear and pain and something else...

BREAD
Grasped desperately

To pull the screaming women from the flames

GLASS
And Labdacus.

FIREWOOD
They all have names.

GLASS
But he, quite terrified,

WATER
As he would be.

FIREWOOD
Fought desperately,

And with a strength beyond his own.

ANTIOPE
More fell, more screamed,

And more blood flew.

Before we knew, well anything,

Labdacus was—

GLASS
He died.

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BREAD
Yes, he died.

(Off. Growing crowd noise, angry male voices.)

MENAECEUS
I see.

We have no king.

GLASS
Is that all you can say?

Menaeceus,

Hear, look at us.

All this has happened since...

This was today.

This blood is his,

These blisters are my own.

This is our town.

A hundred homes shake with the screams

Of burnt and broken girls.

And Labdacus, our schoolmate,

Is dead.

BREAD
And by our hands.

MENAECEUS
I know.

My heart is struck to silence by it all.

My mind, however,

Asks “What happens now?”

This deep and jagged wound is new.

It bleeds still and, somehow,

We need to clean it, bind it up,

Despite the pain.

Or...

GLASS
What?

MENAECEUS
If it grows septic then Cadmea dies.

I have to try. *(Exit)*

BLOOD
And so do I.

BREAD
You leave me now?

BLOOD
I do.

BREAD
Come back?

BLOOD
I…I...

Menaeceus?

How can I help?

(Omnes sed THEBE ANTIOPEQUE exeunt.)

THEBE
Why do you hesitate?

ANTIOPE
What do I do now?

THEBE
You are a mother, are you not?

ANTIOPE
I am.

THEBE
You go to your children, dear.

As surely as a stream flows down a hill.

ANTIOPE
Of course. I will. *(Exeunt)*

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The Barn. The place is empty

(Enter CLOTH and BOWL Jr.)

BOWL Jr.
So, this is it.

Of course it is.

And he sits here?

CLOTH
He does.

In fact, I do not think

That I have ever seen that chair

Without him in it.

BOWL Jr. *(Sits in his father's chair, slouching comfortably.)*
Like this?

I hope he has gone for a piss,

If not then he will wet himself

To see me so when he returns.

CLOTH
No doubt, and yet...

(Looking around.)

Something is wrong.

The fire is low.

BOWL jr
I know what it is!

Those bottles all have corks in them.

CLOTH
What? Oh.

BOWL Jr
A drink I think.

CLOTH *(Moving behind the bar and opening a bottle)*
I do not think...

I hope they do not mind.

BOWL Jr
How can they?

You will pay, of course.

CLOTH
Of course.

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

WATER *(To CLOTH)*
You.

BOWL jr *(Turning to smile at them.)*
And me.

(GLASS screams. FIREWOOD staggers. BREAD supports her etc.)

WATER
But you are—

CLOTH
His son. My brother.

Where is he?

BREAD
Who? Oh.

Oh, no.

FIREWOOD
Sit, both of you and have a drink.

Your father is...

BOWL Jr
Is he dead?

FIREWOOD
Yes, yes, he is.

CLOTH *(To BOWL Jr)*
How did you know?

BOWL Jr
How did you not?

When? Where? And how?

WATER
Today.

FIREWOOD
Right there.

BREAD
And beautifully.

BOWL Jr
He could not hope for more.

Thank you.

I see you are his friends.

I hope you will be mine.

WATER
That may depend on why you come.

FIREWOOD
Not now.

Our friend is not yet cold.

BOWL jr
We have come in his name.

CLOTH
Let me.

First, I apologize for how I left,

I was—

FIREWOOD
We understand.

CLOTH
I grow grapes, as you know.

Well, now I make a wine that bears out father's name.

BOWL Jr
It wrinkles on the glass just like his face did when he laughed.

CLOTH
It does?

BOWL Jr
And on the tongue it is a love song not yet sung.

It warms the breath,

And banishes all thoughts of death,

Or even growing old.

WATER
Stop. Sold.

FIREWOOD
Yes.

WATER
If you are here to sell it.

BOWL Jr
Done.

FIREWOOD
You are his son.

He would be pleased and proud of you.

(Hand shakes and embraces. CLOTH registers the blood on them.)

CLOTH
Is this some sort of Slaughter Festival?

(An exchange of glances.)

BOWL Jr
Tell us.

GLASS
I will. I think I can.

(WATER hands her a bottle.)

Come, please, and sit beside the—

Sit with me.

Here, have some wine.

BREAD

And give her time.

(GLASS sits with BOWL Jr and CLOTH. She pours. Over the next segment she is telling them the whole story of the death of LABDACUS. She is expressive. They react. At times looking at the others. FIREWOOD, WATER, and BREAD try to remove the blood or discard the stained garments. They try to restore or present a sense of normality but are clearly shaken, even shaking. Perhaps things get dropped. Loud voices and other noises in the distance, off.)

GLASS

...and LABDACUS is—

BOWL jr

Dead.

CLOTH

Just like Pentheus.

BREAD

Yes.

What now?

BOWL Jr

Your patience, friends.

I am new here and want to understand.

You have no king? *(Nods)*

And Labdacus, who hoped to be, is... gone.

GLASS

He is.

FIREWOOD

He sought the crown, but not the duties.

WATER

No.

BOWL Jr

But, things get done?

People have homes, and food,

Clean water?

WATER
Yes.

BOWL Jr
By whom?

CLOTH
Dirce and Lycus?

WATER, FIREWOOD and BREAD
No.

WATER
By…

Well, in truth,

A pair of clever youth,

BOWL Jr
Our father loved to tell about the town

That Cadmus and Harmonia came down Olympus

On The Day to build.

CLOTH
Oh, yes he did.

“Wide open gates”

GLASS
And liberty.

WATER
So...?

BOWL Jr
It seems to me,

If I may,

That there might be another way—

(Someone tries the door and then pounds on it. All jump a bit.)

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BLOOD *(Off)*
Please, let me in.

(An exchange of glances.)

BREAD
Oh, please.

FIREWOOD
Of course.

(WATER opens the door. Enter BLOOD.)

BLOOD
I am unarmed and mean no harm.

BREAD
Of course.

Why do you need to say?

BLOOD
You do not understand.

I fled from the Fire and found,

When I came down

A madness in the streets.

It threatens to consume the town.

Lycus calls everyone into the square

To give us order, so they say.

FIREWOOD
And if we stay away?

BLOOD
He is already there,

Supported by a crowd of men

Both angry and afraid.

That fire is laid.

The spark swirls in the air.

I have no doubt that it will burn.

WATER
Unless we go to put it out.

FIREWOOD
Together then?

BOWL Jr
One drink first.

CLOTH
What?

BOWL Jr
To Harmonia.

FIREWOOD
Of course. All drink.

(They do and then leave together)

The Square

(THEBE is still lying on the ground. The crowd of men off gets louder. Chants of "Zeus" and the noise of weapons. Enter LYCUS and LOCRUS sep. LYCUS surveys the empty square.)

LYCUS
Oh good.

Where is that boy?

Ah, Locrus, you will do.

LOCRUS
But I—

LYCUS
You what?

Wish for your precious drawings to be used

To set fire to all that you have built so far?

Without me there will never be

A boulevard of ponds and palaces.

LOCRUS
I understand.

LYCUS
I think you do.

I want men all around the square,

Not seen but...there.

And some few fellows close to me.

LOCRUS
Yes. Sir.

(He addresses off.)

Stop. Listen. Good.

Hold up your spade.

Those to that side of him go back and come around,

And you go that way, quickly now.

No, I will show you, come. *(Exit.)*

(SND throughout to support the movement and growing menace of the men. Enter DIRCE hooded.)

LYCUS
What do you want?

Men! Come!

Oh, Dirce, dear.

Please fellows, give me room

To speak with this good citizen.

DIRCE
No need to jump.

I will not hurt you... dear.

LYCUS
Why are you here?

We had agreed, for your safety, dear,

That I would handle this

Until things are secure.

DIRCE
Things change.

LYCUS
What has?

You played your role quite perfectly,

The men are ready and the crown,

The crowns,

Are ours to take.

DIRCE
Perhaps.

LYCUS
What do you mean?

DIRCE
It all began exactly as we planned,

And then... things changed.

You know I only meant to frighten him.

You should have seen it, Lycus,

The fire was more than fire,

Rage and desire fed on each other,

A group of mothers, sisters, little girls

Became a thousand breasted beast

That .. did this thing.

LYCUS
Well, it is done.

DIRCE
Just know this all the same,

We may not be the players in this game.

(The group from the BARN are heard to approach and begin to enter.)

LYCUS

Perhaps,

Leave this to me.

(DIRCE pulls up her hood and steps off.)

Come, friends, and welcome.

WATER
This is a public square.

LYCUS
Of course, and you are always welcome everywhere;

Within Cadmea's walls and public halls,

The palace, and the prison cells.

FIREWOOD
We come—

LYCUS
Yes, so I see,

Just as I asked you to,

Despite the weariness and shame

You all must feel.

BOWL Jr
Cadmea has no king.

LYCUS
Yes, for the moment,

Thanks to many here.

But have no fear.

A better time is near.

Peace and good government will be restored.

FIREWOOD
We—

LYCUS
We? Exactly who?

FIREWOOD

Cadmea's citizens.

LYCUS

Well, if you claim to speak for all,

Speak up.

Of course, if you are hoarse from screaming, well.

You have the choice to listen, dear.

(Some male laughter from off.)

Observe.

(Louder.)

Friends of young Labdacus. *(Some cheer)*

Fathers with sons the age of Labdacus *(More shout)*

Cadmea's women, dripping with his blood,

Now celebrate his murder and demand of me

That we yield to their lawless anarchy.

(DIRCE steps forward.)

DIRCE

Not all. *(She lowers her hood)*

I yield to you, king of my heart.

You are Cadmea's hope to save her from

A fate far worse than slavery.

Peace and prosperity are ours to grasp

But only you are equal to the task.

What story will your children's children sing?

Cadmea needs you, now, to be her king.

LYCUS

I am not one of you by birth,

Or common memory,

I cannot—

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DIRCE

But you must.

We put our trust in you.

LYCUS

Whoever rules, the laws must rule us all.

Where is the lawyer lad?

BLOOD

Here, sir.

LYCUS

What do our laws say must be done?

BLOOD

Pentheus—

LYCUS

No. The other one.

BLOOD

Harmonia?

LYCUS

Speak up.

BLOOD *(Looking at BREAD)*

Harmonia's Balance is what Cadmus found

Brought peace and plenty to this ground

Drenched in the blood of serpent warriors.

Two crowns, equal in every way, yet different.

Like wine and food, or shield and sword,

This is the safety of our town,

Protected by a double crown.

LYCUS

Most wise.

This then is what the future sings,

Our children's children shall be kings,

And queens.

Stand Dirce, let the truth be seen,

If I am king, then you must be my queen.

(Cheers, shouts of "Lydus and Dirce" from off.)

GLASS
No!!

LYCUS
Take her.

(The citizens form a defensive circle.)

FIREWOOD
There is a better way.

LYCUS
And her.

(The menace of the men increases. The Barn group circle around GLASS.)

BREAD *(A broken bottle in her hand)*
Then take us all.

FIREWOOD
Cadmea needs no king.

DIRCE
Riot and treason!

LYCUS
Arrest these murderers before they sacrifice us all.

(Enter MENAECEUS carrying the infant LAIUS.)

MENAECEUS
Cadmea has a king!

LYCUS
Yes, I—

MENAECUS
His name is Laius,

Only son of Labdacus,

Who was named to the crown

By Cadmus and Harmonia themselves.

This is the head where one crown will be worn,

The other head, I think, is not yet born.

LYCUS

This is ridiculous.

DIRCE

How do we know?

BLOOD

Know what?

DIRCE

That this lost child, left to be raised by none and all,

Is king because you call him so?

THEBE

I know. *(Comes onto her knees)*

I was there.

LYCUS

You were where?

THEBE

Oh, I was everywhere:

High on Olympus with the gods,

Right here before anyone,

And then again right here when Cadmus named our town.

I will be here long after all of you.

But most important, now,

I was there when Labdacus poured his seed into my pool.

(Stands.)

I still can taste his face.

I was the place where the boy king grew.

And I was there when Laius swam to the light.

I swear before you all.

This child, my son, is Laius,

Rightful king of Thebes.

GLASS

Let us at least be ruled by one

Who is in every way Cadmea's son.

(A few shouts of "Laius" and "Pentheus' Law".)

DIRCE

Excuse me. King of where?

MENAECEUS

Cadmea.

DIRCE

No, she named herself.

And she is free to take him as her king

As many mothers do.

But what is that to this?

She is just lost in her own kiss.

BLOOD

Thebe came down Olympus on The Day,

Respect and honour what she has to say.

Tell us please, Thebe, what you know.

THEBE *(Looking around, bewildered by the attention and pressure.)*

I know... I know...

I know exactly where this mighty river flows.

Both prophesy and destiny decree,

I will be the queen of Thebes.

(She scoops up a double handful of muddy water and goes to drink it, smearing filth on her face.)

But others first.

The bad, the worse, and worst.

Oh, sweet Tiresias, how can you think this did not drive you mad?

(She leaps downstage as if on stepping stones, stopping to peer into pools.)

A cataract of blood and mud and lust, *(Splashes LYCUS and DIRCE*)

A crime unthinkable,

A chariot broken in the dust.

Great love, of course.

A terrible mistake.

Another one.

Drought, fire, and plague.

Poor Oedipus, his eyes.

Tiresias, have you seen his eyes?

His sons, their slaughter, then his daughter's,

All flow down from this little boy

To wash up on the beach at Troy.

DIRCE

This is your witness, then?

Does she convince you, men?

LYCUS

Well she convinces me,

In her we see the madness that waits for us all

If we let royal power fall into the bloody hands

Of this wild desperate mob that stands

Before us here, and makes pretence,

Without a scrap of legal evidence,

To stick some orphan on the throne

So they can claim it as their own.

MENAECEUS *(To the crowd)*

But there is evidence.

Will you hear me?

LYCUS

We have no time for—

MENAECEUS

You know me, fellow citizens,

Am I a fool or mad?

And you know that I stand

For fairness, order, and the law.

Then trust me when I say I saw

Prince Labdacus lie down with Thebe, and...

LYCUS

And most of them have done the same.

BLOOD

Have they?

What man will stand before us all and swear

Against his mother's trust and love,

That he has laid with her?

I thought so.

None.

(MENAECEUS takes out THEBE's book and shows it to BLOOD.)

MENAECEUS

None that live still.

You know how Labdacus would write his name.

BLOOD

This is his hand.

MENAECEUS

Please, read aloud, so all my understand.

BLOOD

"I am Prince Labdacus.

It is my heart's desire,

To sire a son with Thebe here today,

This boy, as wise Pentheus' said

Will be Cadmea's king, when I am dead."

LYCUS
But, but...

GLASS *(Standing beside MENAECEUS)*
I was there too,

It all is true.

LYCUS
Two children.

BLOOD
Loved and trusted by the town.

LYCUS
I will not let them bring me down.

DIRCE
Nor will they, dear.

Laius has many years

Before he is a man or king.

Young princes die so easily.

He needs a Regent as his father did.

LYCUS *(Aloud)*
Good then.

I see the baby's father in his eyes,

It is, I think, both right and wise

That we, together, raise the boy to rule,

Exactly as you ask.

And I accept the task of guiding him.

(To BLOOD.)

Write to Nycteus right away,

Say what has happened and what I suggest.

He will, you must agree, decide the rest.

(To ALL.)

For now, when all is said,

Prince Labdacus is dead,

And he deserves a royal funeral.

(to BLOOD.)

However we do that.

(Exit LYCUS, DIRCE, BLOOD, and LOCRUS.)

FIREWOOD

We all deserve a funeral.

Come citizens and customers,

Let us bear up our fine old friend

And turn the mountain fire towards a better end,

That he may once more tickle Are's nose.

CLOTH

Shall we take turns remembering his tales?

FIREWOOD

And recipes.

BREAD

And all the almost clever things he loved to say.

WATER

So welcome one and all,

To our hearth

BOWL jr

To drink his health is rich red wine.

(Exit with Water and BREAD etc. Perhaps BREAD beats a funereal rhythm on her drum.)

CLOTH *(To the men)*

And trust me, my friends, it is very fine.

(Exit.)

GLASS *(To MENAECEUS)*

So, thanks to you,

We now have peace,

And hope for honest government.

MENAECEUS
We do.

If we can keep it.

We also have a king, of sorts,

And those two snakes.

GLASS
We do

(Takes his hand.)

And we have you.

THEBE *(Who has been sitting, playing in the puddle, looks up)*
And we shall call our city Thebes,

And I shall be your queen.

End of Play

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