

# **KING OEDIPUS**

**A Play in Three Acts  
by Tawfiq Al-Hakim  
1949**

## CHARACTERS

ANTIGONE

JOCASTA

OEDIPUS

A VOICE from the crowd of Thebans

HIGH PRIEST of Thebes

TIRESIAS

CREON

A HERDSMAN from Thebes

A THEBAN who returns with the herdsman

AN OLD MAN from Corinth

A SERVANT from Thebes

CHORUS OF THEBANS

ANTIGONE'S YOUNGER SISTER AND TWO YOUNGER  
BROTHERS

PEOPLE OF THEBES

TIRESIAS' SERVANT BOY

## Act One

*KING OEDIPUS is leaning against one of the columns of the hall of his palace. He is motionless, like a statue, and looks long and thoughtfully at the city beyond the spacious balcony. QUEEN JOCASTA appears surrounded by her four young children. She is gesturing to them to slow down and walk quietly. Meanwhile ANTIGONE, the eldest, whispers to her mother.*

ANTIGONE (*whispering while looking at OEDIPUS*): Mother! Why is he looking at the city this way?

JOCASTA: You go to him, Antigone. Cheer him up, for he always listens to you.

ANTIGONE (*approaching him gently*): Father! What are you thinking about, alone like this?

OEDIPUS (*turning towards her*): Is it you, Antigone? (*He sees the QUEEN and the other children.*) And you, Jocasta? . . . All of you here around me. What brings you here?

JOCASTA: This worry oppressing you, Oedipus . . . Don't tell us it's the plague which has settled on the city. For you have no way to repel it. You have done what you could. You hastened to seek out Tiresias so he could advise you of any inspiration he had gathered from his knowledge of the human sciences and secrets of the unknown. Why then do you remain downcast like this for so long?

OEDIPUS: The ordeal of Thebes . . . This city which entrusted its destiny to me . . .

JOCASTA: No, Oedipus! It is not simply the city's ordeal . . . I know you as I know myself. There's another reason . . . There's a disturbance in your soul. I see its traces in your eyes.

OEDIPUS: A disturbance the cause of which I don't know . . . It's as though some powerful evil were lying in wait for me.

JOCASTA: Don't say that! It's nothing but the people's pains reflecting their specter on your pure soul. We are your family, Oedipus. It is our duty now to cheer you up. Here we go, children! Come round your father and disperse these dark clouds from his head and heart.

ANTIGONE: Father! Let me ask you something you mustn't refuse. Tell us the story of that beast you killed long ago.

OEDIPUS: I suspect, Jocasta, that you're the one who inspires your children to ask me that always. They have heard that story from me many times.

JOCASTA: Why does that trouble you, Oedipus? In any case, it is a page from your life that is right for our children to know thoroughly. Every father is a hero in his children's eyes. So why not you, when you are a true hero in the eyes of all of Thebes. Despite that, rest assured that your children are the ones who yearn to hear that from you all the time. Look at their eager eyes and bated breath.

ANTIGONE: Yes, Father. Tell us how you defeated the beast.

OEDIPUS: Do you really want that, Antigone? Haven't you tired of it yet? . . . and your sister and brothers?

ANTIGONE (*shaking her head with the others in the negative*): We shall never tire of it.

OEDIPUS (*taking a seat with his children around him*): Then listen . . . That was twenty years ago . . .

JOCASTA (*sitting down near him*): Seventeen years ago, so far as I recall . . .

OEDIPUS: Yes, you're right. That day as I approached the walls of

Thebes, it happened that . . .

ANTIGONE: From the beginning, Father! Tell it to us from the beginning.

OEDIPUS: That has no relationship to the incident with the beast. Nevertheless, let it be the way you wish . . . You know that I grew up, like you, in a royal palace. Like you, I found love and affection in the care of a generous father—King Polybus—and an affectionate mother—Queen Merope. They raised and educated me like a prince until I became a strong, sturdy, intelligent youth. I was proficient in horsemanship and was wild about knowledge. Yes, Antigone, I had the glow your eyes have. I loved to investigate the realities of things. Then one evening, I learned from an old man in the palace whose tongue was loosened by wine that I was not the son of the king and queen. They had never had a child. I was, rather, a foundling they had adopted. From that hour, I never had a moment's rest and never ceased thinking about the truth of my origin. I departed from that land. I wandered aimless in search of my reality until my travels brought me to the walls of Thebes.

ANTIGONE: And here you met the beast.

OEDIPUS: Yes, Daughter. It was a terrifying beast . . . a lion.

JOCASTA: With a woman's face!

ANTIGONE: And the wings of an eagle. You always forget, Father, to tell us about its wings.

OEDIPUS: Yes! . . . yes. It had wings like an eagle. It advanced against me from the forest.

ANTIGONE: Walking or flying?

OEDIPUS: Walking like a bird . . . It opened its mouth . . .

ANTIGONE: And posed you the riddle.

OEDIPUS: Yes, before eating me, it cast me a riddle . . . that riddle it is said it used to pose to any of the Thebans it met . . .

JOCASTA: And none of them was able to solve it! Then it would assault them and kill them immediately. Thus it devastated a great number of people in the city. Indeed, Oedipus, the people of Thebes continued for a time to avoid remaining on outside the walls till sunset for fear of meeting the beast. They called it "Father of Terror." It frightened people for a long time. My husband, King Laius, had died shortly before and left me in the prime of life to live in this cold palace. I was trembling with fright from the rumors spread in the city about Father Terror and his victims. My brother Creon was at that time the regent. He was not able to repel the disaster. The people rioted asking protection from that danger. Then he did not hesitate to announce his wish that the city's throne be bestowed on the person who rescued it from the beast.

OEDIPUS: Not just the throne, Jocasta. There was another reward even more precious . . . the hand of the widowed queen. I knew none of all this when I met the beast. If I had known that lovely prize awaiting, I wonder what I would have done . . . Perhaps my heart would have been in turmoil, my hand would have trembled, and I would not have been victorious.

ANTIGONE: How did the beast die?

JOCASTA: When your father solved the riddle which no one else could, Father Terror was enraged and threw himself into the sea. At that time I was here in my palace listening to what people had to say about that riddle the beast posed its victims. I didn't know what it was, for no one before your father had returned alive to us to tell us about it. I won't conceal from you, Oedipus, now that at that time I too was posing myself a question, rather, a riddle: who do you suppose the victor will be? Will I love him? For a long time I cried out from the depths of my soul in the still of

the night: who will be the winner? . . . not over the beast . . . but of my heart . . . my heart which had not yet known love – despite my early marriage to the good king Laius. But when I saw you, Oedipus, and loved you, I perceived that my riddle had also been solved.

ANTIGONE: How did Father Terror present his riddle to you, Father?

OEDIPUS: He said to me when he had ruffled his wing feathers: “You who approach, what have you come to do here?” I told him, “I have come to search out my reality.” He said, “I have a question for you. If you are unable to answer it, I will devour you. What animal walks in the morning on four feet, at noon on two, and in the evening on three?”

ANTIGONE: Don't you answer, Father. Let me solve the riddle today in your place. You answered it in this way: “Beast, you have frightened the city, but you will not conquer me. That animal you ask me about is man! When young he crawls on all fours. When adult he walks upright on his two feet. In old age, he hobbles on his feet and stick.”

OEDIPUS: The answer, as you see, is obvious, Antigone. I am amazed that so many people failed to get it. Perhaps we may contain many answers to our questions without knowing or seeing . . .

JOCASTA: Perhaps the beast wanted to make fun of man who does not see himself. But you, Oedipus, saw and answered. In this way, you disheartened the beast, silenced him, and threw him into the sea. You entered Thebes. You found it ready to welcome you, to seat you on its throne, and to bestow on you the hand of its queen. Thus you came to me and lived with me. You fathered these fine, handsome offspring and gave us this happiness.

OEDIPUS: Yes, this happiness which pervaded me and made me forget my reason for setting out and the object of my search.

JOCASTA: Your reality? Of what importance to us is this reality? . . . so long as we're happy! I've told you often not to think that I would prefer you to be a descendent of kings. I and our children are proud that you are instead from the elite of heroes. For this reason, I like you to narrate your heroism to our young ones and to give them your lesson on every occasion. Indeed, I shan't deny that I too always love to hear this story from you. It reminds me of those moments when my heart was awaiting you, anxiously, trembling, not knowing whether you would win its key or whether it should throw itself into a sea of oblivion. Oedipus! My husband! It seems I—and you too—were destined to have complete and unsullied happiness. I had a child by Laius. But no doubt god desired happiness for us and inspired him to repudiate this child, since he would have become an ill omen for him. He handed him over after his birth to someone to kill him on the mountain. Thus there is no phantom to rise between us and spoil your happiness . . . Oedipus! What's troubling you? The dark cold has returned to settle on your face.

OEDIPUS: My anxiety is for the people in their ordeal. I trembled when you mentioned the word "happiness" . . . I sensed something. This word frightens me now . . . Listen! What is this sound?

*(JOCASTA and THE CHILDREN turn to the balcony.)*

ANTIGONE: They are coming down from the hills, crowding the streets, carrying branches . . .

JOCASTA: Yes, Oedipus! . . . It's the people of Thebes, coming to you, no doubt, bearing branches in supplication.

*(OEDIPUS silently looks from the balcony, surrounded by his family.)*

THEBANS *(outside shouting)*: Oh King Oedipus! . . . King Oedipus!

VOICE *(from the crowd outside)*: Oh you who are king, sitting on the



throne of Thebes! You see the throngs of your people, men and women, young and old, rushing to throw themselves at your portal's threshold, raising in their hands the branches of supplication which quiver over their weakened bodies.

Misfortune has stormed through the city as you can see with your eyes. Death afflicts the herds in the pastures and strikes children at random in their cradles. The plague is harvesting spirits throughout your realm and spreading destruction. It mocks our bloodied hearts and our flowing tears . . . Oedipus! You who rescued this city from Father Terror, rescue it today from this plague. The people who proclaimed you a hero and seated you on the throne of this nation—so you would protect it from tribulations—now demands that you act to aid it and rise to its succor.

OEDIPUS: My wretched people! I am not oblivious to your pains nor unaware. I am deeply hurt by your plight. I have not forgotten that you raised me to this throne to protect you and that you expect action from me to save you. So let me have time to think, to plan, and to act.

VOICE (*from outside*): Oh King, seek an oracle from God. Here is the High Priest entering your palace. Listen to him.

PRIEST: Oedipus! I have come to say one thing to you and then depart. Your people are falling around you like leaves from the tree. If no leaf has yet fallen from your branch, this should, we think, not prevent your concern for the state of others. But concern alone is not enough. The matter, as you see, cannot be helped by solving riddles or by finding the answers for enigmas. Nothing will deliver us save a return to God.

OEDIPUS: And do I prevent you from returning to God?

PRIEST: You don't prevent us . . . You can't, but you are always investigating what you ought not and always asking questions which you should not pose . . . Heavenly revelation is for you a subject for scrutiny and exploration.

OEDIPUS: If only I were able to free myself from my nature . . .

PRIEST: There is no need of that for you or for us. We have sought another to go to the temple at Delphi to ask God's guidance in what is right for us to do to lift this wrath from us.

OEDIPUS: Who is this man you have dispatched?

PRIEST: He is Creon!

JOCASTA: My brother?

PRIEST: He is, as we all know, a man who does not debate reality nor dispute actuality. He will not say to the priests in the temple at Delphi: furnish me tangible evidence that this oracle truly came down to you from God and did not originate in your minds.

OEDIPUS: I am happy that Creon has your confidence, but I have not yet understood what you came to ask of me . . .

PRIEST: Creon will no doubt return soon. If he brings a command from the temple, are you ready, Oedipus, to carry out his command to save the city?

OEDIPUS: Now I understand . . . (*after a moment's thought*) I can answer you, High Priest . . . I shall not hesitate to carry out whatever can help save the city.

PRIEST: I am going then, to return to you with Creon and the heavenly oracle he brings.

*(The HIGH PRIEST leaves. OEDIPUS and his family remain, silent.)*

JOCASTA (*after a moment*): Mercy on us, Oh Heaven. I'm . . . afraid.

OEDIPUS: Don't be afraid . . . I'm not afraid. Nothing would truly frighten me unless I saw danger threatening you and our children . . . As for the prattle of these priests . . .

JOCASTA: Don't say that, Oedipus! Don't say that in front of our children. You should know that I owe my happiness to God.

OEDIPUS: Are you sure of that?

JOCASTA: Put aside these ill-omened questions . . . You are no longer sure of anything since you learned you were a foundling. It was a shock to you. You grew up with loving parents. You never doubted that they were your parents. When the veil was suddenly lifted for you to reveal as counterfeit what you thought reality, your confidence in things was destroyed.

OEDIPUS (*turning to the balcony*): Hush . . . What's this commotion?

THEBANS (*outside shouting*): Oh King Oedipus! . . . King Oedipus!

VOICE (*outside among the people*): This is Tiresias who has come. Seek his advice. He may give you a message from the heavens.

(*The blind TIRESIAS enters. A BOY leads him.*)

TIRESIAS: You sent for me, Oedipus?

OEDIPUS: Yes!

(*JOCASTA leads the children out.*)

OEDIPUS (*on seeing the chamber empty*): Now we are alone.

TIRESIAS: I know without needing divine revelation your reason for summoning me. I can read your soul. The people demand that you save them. It is not only a cure for the plague which arouses your concern . . . it is the danger rising round you . . . The priests don't like your way of thinking. They are disturbed by your mentality. They are comfortable with a person like Creon. The situation in Thebes today is one which could alarm a king. It is propitious for a revolt. For

every trial which shakes the masses shakes at the very same time the props of the throne.

OEDIPUS: Do you think Creon can overcome the plague the way I overcame the beast?

TIRESIAS: Who knows? Creon went to seek an oracle. He will soon return with the command vouchsafed him.

OEDIPUS: And you, Tiresias . . . whom the people believe acquainted with the human sciences and privy to heaven's secrets . . . Have you no remedy to bring an end to this ordeal which afflicts the people?

TIRESIAS: I have grown old . . . It is proper for me to watch what happens from a distance. Proceed on your way alone, Oedipus.

OEDIPUS: You wish to rid yourself of me now that you see danger advancing on me and know the circumstances which will endanger my sovereignty.

TIRESIAS: Oedipus, you have will, a strong hand, and a clear eye. What do you want from an old man like me who is feeble and blind?

OEDIPUS: I perceive what is behind your words . . . I know you, Tiresias! A person like you does not withdraw his hand from what is around him without a reason.

TIRESIAS: I am withdrawing my hand this time in order to see what will happen.

OEDIPUS: To see me fall the way you saw me rise?

TIRESIAS: It is a great enjoyment for me to see what will happen when I leave matters to the hand of fate.

OEDIPUS: You will not have a chance to enjoy this, Tiresias. I know

how to spoil your plan for you. You think you have the reins of my throne in your hand, but your veil is in mine. I will tear it away in front of the people and disclose your true countenance whenever I wish.

TIRESIAS: Not so fast, Oedipus. Don't let anger make you lose course.

OEDIPUS: Be confident that I shall not allow you to trifle with me. Indeed, I am quite capable of having the people trifle with you.

TIRESIAS: What can you tell the people?

OEDIPUS: Everything, Tiresias . . . everything! I don't fear the truth. Indeed, I am looking forward to the day when I can free myself of that great lie I have been living for seventeen years.

TIRESIAS: Don't be insane!

OEDIPUS: I may go insane any moment, open the gates of this palace, and go out to the people shouting: listen, Citizens of Thebes! Hear the story of a blind man who wished to mock you and of a well-intentioned man with no ulterior motive who joined him in the farce . . . I am not a hero, I never met a beast with the body of a lion, wings of an eagle, and a woman's face which posed riddles. It is your naïve imagination which liked this picture and made popular this image. What I actually met was an ordinary lion which was preying on people who tarried outside your walls. I was able to kill it with my cudgel, throw its body into the sea, and rid you of it. But Tiresias, this brilliant blind man, inspired you—for his own purposes, not for God's sake—to appoint that hero your king. Yes! He's the one who desired that and planned it. He is the one who taught me the solution for that puzzle about the animal that crawls on its hands and feet . . .

TIRESIAS: Hush! Hush . . . lower your voice!

OEDIPUS: He is the one who in former times inspired Laius to kill his son in the cradle by leading his father to believe that it was heaven which revealed to him that the child would kill his father if he grew up. For Tiresias, this dangerous blind man, resolved with a will of iron to deprive the throne of Thebes of its legitimate heir. He wished the throne to go to a foreigner. What he wished for has come to pass.

TIRESIAS: I told you to lower your voice, Oedipus.

OEDIPUS: Yes . . . This is Tiresias . . . who has had you believe that he can read the unknown mysteries and hear heavenly voices, while he hears nothing in reality but the voice of his will and peruses nothing but the lines of his scheme and plan. He wished—and was proud of it—to change the course of events, to change the established system of inheritance, and to challenge the will of heaven which had produced a son and heir for Laius. He did that in order to put on the throne with his mortal hand a person who was the offspring of his head and the product of his thought.

TIRESIAS: Calm yourself, Oedipus . . . The soul's storms extinguish the intellect's lamp.

OEDIPUS: You know now what I can do to you?

TIRESIAS: And to yourself?

OEDIPUS: I have no fear of the truth for myself . . . even if it casts me off the throne. You know that sovereignty is not my goal. I was in Corinth, my cradle where I grew up in the arms of the excellent Polybus and the compassionate Merope. Their sole aim was to convince the people that I was their son and to put me on their throne. But I fled from that kingship to search for the truth of my origin. I fled from Corinth, because I could not bear to live a lie. I came here . . . only to live a greater lie.

TIRESIAS: Perhaps the lie is the natural atmosphere for your life . . .

OEDIPUS: And your life too, Tiresias.

TIRESIAS: And my life too . . . and the life of every human being. Don't forget you're the hero of this city. For Thebes needs a hero. It believed in the story of Father Terror! Beware of depriving the people of their myth.

OEDIPUS: Nothing forces me to keep silent except my fear of depriving my wife and children of their belief in my heroism . . . And nothing causes me such pain as being forced into this lengthy lie with them. I force myself not to shout to them when they are reciting before me the story of Father Terror: don't believe this nonsense! The truth, my children, is . . .

TIRESIAS: Beware, Oedipus! . . . Beware! My great fear is that your reckless fingers will trifle with the veil of Truth and that your trembling fingertips will come too close to her face and eyes . . . You fled from Corinth, roaming in pursuit of her, but she escaped from you. You came to Thebes announcing you lacked origin or lineage in order to display her to the people. She drew away from you. Leave Truth alone, Oedipus . . . Don't challenge her!

OEDIPUS: Why do you challenge heaven, Tiresias? Do you suppose you are of a stronger fiber, are more resolute and sharper-eyed than I?

TIRESIAS: I am not sharper-eyed than you, Oedipus . . . I see nothing. And I see no god in existence save our volition. I willed and to that extent was divine . . . I truly compelled Thebes to accept the king I wished for it. I got what I wished for. As you see . . .

OEDIPUS (*in a sarcastic tone*): Lower your voice, Tiresias!

TIRESIAS: Don't make fun of me . . . and don't presume—if your determination to execute your threat is real—that I am incapable of confronting the people. Open your gates, if you wish. Go to your people and raise your voice with whatever

you wish. Then you will know what Tiresias has to say!

OEDIPUS: What will you say?

TIRESIAS: I will shout at the top of my voice: People! I have not imposed my will on you for any glory I cover but for an idea I believe in: that you have a will . . . It was not because of hatred between me and Laius or antagonism between me and Creon . . . rather I wished to turn the page on the hereditary monarchy of this ancient family, to make you the ones who choose your king from a wide spectrum, without regard to descent and lineage, with nothing to recommend him except his service to you and with no title for him other than his heroism for you. Thus there exists in your land only your will. That's all that should exist.

OEDIPUS: And what of your will, you brilliant blind man! You know the people find no pleasure in having a will. The day they have it in hand, they hasten to give it to a hero their legends have contrived or to a god enveloped in the clouds of their dreams. It seems to be too much for them to bear. They are not strong enough to preserve it and wish to be free of it to cast aside its burden. But you are a man blinded by delusion. You don't truly strive for public glory. You want, however, to be the fountainhead of events, the source of upheavals, the motive force changing and replacing human destinies and natural elements. I see in you this cloaked presumption. I read in your soul this hidden conceit!

TIRESIAS: I have a right to boast a little, Oedipus . . . You don't deny that I have succeeded. That you are on the throne is nothing other than a manifestation of my will.

OEDIPUS: I am tired of hearing that from you. I summoned you to hear your opinion of this ordeal, not the hymn of your glory. I am not clear about your position with me . . . Are you with me? Have you turned against me? I don't see the grounds on which you have founded your will.



TIRESIAS: You will learn that at the appropriate time, Oedipus.

OEDIPUS: When?

TIRESIAS: When Creon arrives with that oracle from the temple at Delphi. I am well advised to learn something of the will of heaven before proceeding to form my will.

OEDIPUS: Am I able to rely on your support, Tiresias?

TIRESIAS: It would be stupid, Oedipus, to fear anything from me.

OEDIPUS: Let's await then what Creon will bring . . .

TIRESIAS: Let me go now . . . until it is time for action. At this hour I will say to you only: confront your destiny, Oedipus! Don't be afraid . . . I am with you!

OEDIPUS: Are you confident, Tiresias?

TIRESIAS: Where is the boy who leads me?

OEDIPUS (*as though addressing himself*): My destiny? . . . What is my destiny?

TIRESIAS: Where's the boy?

*(OEDIPUS goes to the door and opens it. The BOY enters. He leads TIRESIAS out. OEDIPUS remains alone, leaning his head against a pillar, downcast. It is not long before JOCASTA enters by herself.)*

JOCASTA (*searching the chamber with her eyes*): The prophet Tiresias has departed?

OEDIPUS (*turning to her*): Yes!

JOCASTA: Perhaps he has told you how to drive away this affliction and end this ordeal . . .

OEDIPUS (*speaking to himself*): I must not rely on anything but this hand of mine . . . This hand which knows how to deal harshly with anyone who threatens evil to you or me . . . whether a beast, a person . . . or a god!

JOCASTA: Don't scorn God, Oedipus! You owe our happiness to Him . . . It's not possible He would wish you harm. He is the one who led you from Corinth to this place where you found me and where we have lived in contentment producing these dutiful children.

OEDIPUS: I no longer see anything in the fog surrounding me. I know only that a disaster threatens me . . . From what direction? I don't know! From what hand? I don't know! I am like a lion in the forest which senses a snare set near it but doesn't know where it is or who set it. I am fumbling and groping like a blind man. I see nothing and no one! I merely smell the scent of danger near me . . .

JOCASTA: Your love for us, my beloved husband, is what is making you imagine this. The plague will not approach our house! It will not touch anyone of our young children! It is rather another infection which I think you are doubtless giving me . . . that anxiety disturbing your peace of mind. I, too, Oedipus, am filled by that alarming foreboding. I almost feel as if there were something coarse strangling me . . . here around my neck. I can hardly breathe. I sense a dark melancholy in which my soul sinks like a corpse into the darkness of the tomb.

OEDIPUS: Hush! Don't mention death, Jocasta.

JOCASTA: Do you see how my depression distresses you just as your anxiety and concern distress me? It would be good, Oedipus, for us to banish these ghosts from us. It is no doubt the atmosphere of this city, heavy with suffering, which has spread these dark, gloomy clouds through our souls . . .

OEDIPUS: Perhaps . . .

JOCASTA: Whatever the cause is, it's our duty to be resolute and to pretend to be joyful for the sake of our children.

OEDIPUS: Yes! . . . Where's Antigone?

JOCASTA: This girl, Oedipus, believes in you more than you do yourself. I left her just now telling the other children that you will no doubt vanquish the plague the same way you did Father Terror, because God did not put you on this throne in vain . . .

OEDIPUS (*in almost a whisper*): My dear daughter!

JOCASTA: She believes that her destiny is bound to yours . . . For a long time she has told me that she hopes for nothing for her future except to live in the temple of your heroism and to see the world as you see it . . . to have your eyes, to see life's riddles, puzzles, and secrets with them.

OEDIPUS (*as though speaking to himself*): I hope to have her eyes to see for me the soul's tranquility, the heart's truthfulness, and existence's purity . . .

JOCASTA (*listening*): Listen, Oedipus! . . . What is this din?

THEBANS (*outside shouting*): Creon has come! . . . Creon's come!

OEDIPUS (*looking towards the balcony*): Yes! He's come . . . What do you suppose your brother has brought?

JOCASTA (*looking towards the balcony*): He must have brought good news, for he has fastened a garland of flowers to his forehead.

OEDIPUS (*at the balcony*): Here's the High Priest with him. They are making their way through the crowds of people and waving a greeting to them.

JOCASTA: They are nearing the palace gate. I shall go to allow you to devote yourselves to the city's welfare.

OEDIPUS: I have a burning desire to know what he has brought.

JOCASTA: I hope you will learn from him now something that will comfort your soul and spread peace through it. (*She departs.*)

OEDIPUS (*in a whisper*): Yes! . . . I will learn now.

(*The HIGH PRIEST enters with CREON.*)

PRIEST: Here is Creon who has returned from the Delphi temple with a mighty oracle. I would like him to reveal it to you in private, Oedipus, if you will permit him to speak.

OEDIPUS: I am listening to him. Let him reveal to us everything he brings.

CREON: Oedipus, here's what I've learned . . . The oracle has revealed to us the secret of this anger which heaven has sent down on our land.

OEDIPUS: What is this secret? Quickly?

CREON: There is an abomination in this land which must cease. Otherwise, we are destined to perish.

OEDIPUS: What abomination?

CREON: A sin befouls Thebes which must be erased.

OEDIPUS: Explain!

CREON: Blood from our land has been shed and that must necessarily be washed away with blood.

OEDIPUS: Whose blood! . . . Who did it?

CREON: Laius! Before you came to us, we had a king named Laius.

OEDIPUS: I know! I know! . . . I know his name, but I never saw

him.

CREON: This king was killed.

OEDIPUS: Killed?

CREON: The order of God is unambiguous. Justice must be done and revenge taken on the killer.

OEDIPUS: If this is all you've brought, then it's true . . . but this crime, so far as I can see, happened long ago.

CREON: It's been about seventeen years.

OEDIPUS: Will it be easy after this length of time for us to follow its tracks and lift the veil from the killer's face?

CREON: The God said: "Search and you shall find!"

OEDIPUS: I love nothing better than searching . . . my whole life is nothing but a search. So long as God – as you say – is the one ordering me now to search and investigate you will find me thoroughly obedient. Do you hear me, High Priest?

PRIEST: I have heard . . . I hope you will pursue to the end your search for the killer.

OEDIPUS: Here I begin the search, at once . . . Tell me, Creon. Where was Laius killed? Was it in his palace? Or in the city? Or outside it?

CREON: Laius had left Thebes on pilgrimage to the temple at Delphi to consult the oracle, as he said, on the matter of his son whom he had delivered up to death long before, on the command of heaven.

OEDIPUS (*as though speaking to himself*): On the command of heaven . . . yes . . . That poor king! . . . And then?

CREON: There isn't anything more . . . He did not return to us after that day he set forth.

OEDIPUS: Was there no witness who saw or heard anything of what happened to him?

CREON: All the witnesses were taken by death . . . except for one. He was able to escape with his skin . . . We learned only one thing from him.

OEDIPUS: What was it?

CREON: He related that a gang of thieves waylaid King Laius and killed him and his attendants.

OEDIPUS: Would thieves dare attack a king this way?

CREON: This is the account he gave us.

OEDIPUS: I don't think people like that would attack the king unless someone here had incited them to it, spurred them on, and paid them a price for that.

CREON: This is what occurred to us too at that time.

OEDIPUS: In spite of that, you did nothing to search for the killers or to disclose the hand which directed the crime?

CREON: At the time, we were preoccupied. Our attention was seized by a more alarming disaster which took us by surprise and left us sleepless.

OEDIPUS: What catastrophe is greater than the murder of your reigning king?

CREON: Father Terror had appeared at the time killing people with his riddles outside the walls of Thebes!

OEDIPUS: Yes! . . . Yes, how stupid you all are. My eye sees

everything clearly now. I can almost see the person who planned all that . . . and know the hand which moved and the will which incited . . .

PRIEST: What are you saying, Oedipus? Repeat once more what your lips uttered.

OEDIPUS: What my lips uttered is no concern of yours. You are awaiting my action and seek justice . . . The killer of Laius must be presented to you, even if that is not entirely to my liking . . . Truly! . . . You are right! It had not occurred to me that the pillars of my throne are plunged in a king's blood. I wouldn't have thought that the person who wanted that would go so far as crime. I will not hesitate! Yes! Do you hear? I shall not hesitate to hand over the killer . . . not just to save Thebes but to save my conscience. High Priest! . . . Go and announce to the people that I will promptly carry out the command Creon brought. I will give them the killer.

PRIEST: Do you know, Oedipus, who the killer is?

OEDIPUS: It is not difficult for me to know now. Go at once and leave the matter to me . . . Amazing! . . . Why are you frozen to the earth like statues?

PRIEST: Are you confident that you will take vengeance on the killer of Laius?

OEDIPUS: Do you doubt that, Priest? Whatever the standing of this man among you, I will deliver him to you to receive the recompense for what his hand committed. This is my promise that I will never go back on, no matter what it costs me to be faithful to it. For everything dear to me is reduced to insignificance by this hideous crime. Who can trust—after today—a man who dared kill a king! I will tear the veil from his face and present him to justice, even if that is a curse for me and leads to my destruction.

PRIEST: Your knowledge of the criminal, Oedipus, has relieved us

of a heavy burden.

OEDIPUS: What burden?

PRIEST: The burden of disclosing his name to you.

OEDIPUS: Did you too know who he was?

PRIEST: We knew . . . Creon brought his name with the oracle from the temple at Delphi.

OEDIPUS: And weren't you astonished when you learned who he was?

PRIEST: Totally astonished, Oedipus . . . for he's the last person one would have suspected.

OEDIPUS (*as though speaking to himself*): Yes! . . . That man of exalted standing, high status, venerated by everyone.

PRIEST: He truly is that . . . We are sad he is the one who committed an offense like this.

OEDIPUS: My sorrow is no less than yours . . . but justice is superior to any rank. The victim's blood must be washed away with the killer's. This is what heaven has commanded you, Creon, and I will obey the command.

PRIEST: We did not suppose you would obey heaven's command with such alacrity . . . Forgive us our previous suspicion of you. You are more magnanimous than we imagined . . . But may we ask you what has kept you silent all this time about the killer?

OEDIPUS: I knew nothing of this crime until today.

PRIEST (*looking at CREON*): What are you saying, Oedipus?

OEDIPUS: Why are you exchanging these glances?



PRIEST: We are amazed that you could have been ignorant of it . . .

OEDIPUS: Why are you amazed?

PRIEST: Because you have the closest link to the crime's secret.

OEDIPUS: If you mean Jocasta, you can rest assured that she knows nothing of the affair. If you mean my link to the killer or the instigator of the murder, then I am astonished that you never suspected him all the time he has maintained a position of trust among you and been sought for his counsel.

PRIEST: Would you have wanted us to suspect the lofty soul without proof? . . . to accuse this high rank without a command from God or an oracle from heaven?

OEDIPUS: Now that you know the oracle from heaven and the veil has been removed from the killer's face, here is my decision. He deserves punishment for the offense. He wished to change with his hand the fates and destinies. He let nothing stand in the way of his will . . . not even conscience . . . Go to him and don't shrink back. Hurl the accusation plainly in his face, without fear of his sanctity or awe of his majesty.

PRIEST (*looking at CREON*): Will you truly permit us to do that, Oedipus?

OEDIPUS: Once again you're exchanging these looks . . . What do you think me, Priest? Do you think I'm not strong enough to execute this command? . . . And you, Creon? Haven't you found me able before today to meet difficulties and with the daring to confront adversity?

CREON: No one will deny you your courage, Oedipus. You have confronted a danger that no one else among the people of Thebes could have. The victory was yours alone. But . . . not everyone is like you. You bear for us an adversity which is too great for us and ask us to accuse that lofty rank . . .

PRIEST: Truly . . . if it were possible for you to spare us this painful scene, you would do us a favor we would never forget.

OEDIPUS: You want me to take charge of the affair myself?

PRIEST: Yes!

CREON: This is no doubt the best way. The oracle of Delphi has reached you, Oedipus, and you know the killer's name has become known. Quick vengeance is the price desired to save Thebes. All that remains for you is to carry out this vengeance speedily, without clamor or commotion. Afterwards, it will be our responsibility to announce the affair to the people.

OEDIPUS: I will do this for you. It won't cost me much hardship . . . But what distresses me . . .

CREON: Your family?

OEDIPUS: My family? Of what relevance is my family here? . . . Yes . . . You're right . . . In truth, I think Jocasta believes strongly in this man. In that respect, she resembles all the people in this land . . . The echo will resound far and wide and have a great impact the day the killer's name is announced . . . But what I ask you is to remember . . .

CREON: What? . . . The effects of that, relative to the throne?

OEDIPUS: I am not thinking now of that throne, for that hand has soiled it with blood . . . Certainly not . . . Rather I want you to remember that the sinner may deny the accusation and charge those who advance it with falsehood, slander, fabrication, and falsification. He may call it a conspiracy trumped up to destroy him for personal reasons . . . It is best if you remain here. I shall summon him so that you can tell him what the oracle revealed about him . . . After that I will take care of the rest . . .

PRIEST: Who is it you will summon?

OEDIPUS: The killer of Laius . . . He's not far from this place . . .  
Wait! I will send for him.

PRIEST (*looking at CREON*): Oedipus!

OEDIPUS: Strange! Why do you keep exchanging these looks?

PRIEST: You know he's not far from us now . . .

OEDIPUS: Perhaps . . . He promised to come on your arrival . . . as though he knew what awaited him. He awakened doubt in me about what Creon would bring. But I won't wait for him any longer . . . He must be sought for. (*He moves.*)

PRIEST (*stopping him*): Where are you going, Oedipus? The killer of Laius is not far from us.

CREON: He is not far from this palace.

PRIEST: He is, as you know, in this palace now . . . only a step away.

OEDIPUS: In this palace now? . . . What do you mean?

PRIEST: You know, Oedipus, what we mean and whom we mean.

OEDIPUS: The killer of Laius is in this palace?

PRIEST: And in this chamber . . . as you no doubt know.

OEDIPUS: Explain!

PRIEST: Woe! . . . Haven't you known all the time what we mean?  
Who besides yourself were you accusing then, Oedipus?

OEDIPUS: Besides me? . . . What's this I hear from you?

PRIEST: Strange! . . . Didn't you know that you, Oedipus, are Laius'

killer?

OEDIPUS: I . . . the killer of Laius? Have you gone mad, Priest?

PRIEST: I am not mad . . . It is the oracle Creon brought from the temple at Delphi.

OEDIPUS: The oracle said I am the killer?

PRIEST: Speak, Creon!

CREON: Yes! . . . That's the truth! . . . I will relate it as I heard it without adding a word. This is the revelation from heaven . . . "Oedipus is the killer of Laius."

OEDIPUS (*racked by laughter*): I the killer? Is this credible?

PRIEST: We are truly greatly distressed . . . but . . .

OEDIPUS: When was your king, whom I never saw, killed? . . . When did I do that and where?

PRIEST: We don't know . . . We can't answer these questions. We can tell you only what the oracle revealed to us.

OEDIPUS: Whose oracle? . . . Creon's oracle or an oracle from you religious men?

PRIEST: What are you saying, Oedipus?

OEDIPUS: Here's a trick which has been uncovered! . . . a riddle disclosed in the land of puzzles and riddles! . . . How stupid you are! Not one of you can even devise an adequate trap.

PRIEST: Don't overdo this kind of talk, Oedipus!

OEDIPUS: Hush! I see the affair now as plain as day. The veil has truly been lifted . . . not from the face of a killer and a crime but from the face of conspiracy and of conspirators. You must

not think, Creon, and you, High Priest, that I am so dull-witted that I will fall into a trap like this which would not catch even small birds. I am not so weak as to be incapable of punishing you and all those who support you, openly or clandestinely, with every type of punishment.

PRIEST: Not so fast, Oedipus!

OEDIPUS: I have not yet shown you I am fit to be called a hero. My victory over a beast will not compare with that fortitude with which I shall conquer the traitors.

CREON: Who are these traitors?

OEDIPUS: You are at their head, Creon! . . . You who covet my throne. These priests have misled you, but I shall make you all the laughingstock of the people.

CREON: That's enough, Oedipus! I refuse to let you call me a traitor. Remember I am your wife's brother . . . I would never harm you nor would I harm Jocasta for the sake of ambition . . . Sovereignty was in my hand before you came to us. I released it to you for the sake of the people's welfare and in obedience to the counsel of the holy and inspired.

OEDIPUS: And today you attack me pleading the people's salvation again as well as obedience to the counsel of those men of religion who love you.

PRIEST: Don't speak blindly, Oedipus! The men of religion know that God's hand raises and lowers people to royal thrones. It is not for human hands to do. We would not have come to you on this grave matter had we not known that our God cursed this land. He inspired us to root out its causes and dispel His anger from us. You yourself promised to aid us and execute God's command. We who have brought it to you are racked by pain and distress. You ought to have received heaven's will submissively. You ought not hurl your thunder and lightning at us, in an attempt to hide the voice of truth.

which has come down from on high.

OEDIPUS: The voice of truth! What is the voice of truth? Is it what you hear and I don't? Don't I have two ears on my head like you?

PRIEST: The voice of truth, Oedipus, is not heard by the ear or the head . . . but by the heart!

OEDIPUS: Yes! . . . With words like these, Priest, you wish to make me feel I am far removed from your heaven . . . that I am subject to its curse and the object of its anger . . . It afflicted this land with the plague merely because I am dwelling here . . . Why am I cursed by God? Is it because I do not accept what you attribute to Him until after an inquiry which satisfies my intellect? If you said that, if you dared, you would find no objection from me. But you say something that corresponds to your obvious scheme. You say I am cursed by heaven, because I killed Laius . . . That the blood which soiled Thebes and brought the plague can only be washed away by the killer's blood . . . What a conspiracy! What a conspiracy it is!

PRIEST: Anger, no doubt, has blinded you, Oedipus! We have passed on to you what the oracle revealed. Make your plans accordingly.

OEDIPUS: The matter does not require lengthy planning.

PRIEST: You have all the time you wish . . . We have nothing left to do but depart.

OEDIPUS: Depart? . . . Do you think a person who says what you have said today can depart in peace?

PRIEST: What do you mean, Oedipus?

OEDIPUS: Priest! You don't know the Oedipus yet whom you dared term a murderer. You claimed he had defiled the earth

of Thebes with blood. You will not depart in peace, Priest  
. . . nor you, Creon!

CREON: Oedipus!

PRIEST: We won't depart in peace?

OEDIPUS: You have only two roads by which you can depart.  
Choose between death and banishment!

PRIEST and CREON (*shouting*): Death or banishment!

OEDIPUS: There is no punishment for a traitor who conspires  
against the sovereign except death, but I grant you the choice,  
out of compassion for you . . . Discretion would dictate I be  
firm and pluck you from life by the roots like rank, stinking  
weeds which disperse around them anarchy and corruption.  
I have given my verdict on you: banishment or death . . .  
Banishment or death!





**Act Two**

*The square in front of the palace . . . A CHORUS of the people is assembled. OEDIPUS, the PRIEST, and CREON stand before them as though appearing before a court.*

OEDIPUS: People of Thebes! You have before you now a crime against my person and throne committed by these two conspirators. I have pronounced a sentence on them which I think just . . . But I will not carry out my verdict until I mount an investigation of their offense in your presence. I would not like to be blinded to truth by anger. I shall now disclose the face of truth to you so you can see the criminals barefaced.

CHORUS: Who would have thought, Oedipus, that Creon and the High Priest would conspire against you?

OEDIPUS: You in your simplicity, Citizens, do not see what is fabricated in the dark . . . but I will tear aside the curtain for you at this moment so you can see in the light those sinful hands which wished to defile your throne with sin and blood.

CHORUS: Woe to anyone who would harm a single one of your hairs, King. We shall never forget that you are the hero who saved us from Father Terror . . . Strike down your enemies, Oedipus, without mercy . . . We are with you.

PRIEST: How skillful you are, Oedipus, in rallying the people against us . . . and in presenting us as criminal, when our only crime is that we told you the command revealed by heaven to free Thebes of this plague.

OEDIPUS: Do you persist, treacherous priest, in terming this conspiracy an oracle from heaven?

PRIEST: Don't get angry, Oedipus! You are the one who just said that you don't want anger to blind you to the truth. Hold firm to prudence, seek the aid of patience and proceed with the inquiry you promised. Do it quickly to keep the people from thinking about the misery they are suffering.

OEDIPUS (*to the CHORUS*): People, do you actually think I am trying to distract you with this inquiry from the torment you suffer?

CHORUS: Proceed, Oedipus, with what you have begun. Strip back the curtain for us. We are eager to see what is behind these affairs.

OEDIPUS: Do you see, sinful priest, how your arrow has missed its target? . . . This is the will of the people.

PRIEST: How naïve they truly are, these people! Yes, these people who are nourished by imagination not by realities! They have forgotten the plague annihilating them. They have forgotten that you have found no remedy to save them. They have forgotten heaven's oracle which they were awaiting. They remember only their desire to see the phantoms you claim to reveal.

OEDIPUS: Don't scorn the people, Priest! You are appearing before their court. They are the ones who will find you guilty and support my punishment for you when they see your crime laid bare after I have stripped you of your secret.

PRIEST: Do it, Oedipus, and quickly . . . You are still the hero who fascinates people by disclosing secrets and solving riddles. But the people will learn that I conceal no secret and harbor no riddle. I merely sought in good faith to ask God's aid in dispelling this plague from our land. I have informed you of the oracle . . . That is my entire offense against you.

OEDIPUS: Not at all, Priest! You know your crime just as Creon

knows his . . . and those who support you covertly . . . I shall not undertake its presentation to the people. Rather, I leave you that honor, so it won't be said I reported it incorrectly or distorted it intentionally . . . You tell your story, Priest . . . or let your accomplice speak.

(*QUEEN JOCASTA comes out of the palace.*)

CHORUS (*turning*): Queen Jocasta!

JOCASTA: May I attend this trial? The accusation you advance against these two men is grave, Oedipus.

CREON: Do you believe, Jocasta, that your brother Creon would covet your husband's throne?

OEDIPUS: It is not I, Jocasta, who will try your brother but the people. I am only a man who has undertaken the investigation into the crime. You will see now with your own eyes, just as the people around you will see, what the inquiry discloses.

CREON: We have already been sentenced to death or banishment!

OEDIPUS: I will never be satisfied with less than this penalty for those who conspire against the throne . . . This conspiracy, had it been concluded, would have had among its consequences my death or banishment.

JOCASTA: The evidence will have to be damning, Oedipus, before you carry out this harsh sentence on them.

OEDIPUS: Here is the inquiry, conducted in public before you, Jocasta, and before all the people. In it I will go to the pits and delve the depths to extract for you at the end of the affair the manifest and unambiguous truth.

CHORUS: Proceed with your work, Oedipus . . . You are the person best able to remove the cover from the secret of

things.

OEDIPUS: I would like the hearing to take place with Tiresias present. I know his standing with you. I sent for him before coming out to you.

CHORUS: You did well, Oedipus. The presence of this blessed elder among us at this hour will certainly increase our peace of mind.

JOCASTA: No one so wishes for peace of mind as I do . . . for I of all people know Creon best. He is my brother with whom I grew up. His upright characters, his even temper, and his clear conscience all combine to make my soul amazed by his deed . . . I have not yet learned how he conspired against the throne. All I've heard is that he is accused of this crime. But I don't know how he came to that.

OEDIPUS: You will learn now . . . not from my mouth, but from his!

*(TIRESIAS appears led by his servant boy.)*

CHORUS: Here's Tiresias who's arrived.

OEDIPUS: Make way for him!

TIRESIAS: I know why you are gathered here . . . Beware of asking my opinion, Oedipus, or of requesting me to speak!

OEDIPUS: I shan't do it. I merely wanted you to be present at this trial, because a person like you should not be forgotten in great undertakings. Listen to what will be said now and grasp the import of these statements.

TIRESIAS: I am listening, Oedipus.

OEDIPUS: Now, People, hear how these men conspired. I promised to let the accused state the case for the sake of

justice. I will not go back on this promise. Go ahead, High Priest . . . You speak first.

PRIEST: What shall I say? . . . You have put us into this shameful situation, Oedipus. You have affixed to us the stigma of accusation. You have presented us to the people's eyes as sinning traitors before we have learned what our offense was. . . I have nothing to say except what you and the people know . . . Your outcry against that plague which has been decimating you, People of Thebes, was raised. We saw no means to repel the plague from us except to seek an oracle from heaven . . . We thought a man from the royal house, known for prudence of opinion, forthrightness, and proper conduct, should go to the temple at Delphi . . . That man was Creon, as you know. Do you see anything the matter with this action, anything untoward about it?

CHORUS: Certainly not!

PRIEST: Creon went to the temple at Delphi. Then he returned with the oracle from God concerning this plague and its cause. I did not wish to reveal it except to the king in private. We wished to confine the matter to the narrowest limits and hoped to avoid upsetting you.

CHORUS: What was the oracle Creon brought?

PRIEST: It's up to Creon to reveal it to you, if he wishes . . .

CHORUS: Speak, Creon!

CREON: It's an alarming matter! I am not entitled to announce it to you without permission from Oedipus.

OEDIPUS: I give you permission to say everything here.

CREON: Here is what I brought . . . transmitting to you the exact text: "Heaven is angry, because the earth of Thebes has been defiled by impurity . . . Its king, Laius, was killed. No

revenge has yet been taken on his murderer. The anger against Thebes will not be lifted unless that blood is washed away."

CHORUS: Our King Laius was killed?

OEDIPUS: This is not the amazing part, People . . . Ask him who the killer was . . .

CHORUS: Who was the killer? . . . Who was he?

CREON: You can be sure that it pains me deeply to utter his name. When I learned for the first time, I was struck by a terror I haven't the power to describe. Oedipus has been blinded by desire and fear. He has forgotten our relationship and my place with him and in his family. He has similarly forgotten my earlier days which I spent in his support . . . and my character which would reject what he has accused me of . . . and my nature which would shy away from what he suspects I did.

CHORUS: Who killed Laius, Creon? Who's the killer?

CREON: Don't force my mouth to mention this dear name! Ask the king standing before you to tell you.

OEDIPUS: No, you speak his name yourself, Creon.

CHORUS: Tell us the killer's name, Creon.

CREON: It is . . . Oedipus.

CHORUS: This Oedipus? . . . Oedipus our king? . . . He is the killer of Laius?

JOCASTA: What do I hear from you, Creon?

CREON: This is the way the oracle came from heaven, Jocasta.

CHORUS: Oedipus is the killer? . . . The killer is Oedipus?

OEDIPUS: Do you see, People of Thebes, how the conspiracy was hatched? Can you imagine I killed Laius when I had never seen him? Don't you remember that when I came to your land your throne was vacant and his resting place unknown? But they wish me to be the killer so that I would deserve in consequence death or banishment. For they are distressed by my rule and dislike, for a reason best known to themselves, that I should remain your king.

CREON: Would I ask heaven to pour its curse on me even if I had in my soul a vile objective like this? I swear . . . I swear I added nothing to what I heard and learned by heart from the oracle of the Delphi temple.

JOCASTA: May I give my opinion about the disagreement which has arisen between you? I don't think either of you is a liar or covetous. I have no doubt that Creon heard what he reported to you, Oedipus, with pure soul and clear conscience . . . But heaven's oracle is too elevated in status for human beings to comprehend it, all the time. People rarely are able to understand the divine oracle properly . . . God's will has goals which man's mind is not able to grasp. Thus no person has complete sovereignty over the unknown or the ability to prophesy. I have at hand the example of Laius. A prophesy informed him that he would die at his son's hand — his son from his loins and my belly . . . I believe Tiresias who is present remembers the story of that prophecy.

TIRESIAS: I remember that, O Queen.

OEDIPUS (*with concealed sarcasm*): Indeed . . . he had better remember that!

JOCASTA: What happened after that? . . . That son perished in the cradle, for his father handed him over three days after his birth to a shepherd who carried him off with his feet

bound to be destroyed on a desolate mountain. Laius met his death, as you know, outside this land. A gang of thieves, as I was informed at that time, attacked him. They killed him in a distant place at a spot where three roads meet. Thus the father died by a hand not his son's! What became of the prophecy then? The oracle, as you see, is not always borne out in all circumstances. Heaven does not whisper its words to every ear. It guards its secrets better than you suspect . . . Its language is not understood by every person . . . It prefers to reveal its intentions through actions not words. Speech is our human language . . . God's language is the deed . . . Beware of taking what Creon brought for a proof! It is only something he heard. It should have no effect. No decision should spring from it.

OEDIPUS: I hope, Jocasta, that my ear has misheard.

JOCASTA: Why? . . . What's this anxiety on your face?

OEDIPUS: It's nothing . . . It's merely the situation no doubt . . . with the strange talk and amazing accusations stirred up, which has landed me in confusion.

JOCASTA: Be more explicit, Oedipus. Disclose what is troubling you. Do you think I said anything injurious to you, unintentionally? Many pointless words slip at times, like rabble, into the parade of ideas.

OEDIPUS: I imagined I heard you say that Laius was killed at a place where three roads meet.

JOCASTA: That's true . . . That's what I said.

OEDIPUS: You said that? . . . You said that?

JOCASTA: What's come over you, Oedipus? . . . Yes. That's what I eventually learned then.

OEDIPUS: Where were those roads? . . . in what land?



JOCASTA: In a land called Phocis . . . where the road branches into two courses. One of them leads to Daulia, the other to Delphi.

OEDIPUS: At what time did that take place?

JOCASTA: Everyone knows that happened shortly before you ascended the throne.

OEDIPUS: Oh Heaven! Is it possible that is true?

JOCASTA: What, Oedipus? What's bothering you and causing this turmoil in your soul?

OEDIPUS: Don't ask me anything . . . Tell me what Laius looked like? How old was he?

JOCASTA: He was tall and slender with curly, grey hair . . . His face resembled yours a bit.

OEDIPUS: Do you suppose heaven's curse has truly struck me?

JOCASTA: What are you saying, my husband? . . . You frighten me.

OEDIPUS: Do you suppose there's some truth in the oracle? . . . Tell me something else too . . . so that not a shadow of doubt remains in my soul.

JOCASTA: You scare me! I will tell you everything that came to my knowledge.

OEDIPUS: What was King Laius' retinue like? . . . How many guards did he have?

JOCASTA: No more than five men guarded him on his trip . . . and a scout in advance. There was only a single carriage in which the king rode.

OEDIPUS: Enough, Jocasta! . . . My eye sees everything clearly and plainly now . . . but . . . who told you all that?

JOCASTA: A servant . . . He was the only one who returned alive from that trip.

OEDIPUS: Is he still in service here?

JOCASTA: To the contrary! He asked me to release him from the palace service when he saw you had taken his master's place and ascended his king's throne . . . So far as I know he went to the fields to work as a herdsman, far away from this city.

OEDIPUS: Can we have him brought at once?

JOCASTA: We can . . . but what do you want from that?

OEDIPUS: Oh, my dear wife! I fear I have divulged more than is fitting . . . I must see that man first.

JOCASTA: You will see him . . . but have I not the right, Oedipus, to know what is spreading this anxiety and turmoil through your soul?

OEDIPUS: You will know . . . Send for that herdsman!

*(Some of the assembled people run off.)*

JOCASTA: What do you wish to learn from him, Oedipus?

OEDIPUS: This herdsman is my only hope . . . I would like to hear words from him contradicting what you said.

JOCASTA: Contradictory in what respect?

OEDIPUS: You said that the killer was a gang of thieves . . . and that he is the one who told you that. I must hear his testimony to clear up that important matter. Was the killer truly a group or was he a single individual? On this

testimony rests the verdict and hangs the destiny . . .

JOCASTA: Whose destiny? . . . Whose destiny, Oedipus?

OEDIPUS: Mine! . . . There's something I have concealed from you, Jocasta. Just as you concealed from me the information of the circumstances surrounding the death of King Laius.

JOCASTA: I haven't concealed anything from you . . . It did not occur to me to mention those details until there was some call for it or some motive for us to go over them. They are not a pleasant topic for me to discuss with you when there is no need.

OEDIPUS: I too have not intentionally hidden anything . . . It is just a passing incident to which I attached no importance at the time and paid little attention, because I did not know who it was I met.

JOCASTA: Whom did you meet, Oedipus?

OEDIPUS: A man in a carriage . . . guarded by about five men who blocked my way in the land of Phocis at the crossroads between Daulia and Delphi. A dispute broke out between us over the right to pass first. The dispute developed into a quarrel, and the fervor and passion of youth drove me to violence. I raised my cudgel in the men's faces, and we began to fight. I vanquished them in the battle, but it seems that a blow of my cudgel missed and struck the head of the person in the chariot. I set off afterwards on my way until I neared the walls of Thebes and met the beast. And you know what happened to me then . . . If that man in the carriage was your King Laius, then I'm the one who struck and killed him.

JOCASTA: My god! . . . my god!

OEDIPUS: But I was alone and you all said that Laius was killed by a band of thieves . . . This matter must be cleared up

before I pronounce sentence on myself.

CHORUS (*turning*): Here's the herdsman. They've brought him.

(*Some of the people who left to search for the HERDSMAN enter. They are leading a feeble, old man.*)

THEBAN (*with the HERDSMAN*): We hadn't gone far when we met him on his way here. He had heard, so he said, news of the ordeal. He was coming to pray with the people of Thebes and to entreat heaven to lift this plague from our land.

CHORUS: What a decrepit old man he is!

OEDIPUS: Come near me, Man, and answer the questions I ask you . . . Were you in the service of King Laius?

HERDSMAN: Yes! . . . I was born in his household and grew up in it.

OEDIPUS: What was your employment with him?

HERDSMAN: Herding his livestock.

OEDIPUS: Do you remember how Laius was killed?

HERDSMAN: That happened a long time ago . . . and my memory has grown weak and my mind feeble . . .

OEDIPUS: Recall! Recall! . . . Who killed Laius?

HERDSMAN: He was killed . . . so far as I remember . . . by a strong-bodied youth.

OEDIPUS: How?

HERDSMAN: He jostled against the king's chariot at a crossroads between Delphi and Daulia. A quarrel broke out

between him and the guards in the retinue. He conquered and killed them. One of his blows struck the king's head. It was a fatal blow and he died. I fled from the battle with my skin. No one else escaped.

OEDIPUS: Was it a group which attacked the king?

HERDSMAN: Certainly not, your Majesty! It was a single man.

OEDIPUS: Everything has become clear to me and to you all. The veil has been removed from the killer's face . . . You were right, Creon. The oracle you brought from the temple at Delphi was right. I ask your forgiveness and that of the High Priest. I have erred in my suspicion of you and by falsely accusing you . . . The killer of Laius is before you . . . People! I shall not attempt to defend him. Judge him as you see fit. Provide him the punishment he deserves.

JOCASTA: Oedipus! . . . Oedipus! Don't exaggerate this way . . . accusing yourself. You didn't intend to kill him . . . You didn't know the identity of the man you killed.

OEDIPUS: Don't defend me, Jocasta, for you are part of me. It is not right for us to undertake a defense of ourselves for the sins we have committed.

JOCASTA: If you refuse me and yourself this right, here is Tiresias to speak on your behalf.

TIRESIAS: If you need me, Oedipus, I am not far from you.

OEDIPUS: Certainly not! . . . Rather, stay in your place, Tiresias. Don't interfere. My case is clear. I committed a crime and forgot it. But heaven did not forget it . . . Now it wants the price and demands the penalty. Whatever doubts the intellect may have about the truth of the relationship between that crime and this plague, honor does not doubt the reality of the duty cast on my shoulders. My duty now is to remove myself from the throne of a man who died by

my hand.

JOCASTA: He died by your hand against your will . . . I don't think heaven demands of you this oppressive price for it.

OEDIPUS (*as though addressing himself*): Heaven is never unjust, for it is a set of scales which has no defect, tilt, deviation, or passion . . . When we perceive it to be unjust that is simply because of our inability to see what consciences conceal and our forgetfulness for our past account . . . It adds to the manifest sin the weight of the concealed one. I have lied to the people! I have deceived the people . . .

TIRESIAS (*shouting and interrupting*): Enough! Enough!

(*At this moment a feeble OLD MAN with a stooped back appears.*)

OLD MAN (*shouting*): O People!

CHORUS (*turning*): Who is this old man coming in from the fields?

OLD MAN: Direct me to the palace of Oedipus!

CHORUS: This is the palace before you! . . . Who are you, Stranger? What do you want?

OLD MAN: I am a messenger from Corinth. I have brought a message to Oedipus.

OEDIPUS: Here I am, Man! Approach! What is your news?

OLD MAN: Happy news! . . . Although it contains something that may stir your sorrow.

OEDIPUS: Speak, Messenger! Tell us what news you bring.

OLD MAN: The people of Corinth greet you and ask you to be their King.

CHORUS: King? Over the people of Corinth?

JOCASTA: Oh how heaven severs and binds! . . . Do you see how unjust you are to yourself, Oedipus? You wished to vacate the throne of Thebes and here's another throne coming to you from heaven!

OEDIPUS (*to the messenger*): What has become of your King Polybus?

OLD MAN: He has died and been entrusted to the earth.

OEDIPUS: Polybus has died? . . . How? Did he die of an illness or in some incident?

OLD MAN: Of the illness of old age!

OEDIPUS: I shall never forget that he was like a compassionate father . . . What has become of Queen Merope?

OLD MAN: Age weakened her . . . and she is on her way to rejoin her husband.

OEDIPUS: She loved me too, as though she were my mother . . . What good generous people they were . . . I remember their distress when I informed them of my discovery of the real nature of the tie binding me to them . . . that I was nothing more than a foundling they adopted . . . They exerted every effort to pluck this truth from my head. But I refused to accept their affection when it was like accepting alms . . . I hope they forgot me after I fled from Corinth and that in the course of time they found other things to think of . . .

OLD MAN: To the contrary! They did not forget you. They sent after you, at that time, someone to search for you. But you had disappeared. Polybus died mentioning your name and charging me to renew the search for you and to propose to you to be king after him.

OEDIPUS: How did you know where I am?

OLD MAN: It finally occurred to me to search for you in your birthplace. So I traveled on foot to Thebes. When I drew near its walls I learned that you are its king today.

OEDIPUS: Who said Thebes is my birthplace?

OLD MAN: I know that, because I'm the one who found you when you were an infant and handed you over to Polybus.

OEDIPUS: You found me, Old Man?

OLD MAN: On a wooded mountain near Cithaeron.

OEDIPUS: What were you doing there?

OLD MAN: I was herding livestock.

OEDIPUS: How did you find me?

OLD MAN: Those scars on your feet will tell you.

OEDIPUS: Indeed! . . . Those old scars I grew up with . . . No one ever told me anything about them, of their secret or origin.

OLD MAN: They are the marks of fetters. You were shackled by your ankles! I was the one who took off your fetters. For this reason you were "Oedipus" — that is, Swellfoot!

OEDIPUS: By heaven . . . who did that to me? Was it my mother who gave birth to me or my father who rejected me?

OLD MAN: I don't know anything about that. Ask the one who delivered you to me about that.

OEDIPUS: Delivered me to you? . . . Weren't you, then, the one who came across me?



OLD MAN: No, another herdsman was the one who entrusted you to me and put you in my hands in that form.

OEDIPUS: Another herdsman? Who is he? Can you inform us who that herdsman was?

OLD MAN: I remember he said that day he was one of Laius' men.

OEDIPUS: Laius? . . . The former king of Thebes?

OLD MAN: Yes, King Laius . . . That herdsman told me he was one of his servants . . .

OEDIPUS: He had many servants, no doubt. Is the servant you mean still alive? . . . Is it possible for me to see him, question him, and learn from him?

OLD MAN: This is a matter the people of Thebes can answer for you.

OEDIPUS: People! Inform me! Hasn't any one of you heard anything about the servant we are speaking of? . . . Hasn't one of you seen him in the city or in the fields? Let one who knows among you speak . . . Do not remain silent! Here we have now reached the key to the secret . . . the secret of my birth and of my reality which I have for so long investigated and pursued.

CHORUS: Ask Queen Jocasta . . . perhaps she knows that servant in the household of Laius . . .

OEDIPUS: My dear wife! Don't you know anything about that servant?

JOCASTA (*her face drained of color*): What servant are you talking about? . . . I know nothing. We ought not to know . . . My husband, you are paying too much attention to what is being said . . . Leave this matter. Close this door. You

won't find anything of value behind it.

OEDIPUS: How strange, Jocasta! How can I close this door when it has begun to open on the secret I long to know?

JOCASTA: No, no, Oedipus! Don't do all this digging in search of a secret . . . You are digging now the grave for your happiness! I entreat you to desist . . . I'm afraid . . . An eternal curse is gathering to break over our heads . . . For heaven's sake desist, Oedipus!

OEDIPUS: Don't be afraid! . . . I told you one day that you shouldn't be concerned about the truth of my birth . . . Even if I were the child of your humblest slaves . . . would this frighten you . . . or cause you shame that would humiliate you or damage your self-esteem? I will continue my search for my reality . . . that desire is stronger than I am. No one can stand between me and my desire to know who I am and will be . . .

CHORUS: Proceed on your course, Mighty King! Remove the curtain from your birth. Whatever your origin and birth, we are proud of you.

OEDIPUS: I don't want to live in a fog, even if the price is the kingship. I left Corinth and its throne to search for the truth . . . Now that I have almost placed my hand on its key, should I recoil, draw back and desist? . . . That shall never be! . . . That shall never be.

CHORUS (*turning towards the back*): What's with this herdsman in back of the crowd who is slinking away like a person wishing to flee?

OEDIPUS: Which herdsman?

CHORUS: The one who was in Laius' retinue.

OEDIPUS: Seize him and bring him forward! He must know

something.

*(Some of the people push the HERDSMAN forward to the place where OEDIPUS stands.)*

CHORUS: Why are you fleeing, Herdsman?

HERDSMAN: I wasn't fleeing . . . But I saw no cause for me to stay.

OEDIPUS: Your departure in this way must be for a reason we shall now learn . . . Perhaps you know the person we seek.

HERDSMAN: I don't know anyone . . . or anything.

OEDIPUS: First, bring him close to the messenger from Corinth. Messenger, examine his face carefully. Perhaps that may lead to something . . .

*(The HERDSMAN is pushed near the OLD MAN.)*

CHORUS *(looking at the two men)*: Two feeble old men . . . They seem to be the same age.

OLD MAN *(shouting after staring at the HERDSMAN)*: He's the very one . . . the very one!

OEDIPUS: Who? . . . Who?

OLD MAN: The herdsman who handed me the infant.

OEDIPUS: Do you hear, Herdsman?

HERDSMAN: I haven't understood anything this old man said.

OEDIPUS: Haven't you previously met this old man any place?

HERDSMAN: I don't remember.

OEDIPUS: How is it he can remember?

OLD MAN: Allow me, Oedipus, to sharpen his memory . . . I don't think he has forgotten those days when we worked near each other in the region of Cithaeron. He was herding two flocks and I was herding one. Three seasons from spring to fall passed in succession until winter came. I drove my flock away returning to Corinth and he drove his two off returning to Thebes . . . Didn't we do that, Herdsman?

HERDSMAN: Yes . . . this is truly what we used to do . . . but that was many years ago.

OLD MAN: Yes . . . many years have passed, but that doesn't prevent you from remembering that nursing infant which you put into my arms one day, imploring me to raise him as if he were my son.

HERDSMAN (*trembling*): What do you mean? . . . What do you want me to say?

OLD MAN: I simply want you to look in front of you, Old Friend . . . This is your nursing infant! (*He points to OEDIPUS.*)

JOCASTA (*unconsciously emitting a whisper like a rattling in her throat*): Enough! . . . Enough!

(*She starts to dart off toward the palace, but OEDIPUS prevents her.*)

OEDIPUS (*shouting*): Where are you going, Jocasta?

JOCASTA: Oh God! Mercy!

OEDIPUS: Stay a moment to hear with your own ears the truth of my origin.

JOCASTA: I can't stay another moment . . . I can't . . . can't.

OEDIPUS: You can't endure the blush of shame tinting your face when you hear in front of this crowd from whose womb your husband emerged! . . . I have never compelled you to do anything before, but I compel you now to remain where you are to learn about me what the assembled people will learn at this time . . . even if there is in that some humiliation for your royal majesty and wound for the glory of your ancient family.

CHORUS: Stay with us, Queen! Hear what we hear . . . Nothing will harm you. Oedipus is our king because of his heroism, not because of his lineage.

JOCASTA (*hiding her face with her veil*): Have mercy, Heaven!

OEDIPUS (*to the HERDSMAN*): Now, Herdsman! Give us a frank and straight answer with no twist to it about the real facts concerning that infant you delivered to this comrade of yours.

HERDSMAN: This comrade of mine, your Majesty, doesn't know what he is saying. He is no doubt mistaken.

OEDIPUS: Beware, Herdsman! If you refuse to answer when asked nicely, we know how to force you to talk!

HERDSMAN: Be gentle, your Majesty, with an old man like me.

OEDIPUS: If you desire gentle treatment, speak!

HERDSMAN: What more do you want to know than you know already?

OEDIPUS: That infant of whom your friend spoke—are you the one who handed him to him?

HERDSMAN: Yes, your Majesty . . . I did . . . and I wish I had died that day.

OEDIPUS: I will treat you to death today, if you refuse to reveal the truth.

HERDSMAN: Alas for me! This truth is death for me, and what a death!

OEDIPUS: Haven't you ceased trying to shirk and evade?

HERDSMAN: There's no longer any way for me to . . . Haven't I confessed that I gave him the infant? What more to you want from me then?

OEDIPUS: Where did you get that infant? . . . From your own house or someone else's?

HERDSMAN: Not from my house . . . rather . . . from someone else's.

OEDIPUS: Whose?

HERDSMAN: Woe! Alas! I entreat you for heaven's sake to desist from questioning me!

OEDIPUS: Answer . . . answer. If you refrain from answering now, I will subject you to every form of torture and have you killed in the worst possible way . . . Speak!

HERDSMAN: That infant was from the house of Laius.

OEDIPUS: Was he the son of one of his slaves? . . . Speak!

HERDSMAN: Can't you spare me from saying it? Your Majesty, have pity on me!

OEDIPUS: You must speak . . . I must hear. Otherwise, I will crush your white head mercilessly and pulverize your feeble body.

HERDSMAN: The infant was his . . . own son.

OEDIPUS: Whose?

HERDSMAN: The son . . . of Laius!

OEDIPUS: The son of King Laius?

HERDSMAN: Yes!

*(There is commotion among the people . . . OEDIPUS sways . . . but he is able to regain his composure.)*

OEDIPUS: What you say is hideous, Man. It's hideous what you are saying! My mind can scarcely believe . . . Beware, Man, that there be in your words any lie or fiction . . . I understand now the reason you were fleeing from me . . . In actuality, you are the real source of the story . . . The temple priests no doubt learned it from you! For no secret is buried in the chest for seventeen years without an aroma spreading from it into the air. You are the origin of the Delphi oracle! Take care that you don't trump up a lie against me or give inspiration to a falsehood!

HERDSMAN: But it's the truth . . . It's in your power to ask Queen Jocasta, for everything took place in her presence and with her knowledge . . . They gave me the child to destroy, but my heart did not dare . . . so I gave him to this man to take to his country and to have for his son. He took him and in that way saved his life.

OEDIPUS: Was it a son Queen Jocasta bore?

HERDSMAN: Yes, your Majesty. It was said at that time it was necessary to destroy him . . . because of an unlucky prophecy attached to him . . . that this son would kill his father!

OEDIPUS (*screaming*): Laius! . . . Jocasta! Heaven! Heaven! The fog has dispersed from around me. I have seen the truth . . . How repulsive is Truth's face! What a curse! Never before

has a person been subjected to one like it! Tiresias! . . . Tiresias! But you are motionless, like a statue . . . I sensed the specter of disaster and my chest was oppressed by it, before it struck . . . but I never imagined it would be so hideous . . . You also were disturbed by it, Jocasta . . .  
Jocasta!

*(JOCASTA, who seems to have been standing erect but in a daze all this time, falls to the ground in a swoon.)*

CHORUS *(shouting)*: Hasten to the Queen . . . Queen Jocasta sinks under the weight of the catastrophe! Help her . . . Give her first aid. Take her into the palace!

*(People gather around the Queen. They carry her gently. OEDIPUS assists them, stunned by the misfortune. They take her into the palace, leaving TIRESIAS where he stands.)*

TIRESIAS: Take me far away from this place, Boy . . . For heaven has been pleased to make it a playground . . . Yes! For God is as play, creating art, shaping a story . . . a story based on my thought. With respect to Oedipus and Jocasta, it is a tragedy. With respect to me a comedy. You who rule this palace must shed tears. I am obliged to laugh! *(He laughs hysterically.)*



**Act Three**  
**Scene One**

*In the palace . . . JOCASTA is in her chamber, stretched out on her bed. OEDIPUS and the CHILDREN surround her apprehensively.*

OEDIPUS (*whispering*): Keep back from her a bit, my children, and don't be alarmed. She's sleeping.

ANTIGONE: Her eyelashes are moving, Father!

OEDIPUS: Yes, she's coming to . . . Take care not to let her see your anxiety . . . It's just a passing illness which will soon vanish.

*(JOCASTA sighs and opens her eyes.)*

JOCASTA: Where am I? . . . Are you here, my children? . . . Is this you, Oedipus . . . Woe is me! Woe is me!

OEDIPUS: Have courage, Jocasta!

JOCASTA: Am I still alive then? . . . Hasn't the earth swallowed me? Haven't I ceased to exist?

OEDIPUS (*in a lowered voice*): No more of this talk in the presence of our children.

JOCASTA: Our children . . . our children . . . How repulsive your words are!

ANTIGONE (*alarmed*): Mother!

OEDIPUS: Antigone, you go along with the other children . . . Don't disturb your mother now. (*He gently shows them out of the room.*)

JOCASTA (*as though speaking to herself*): Our children! . . . Our children!

OEDIPUS (*returning to her*): Jocasta! . . . Darling! Have pity on yourself and on me!

JOCASTA: Our children! . . . From whose womb did they come . . . all of them including you, Oedipus! . . . A single womb carried them and you . . . You will never say after today that they are your children . . . rather they are also your brothers and sisters. You will not say I am your wife from now on, I am also at the same time your . . . I am also your . . . What? . . . What am I to say?

OEDIPUS: Don't say anything, Jocasta!

JOCASTA: Has the world ever known an offense like this before? Has the earth's face been defiled by a sin like this? Has anyone ever suffered a curse like this? . . . And in spite of that I am still alive. Alive and breathing . . . speaking . . . and seeing my children . . . All of my children . . . all of them! (*She weeps and tears her hair.*)

OEDIPUS: Have pity on yourself and on me.

JOCASTA: Oedipus! . . . My husband and . . . my son! Why did heaven do that to us? What crime necessitated this punishment for us? . . . Do you think it was my crime the day I left you, a babe, to your destruction . . . My son and husband! Is this possible? . . . Is it possible for a human being to suffer this without being afflicted by insanity . . . or instantly struck by a thunderbolt! I must die, Oedipus! . . . I must die!

OEDIPUS: You will not die, Jocasta! I will protect you like an enraged beast . . . I will stand in the way of anyone who tries to touch a hair of you. I will defy heaven's thunderbolts with you . . . and the blows of fate . . . and the curses of human beings. You will not die! . . . You will not die!

JOCASTA: What value does life have now, Oedipus? What value does our life have? . . . Our enemies are not in heaven and not on earth. Our enemy is within us. Our enemy is that buried truth which you dug up with your own hands and uncovered leaving no way to escape it . . . except by ending our lives . . . I must die if I am to stifle the repulsive sound of that repulsive truth deep inside me.

OEDIPUS: You will not die . . . I will destroy every enemy you have. . . even if it is inside you!

JOCASTA: No, Oedipus! Don't do it! . . . In that way, you extend my torment. You don't relieve me. The matter has been decided and the curse of God and of the people has settled on us . . . Wherever we go, looks will follow us like stones thrown at us.

OEDIPUS: Take heart and be brave like me . . . Endure everything to face the actuality.

JOCASTA: Which actuality can we face after today?

OEDIPUS: Our unitary being . . . our united family . . . our loving hearts . . . our souls filled with affection and strengthened by compassion. Who would be able to destroy this edifice? What power could demolish this tower built of love, affection, and compassion?

JOCASTA: Oedipus! . . . My . . . I don't know what to call you.

OEDIPUS: Call me anything you like, for you are Jocasta whom I love. Nothing will change what is in my heart . . . So let me be your husband or your son . . . Names or epithets cannot change the love and affection rooted in the heart. Let Antigone and the others be my children or siblings. These terms cannot change the affection and love I harbor for them in my soul. I will confess it to you, Jocasta, that when I received the blow I almost collapsed under it . . . But that was not in any way able to make me change my feelings for

you a single moment . . . For you will always be Jocasta. No matter what I hear of your being my mother or sister, this will never change the actuality at all . . . For you are always Jocasta to me!

JOCASTA: Oedipus! You whom I cherish more than myself. Don't try to lighten the effect of the catastrophe on me . . . The actuality is as you described it, but the truth, Oedipus . . . What shall we do with the screaming voice of truth?

OEDIPUS: The truth? . . . I have never feared its face a day . . . nor been alarmed by its voice.

JOCASTA (*as though addressing herself*): For how long have I cautioned you against that . . . I have worried about it for you . . . you who have spent your best days chasing after it . . . from city to city in order to grasp its veil . . . until she turned on you at last, bared a little of her terrible face, and screamed in her resounding voice. It devastated the palace of our happiness and brought us to the state you see . . . the wreckage of a family to which no family term applies and for which there is no human description.

OEDIPUS: It was necessary for me, Jocasta, to know the truth.

JOCASTA: Now that you know it . . . do you feel relieved?

OEDIPUS: I truly wish I didn't know it . . . Could I have imagined it would be so terrible? . . . Did it occur to me that it could destroy my bliss? I have realized that only now . . . after it has taken revenge on me for playing with its veil.

JOCASTA: It took revenge on all of us, Oedipus, with a vengeance from which we can never recover.

OEDIPUS: Don't say that, Jocasta. We are capable of recovering. Rise with me . . . Let's put our fingers in our ears and live in actuality . . . with the life which throbs in our hearts overflowing with love and compassion.

JOCASTA: I can't, Oedipus! I can't remain with you . . . Your love for your family has blinded you . . . You are not thinking of people. What would they say if we were to continue this abnormal life after today . . . I am no longer fit to stay. Darling, there is only one solution, for me to go.

OEDIPUS: You will not go! I will compel you to live. I will guard you night and day. I will not permit anything to destroy our happiness and demolish our family. I will abandon the kingship and the palace. We will travel together with our young ones outside this country.

JOCASTA: Travel together? . . . Certainly not. Rather, I will travel alone.

OEDIPUS: Jocasta! Take care you don't proceed with a matter which will bring despair to my heart . . . You know I can't bear to be parted from you. Take heart and rise to meet life with me . . . Rest assured that so long as we have hearts, we are fit to remain.

JOCASTA: We are no longer fit to remain together . . .

OEDIPUS: What is this force which is to separate us?

JOCASTA: You can't overcome it, Oedipus . . . not even with that heroism of yours that vanquished Father Terror.

OEDIPUS (*as though addressing himself*): What a destiny! I am a hero because I killed a beast they claimed had wings. I am a criminal because I killed a man they showed to be my true father . . . I am neither a hero nor a criminal . . . I am just another individual upon whom the people have cast their fictions and heaven its decrees. Must I suffocate under the burden of these cloaks that have been thrown over me? . . . This heart of mine still throbs. I am alive. I want to live. I want to live, Jocasta, and want you to live with me. What is this chasm which separates us now? What hidden enemy and concealed foe rises between us like a giant? . . . Truth?

What power does this truth have? If it were a savage lion with sharp claws and teeth, I would kill it and throw it far from our path. But it is something found only in our minds. It is a figment of the imagination, a ghost. My blow does not penetrate its vitals. My hand does not seize its being. It truly is a winged beast, lurking in the air. We can't reach it with our weapons. It kills our happiness with its riddles . . . Jocasta! You are trembling at a ghost, Jocasta. The actuality in which we now live must endure. We must not allow anything we can't see to destroy it. Free yourself from the truth we heard, Darling! Listen to the throbbing of your heart right now. What is it saying to you? Is it telling you that something has changed? Has your love for your young ones changed? Has your love for Oedipus changed?

JOCASTA: No . . . This love will never change . . . Never, never. But . . .

OEDIPUS: What are these tears in your eyes? Say you want to live for our sake.

JOCASTA: Oedipus!

OEDIPUS: Why are you looking at me this way as though I were your child . . .

JOCASTA: Oedipus!

OEDIPUS: What's **come over** you, Dear Jocasta? . . . You feel sorry for me. My **tenacity for** our lost bliss **fills** you with sorrow. I see pain and torment in your face. Give vent to your pain a little . . . rather plunge into the pain, for the greatest forces have collaborated to destroy this happy family. All the powers! . . . Man's rebellious thought, God's ironic planning, the people's traditions, and human fictions . . . Everything conspires to torment us. Even my intellect which spent years searching for my destruction . . . until I brought out into the open for us that ghost which firmly established itself in empty space . . . to disrupt our smiling

life, rock our lovely actuality, and prevent us from communing in a nest we have built from the feathers of our mutual regard over a long period of time . . . Jocasta! Let's accept the pain of the flow of the disaster which has overcome us. Our souls were both oppressed by it when it neared . . . Don't you remember? But let's not surrender to what has befallen us. Everything will pass so long as we protect our home. The heart's warmth will melt away all sins, even the intellect's sins and errors. I believe in the purity of your heart and mine, for we did not sin deliberately. We did not will any of this evil the consequence of which we suffer. There is no way anyone can reproach us. No power has the right to request an exorbitant price from us for crimes we made no effort to commit. If we must pay a price, let it be this glory, sovereignty, and wealth . . . But you, Jocasta, and our children . . . No, no, no.

JOCASTA (*whispering*): Our children! . . . Our children . . .

OEDIPUS: What are you whispering?

JOCASTA: Nothing . . .

OEDIPUS: I see something in your eyes . . . I am afraid, Jocasta.

JOCASTA: Have no fear . . . It's just a little fatigue . . . Leave me now.

OEDIPUS: I think you are worn out.

JOCASTA: Yes.

OEDIPUS: If you would sleep a little . . . If you sank into a long slumber, Darling . . .

JOCASTA: This is my resolve.

OEDIPUS: But I won't leave you now until you promise me we

will travel together from this country to a distant place . . .

JOCASTA (*as though speaking to herself*): To a distant place . . .  
Yes, I promise you!

OEDIPUS: I will request that at once from the people and from  
Creon. Have a rest now and don't think about anything  
until I return.

JOCASTA: Go along . . . Oedipus!

OEDIPUS (*looking at her for a time*): I won't leave you alone. I'll call  
the children to remain by your side till I return. (*He calls.*)  
Antigone! . . . Antigone!

(*ANTIGONE appears at the threshold.*)

ANTIGONE: Father!

OEDIPUS: Come in with the other children. Look after your  
mother. Cheer her up until I return.

(*He puts his hand on the necks of his children. JOCASTA gazes at them  
while they are joined in this fashion. OEDIPUS leads them to their  
mother.*)

ANTIGONE: Father, you are the only one who can cheer up  
Mother. All you have to do is to tell her the story of Father  
Terror. Mother, as you know, always loves to hear it from  
you.

OEDIPUS: The people are waiting for me, Antigone. You take  
care of this for me. You do a better job of telling the story  
than I do. I entrust your mother's care to you until I come  
back. Take care not to leave her at the mercy of her  
thoughts.

(*OEDIPUS goes out followed by the distraught glances of JOCASTA.*)



JOCASTA (*whispering*): My husband! . . . My son!

ANTIGONE: Mother! You truly seem to be thinking about something sad.

JOCASTA: That won't last long, Daughter.

ANTIGONE: Why are you looking at me this way?

JOCASTA: You love your father a great deal, Antigone. I am sure you will always be at his side . . . if I were fated to go one day to a distant place . . .

ANTIGONE: Mother, are you going to a distant place?

JOCASTA: That may happen one day.

ANTIGONE: What distant place do you mean?

JOCASTA: A distant place . . . where the heart lives free . . . like a peaceful dove. That bird with wings and claws which preys on love does not fly in the sky there.

ANTIGONE: I don't understand what you are saying, Mother.

JOCASTA: Never mind. Don't try to understand now. All I ask of you is to take care of your father if one day you see him all alone . . . I leave him to your care, Antigone. For he deserves all our love. If one day you see his tears flowing from his eyes, then with your pure little hands, wipe away those tears.

ANTIGONE: Why are you saying this to me, Mother?

JOCASTA: Because I don't want your father to suffer. He must live bright-eyed and find solace in you for everything.

ANTIGONE: Are you weeping, Mother?

JOCASTA: I entrust him to you, Antigone! I entrust him to you!

*(She embraces her daughter for a long time.)*

### Scene Two

*In the square in front of the palace . . . The CHORUS is assembled as before. The PRIEST and CREON have taken their places in the crowd.*

CHORUS: Who would have imagined that these alarming things would be disclosed? Who would have thought that Oedipus would fail to know these things about his reality? This hero who has persevered in his research and was proficient at solving riddles was blind to his situation. He did not notice which woman was in his bed, which child he fathered, or which man he killed . . . It seems that this man who grasped more of what is secret than was necessary for him missed the minimum a person ought to know. He dared to attack even Father Terror to wrest away his secret and shrank from knowing what was hidden in his own house and in his past. How miserable is this man who began to drill into the depths, for nothing burst up at him except the spring of his sorrows . . . What do you suppose he is doing now? What has become of Jocasta? Has she regained consciousness? What do you suppose they can do now? This palace encompasses them in its belly like an animal with unclean and decaying matter in its intestines . . . We don't know whether to pity Oedipus or be angry at him . . . In spite of everything, he is more our king and hero than he is one who has sinned against his own truth and that of his relatives.

PRIEST: That's enough talk from you, People, concerning Oedipus. Leave his suffering now and busy yourselves with yours.

CHORUS: What stratagem do we have at our disposal? Ask Oedipus. He's the one who always sees what must be done for us.

PRIEST: You haven't stopped putting Oedipus up where you raised him. You still imagine him with the same qualities you knew from him. You are not able to get free quickly from the enchantment of an idea you have grown accustomed to nor to make any sudden change in it. For that required an ability for quick perception . . . How stolid your thought is, People. How slow your hand is to put the statue where it belongs. But I draw to your attention that Oedipus now has sufficient concerns of his own. He has an affliction which saps, a trial submerging him, and work which turns him away from having time for you.

CHORUS (*looking at the palace gate*): Here is Oedipus! He has appeared.

OEDIPUS: It is difficult for me to show myself to your eyes after disgrace has covered me and dishonor has enveloped me. But I have come to receive the verdict of the citizens on me, People. Have a little mercy for me, if your verdict delivered just now in my absence is harsher than I can bear.

PRIEST: They have not delivered judgment on you, Oedipus. Don't expect them to, but remember that you promised to deliver your verdict on the killer of Laius . . . So do not go back on your promise.

OEDIPUS: I will not go back on my promise, Priest. What punishment did I decree for you when I accused you and Creon?

PRIEST: Death or banishment?

OEDIPUS: I am not brave enough for death now, because I love my family . . . so let it be the latter, Priest. Allow me to travel with my family from this land . . . not to return!

CREON: Oedipus, you ask too much! What is your family but mine? How can we allow you to wander off with the family to foreign parts . . . to take them never to return?

OEDIPUS: And can this land support us after today?

CREON: No one here has the right, Oedipus, to authorize this departure for you . . . We are not able to issue any ruling for it before we ask God's guidance.

OEDIPUS: What's this you say, Creon? Aren't you the one who brought the oracle from the temple at Delphi? Didn't it tell you to cleanse this land of the person who defiled it with pollution?

CREON: What you request, Oedipus, is too serious for me to grant without permission . . . The oracle is sometimes obscure for us. There must be some hesitation in your case. It is not easy to have the family of Laius leave its place of origin . . . It's an outcome over which there can be no haste or speed.

CHORUS (*turning*): Here is Tiresias approaching . . . Perhaps he has an opinion. He is able to understand the oracles.

OEDIPUS: Come here, Tiresias, and settle our disagreement. You know the events which have taken place and the calamities which have landed on my head. Here I am proposing to give up this kingship which is plunged in mud and blood. I wish to flee from this land with my family, but these people refuse to shorten my torment and humiliation.

TIRESIAS (*pushing his boy away from him*): Get away from me, Boy. I see my path now. God has struck my eye and I can see.

OEDIPUS: Tiresias! . . . Listen to me.

TIRESIAS: Who is this calling me? Is it a human being or a god?

OEDIPUS: I'm Oedipus.

TIRESIAS: Oedipus? . . . Who is Oedipus?

OEDIPUS: Don't you know now who Oedipus is? Allow me to

remind you of him. He is the one on whom you brought down all these misfortunes. You are the person so stupid he wished to interfere in something beyond his power . . . You are the blind man who thought he could see better for people than heaven could. You are the one who willed, and your will was a curse on the innocent. Had you allowed matters to run the course intended for them according to the designated laws, I would not be a criminal today . . . You wished to challenge heaven. You banished young Oedipus from the kingship and place on the throne a man of your making. But this man you put up is the very same Oedipus you banished. For a long time you have prided yourself on your free will . . . Yes, you truly had a free will. I have witnessed its effects. But it was always operating, without your knowing or sensing it, within the framework of heaven's will.

CHORUS: We don't understand anything of this strange speech Oedipus is uttering.

PRIEST: Allow Oedipus to say whatever he wishes, for he would like to appear in the garb of the innocent and throw the crime on the shoulders of this blind old man. This old man was simply the bearer of a divine oracle . . . and the prophecy has been borne out.

OEDIPUS: Yes! It was correct. This is something causing amazement. It amazes him in his soul . . . this old man who was the bearer of the prophecy. When I uttered that statement just now I did not wish to appear innocent. I have never defended myself before you. It's a statement only Tiresias understands. It is of no significance for you. If you learned, People, what I mean, you would be filled with amazement. And you, Priest . . . Who knows? Perhaps you were, unconsciously, for Creon what Tiresias was for me . . . Man is man. He must act, will, and proceed according to the motivation of his aptitudes and conceit. His shortsightedness does not distinguish between his will and God's.

TIRESIAS: What is this clamor around me? I hardly hear anything people say. My ear is filled with laughter coming from above.

OEDIPUS: Yes! Heaven wished to make a laughingstock of you . . . You who thought to wage war and tried to make your will a sword. You selected this palace with its peaceful residents as the battlefield! You struck your blow, but God had only to mock you and strike your blind eye. Then you saw your stupidity and conceit . . . The palace, however, has been razed to the ground with its inhabitants by your stupid blow and heaven's irony . . . Although it would have been more chivalrous, Tiresias, to think a little about the victims. Speak and give the judgment you think just . . . I ask only to depart with my family from this land, carrying away our disgrace. Perhaps in another land we will succeed in restoring our fortunes.

TIRESIAS: Boy! . . . What is buzzing from the depths of silence? The drone of an insect deep in the mud?

OEDIPUS: It's a creature which killed its father, married its mother, and fathered children who were its siblings. Insects deep in the mud do that, because they're blind. I did that, because since I came into existence a blind man has wished to guide my destiny . . . You are the true criminal. If your blood were pure, I would shed it and wash my wounds with it. But it was fated that you live respected and deceive people, while I pay the price of your errors and wear the ignominy of your crimes.

PRIEST: Have pity on the old man, Oedipus! Have pity on the old man!

CHORUS: Bear your destiny alone, Oedipus, as befits a hero!

OEDIPUS: You're right, People. It's foolish to dispute the destinies allotted us. Perhaps some of it is of our own making. Do you hear, Tiresias? Your closed eye could not

see God's hand in this existence . . . This system ordained for things is so straight a path that everyone who strays from it finds pits to fall into. You have a path you can proceed down according to your will, or you can stop. But you are not to challenge or deviate. You did, Tiresias, and you fell. But you swept us along with you. The fall affected you only in your pride. God used it to put you back in your place. We, however, were hit in our hearts. No one can give us assistance now. Not even you . . . You keep silent except to prate and babble. No hope remains for us save the people's hearts. We ask them to have some mercy on us . . . Now get away from me, Old Man. From now on you are good for nothing, in my opinion. Take him far away, Boy.

TIRESIAS (*to the BOY*): Take me to God so I can ask him when He prepared and planned His mockery — before creating us . . . or after our deliberation? Take me up to heaven, Boy. Bring me to God. I would know whether He truly is laughing at me just now . . . or whether He does not know me or care about me . . . Has He laughed in advance, since the beginning of creation . . . since He created this jest and shot it off into time to strike anyone who opposes it? It envelopes anyone who challenges it and clings to anyone who stands in its way . . . Take me up to heaven, Boy, so I may know. If I find God laughing at me, I too will laugh in His presence . . . like this . . . and this . . . (*He pushes the BOY in front of him. While he laughs, they depart.*)

CHORUS (*watching TIRESIAS leave*): What has happened to noble Tiresias today? It seems the events have made him oblivious to us and have unbalanced him.

PRIEST: Let him go. I think he's out of sorts today.

(*A scream resounds from inside the palace. Everyone turns towards the portal. Then ANTIGONE appears screaming.*)

ANTIGONE: Father! Father!

OEDIPUS: What's happened? What's happened?

ANTIGONE: Mother . . . Hurry to Mother!

*(OEDIPUS leaps up the steps and enters the palace, terrified, with his daughter behind him. The crowd stares at them, motionless from alarm, like statues.)*

CREON *(recovering from the surprise and beginning to move)*:  
What's happened to my sister? *(He starts to go to the palace.)*

PRIEST *(catching and restraining him)*: Stay, Creon! Your place now is with these people who have been left by their guardians. Their protectors are too preoccupied to care for them . . . We can guess the pain you suffer and the sentiment filling you . . . For you are a branch of this ruling tree and a member of this unhappy family. You are shaken by the tempests and losses which toss it . . . Your loyalty to Oedipus and your sister inspires us to request you to put your hand to the tiller of this ship before it sinks with all of us. So rise before this anxious and apprehensive people. Fasten their vessel to a safe shore.

CREON: Who grants me this sovereignty?

PRIEST: The encompassing circumstances and the tyranny of events give you the right to look after the people's welfare. In the same way, waves washing over a ship give the resolute sailor the right to hoist the burden and establish tranquility, stability, and safety when the captain is down.

CREON: Didn't you see how I was accused of desiring the throne?

PRIEST: That accusation against you was dropped, because the truth was on your side. Never listen to any voice except that of your duty.

CREON *(shouting into his ear)*: Hush!



*(Screams ring out from inside the palace.)*

CHORUS: What are the frightening sounds coming from inside the palace?

PRIEST *(turning towards the palace)*: Not so fast. Here is a servant coming to us from the palace.

CHORUS: Look at this person coming from the palace. His eyes show signs of alarm.

SERVANT: People of Thebes! . . . Queen Jocasta is dead.

CHORUS: Dead?

CREON: O Sister! *(He rushes into the palace.)*

CHORUS: Speak . . . speak. Tell us what happened!

SERVANT: We did not see anything at first, but we heard Antigone screaming, "Where's Father? Where's my father?" When we asked her what was the matter with her, she said that her mother had risen from her bed and kissed her and the other children. She pretended that she was overcome by fatigue and that she wished to sleep for a long time. She drew them outside her room. Then she entered it and blocked the door from the inside. Her eyes flashed in a way to arouse fear and awaken anxiety . . . After that, the young ones heard through the cracks of the door only suppressed cries and choking moans . . . Then there was a dreadful, pervasive silence . . . and Antigone rushed outside to you as you saw to tell her father . . . Then Oedipus hastened after her to the locked room, banging on the door as though crazed. There was no answer. He bellowed like a frightened animal and attacked the door with his shoulder until he knocked it down. And here we saw a sight which froze the blood in our veins . . . Queen Jocasta hanged by her neck from a rope. She was dangling in the air with everything around her quiet as a tomb. Oedipus had

scarcely seen her in this state when he rushed to the rope and pulled it down. Then the queen's corpse fell cold to the floor . . . At that time, our eyes saw the most hideous sight observed by the human eye. Oedipus became quite crazed. He bent over Jocasta's body rubbing his cheeks against her and wiping his head against her feet. He shouted: "They are slow to bring me a weapon of death too . . . I have no need for the sword. Here's something more hideous than death, more violent and painful!" He stretched out his hand like a hawk's talon to the breast of the royal robe which Jocasta wore. He tore off its gold brooches and plunged them violently into his own eyes, saying: "I will weep for you only with tears of blood!" He proceeded to tear his eyelids and rip his eyelashes with the brooches. Blood flowed from his eyes in streams, dyeing with its dark color the surface of his cheek like black lines from the judgment of a stern fate.

CHORUS (*including women's voices*): Enough! Enough!

PRIEST: Where is this wretched king now?

SERVANT: He is stumbling about inside the palace writhing from his pain.

PRIEST: Hasn't anyone been quick to attend to him?

SERVANT: Of what use would an attempt to care for him be now? . . . Look, I see his arms beating the air, groping for the way out of the palace.

(*OEDIPUS appears, blinded, with blood on his face and clothes.*)

CHORUS (*shouting in alarm*): Woe!

OEDIPUS (*stumbling while he advances*): Where have my feet led me?

CHORUS: Why did you do this to yourself, Oedipus? It hurts to look at it.

OEDIPUS: This is you, Generous People. I seek your pardon and forgiveness for me . . . I did not wish to hurt your eyes with a distasteful sight. But I am searching for the only path left to me.

CHORUS: What path is this, Oedipus?

OEDIPUS: The path of death . . . There beyond the walls of Thebes. I will wander aimlessly through the countryside until I encounter a beast to devour me. Then the birds will land to feed off the remains of my body.

PRIEST: We won't allow you to go to your destruction.

OEDIPUS: Have mercy on me. Don't bar the way before me any longer. You refused us exile until it was too late . . . Nothing remains for me but to meet death.

PRIEST: You will not walk to meet it.

OEDIPUS: Who will prevent me?

PRIEST: God . . . if He thinks your time has not yet come.

OEDIPUS: What interest does God have in drawing out my torment? Hasn't He fully exercised His right to punish me yet?

PRIEST: Perhaps He wishes you well . . .

OEDIPUS: What good can happen to me after today? The light around me has been extinguished . . . all light in my eye and in my heart. An eternal darkness has blotted out my life. It seems a cloak of mourning which will never be lifted from me.

PRIEST: If you wish to draw near to God and light a lamp to Him in your soul, it will give you light on your darkest nights. But you have preferred to light candles in your intellect

which have all gone out in the first gust of wind.

OEDIPUS: Don't scold me, Priest, and don't take revenge on me. I truly lit these candles to search for Truth. Tiresias cautioned me one day against letting my fingers touch its face and come close to its eyes. It does not like anyone to look at it more than is necessary. Yes, these fingers have come closer to it than they ought, until I have put out my eyes . . . It has taken revenge on me, so don't you be hard on me, Priest. I need your pity and compassion.

PRIEST: What good will my compassion be to you when all these mishaps have befallen you? But I will ask heaven's mercy for you.

CHORUS: Here's Creon coming pale-browed out of the palace . . .

OEDIPUS: Creon is coming? Ask him to help me and to lighten my pains.

CREON (*when he has appeared*): Why did you do this to yourself, Oedipus? What do you wish from me to alleviate your pains?

OEDIPUS: Allow me to go far away from Thebes. Expel me from your land like a curse.

CREON: Don't ask that of me, Oedipus.

OEDIPUS: I shall not ask you, Creon, to take my family with me . . . as I requested at first. The circumstances have changed now, as you know. I shall go alone, leaving my children with you. You take care of them; you are an excellent father for them. I entreat you to take good care of the two girls, Creon . . . and Antigone in particular . . . She has been very attached to me. She will have greater need for your affection . . . So you can see the matter is easy for you to consent to, for I have committed to you my family and yours, that is what remains of it. So far as I'm concerned, it

is of no use for me to remain. I am no longer fit to remain . . . Dear Jocasta was right. I vainly encouraged her to live. She resisted as I did, but something stronger and more violent was victorious. With the departure of Jocasta, I perceived the power of that thing which compelled her death. I understood that my life as well was completely futile. Then I immediately wrapped it in darkness.

CREON: Do you have a last request, Oedipus?

OEDIPUS: Yes! . . . Don't forget to have the appropriate funeral rites performed for the burial of that one who lies shrouded in her chamber. She is your sister, and I am confident that you will do your duty well . . . I have no request beyond that except to commend my children to you once more . . . And I appeal to your generosity, Creon, and ask you to send for them now so that I can touch them with my hand.

CREON (*gesturing to the servant near the palace gate*): I had thought to spare them these painful sights . . .

OEDIPUS: For a time which may be the last . . . if you allow it, Compassionate Creon, I would touch their innocent faces with my fingers. I would imagine their features and contemplate their images in my head . . . What's this I hear? That is the sound of their little feet and that the sobbing of Antigone which I know. They are coming. I wonder whether you have had mercy on me, Creon, and sent to fetch them?

(*ANTIGONE comes out of the palace leading the other children.*)

CREON: I ordered them brought to you, Oedipus, for I know how much you love them. Here they are, close to you!

OEDIPUS (*stretching his hand out in the air*): Thank you, Creon! Where are you, my children? I don't see you. My eyes will never see you again.

ANTIGONE (*holding back her tears*): Never mind, Father. So long as I have eyes, they are yours. You shall never be alone. I will be by your side wherever you are . . .

OEDIPUS: Antigone, my daughter! My heart is not pleased to drag you with me down the road of suffering. Your place is here beside your uncle with the other children.

ANTIGONE: The only place for me is next to you, Father. I will see for you. Don't you remember that I aspired one day to see things with your eyes . . . to see them as you see them. I will try to observe things the way you would. I will not let you feel for a day that you have lost your sight.

OEDIPUS: To the contrary, I was the one who aspired to see existence, pure and clean, through your eyes, but I am no longer worthy of that. Stay far from me, Daughter. Your radiant youth is yours, not mine. I will not take it from you and thereby commit another crime . . . Live life, my children. Keep your hands clean of me. For I am nothing to you but a blot. I am nothing but a burden on you. My ill-omened shadow which will attend you on the morrow will be enough of me for you to bear. You will be a proverbial example, a tidbit for mouths and toy for tongues. So long as people need fictions to fill the emptiness of their days, you will be a legend for people. The only hope for you is your uncle Creon. Make him your father. You will find affection and sympathy in his care. He has pledged to care for you. Here I extend my hand to you to confirm the pact . . . Where is your hand, Friend?

(*CREON takes OEDIPUS' hand and presses it without speaking.*)

OEDIPUS: Young Ones, make Creon your example and model . . . This man is even-tempered and pure-hearted, with a believing soul. Take care . . . take care not to make your father a model. Rather, take a lesson from his fate.

(*ANTIGONE's tears fall on OEDIPUS' hand with no sob or sound.*)

OEDIPUS: What are those tears on my hand? Whose tears are these?

ANTIGONE (*exploding*): Don't say that, Father! I will never take anyone for a model besides you . . . Never . . . You are the hero of Thebes!

OEDIPUS: This is you, Dear Antigone . . . You still believe your father a hero? (*He weeps.*) No, I am no longer that today, Daughter. Indeed, I never was a hero at all.

(*ANTIGONE brushes away OEDIPUS' tears with her hands.*)

ANTIGONE: Father! You have never been the hero you are today!