

OEDIPUS REX

Oedipus: My children, scions of ancient Kadmos, why this importunate posture? Why these wreaths of suppliant branches? The incense permeates the whole city, as does your chanting, your sorrowful cries. So, not wishing to put my faith in second-hand information, I'm here in person, famed Oedipus.

Revered sir, speak! (it is fitting that you represent these folk). What is the problem? Some dread? A request? I would help you in any way I can. I would be hard-hearted indeed not to have compassion for your cause.

Priest: Oedipus, ruler of our land, you see gathered here at your altar people of all ages, chicks barely out of their nest and priests bowed down with age, Zeus' representative (myself) and the pick of our youth. The rest of us are in the market-place, similarly wreathed, and at Athene's twin shrines and at the ash-strewn altars along the river Ismenos. The state totters alarmingly (see for yourself!), she can barely raise her head any longer, plunged as she is in bloodshed. Her cornfields are rotting, her cattle are dying, her mothers are barren, That fiery fury, detested Plague, is storming our city and depleting the House of Kadmos, enriching murky Hell with cries and groans. We importune you, I and these young people, not as the gods' equal but as first among men in both the vicissitudes of life and communication with the immortals. You came to the city of Kadmos and released us from tribute we had long been paying to that harsh songstress, the Sphinx.. Aided by no knowledge on our part, you, with the divine help, restored us to a happy life.

Now, mighty Oedipus, we all beg and entreat you to give us succour. Have you any information to hand, either mortal or divine? I know that men of experience in the world are most likely to offer good advice. Best of men, come, restore our city. Take care! Our land worships you for your earlier zeal on its behalf. Let us not remember your kingship as one which set us back on our feet only to scupper us at a later time. Restore our city to safety! With happy augury you gave us good fortune – be equal to the task now too! If you are to rule us in the future as you rule us now, better to have a peopled kingdom than an empty one. What good are towers and ships without citizens in them?

Oedipus: Piteous children, I know well what you desire of me. I know of your sickness, yet, sick though you be, none of you is as sick as I. Your pain is a single pain only, but my very soul grieves for us all, city, citizens, self. You do not rouse me from sleep – no, you see me weeping for countless reasons, treading countless paths in the vagaries of my mind. This path I chose - after much thought I believe it is the only way: I sent to Apollo's shrine in Pythia my brother-in-law Kreon, son of Menoikeus, that he may learn what I may do or say to save this city. I have calculated the days he has been away and I am concerned. What is he doing? He is behind his time. When he gets here I will be less than a man if I do not do all the god advises.

Priest:-Your words are timely – his approach is announced.

Oedipus: Lord Apollo! May his news be as joyous as his face suggests. This could be our salvation!

Priest: It is as you guess, surely. His head is wreathed with laurel-berries.

Oedipus: We'll soon know. He's in hearing distance. Lord, brother, Menoikeus' son, what word from the oracle?

Kreon: A good one! Trouble can change to joy if a prophecy turns out right.

Oedipus: What sort of prophecy is it? These words of yours inspire neither over-confidence nor apprehension.

Kreon: Shall I speak in the presence of this crowd, or should we go indoors?

Oedipus: Speak to us all. My grief for them is greater than for myself.

Kreon: Let me tell you what Apollo communicated to me. Lord Phoibos' words were clear – drive out the pollution that is nurtured in our land! Nurture it no further, else it will be past all cure!

Oedipus: How do we cleanse the land of this abomination?

Kreon: With exile or with blood for blood – it was blood that brought the plague to our city.

Oedipus: Who is it shall pay this price?

Kreon: Lord, Laios once ruled over us, until you assumed his mantle.

Oedipus: That I learned of you. I never met him.

Kreon: Apollo explicitly commands that we take revenge on those who murdered him.

Oedipus: And they are...where? It will be hard to sniff out a trail that has gone cold.

Kreon: They are here in this land, it seems. What is sought can be found, while neglect leads to loss.

Oedipus: Where did Laios meet his end? At home? In the countryside? Abroad?

Kreon: Apollo averred that he set off on a mission to an oracle, but never arrived back home.

Oedipus: Was there no envoy, a fellow-traveller who witnessed the deed and therefore could give an account of it?

Kreon: All dead. All but one, who was so horrified by what he saw that he could relate one thing only.

Oedipus: Which was...? One thing could mean many once we have grasped a small spark of hope.

Kreon: He was set upon by brigands in no small strength – an extensive gang, it seems.

Oedipus: What motivation other than money could have led a brigand to this rash act?

Kreon: What indeed? But with Laios gone there was no-one to support us in our ensuing difficulties.

Oedipus: With the kingdom lost, what difficulty prevented an inquiry?

Kreon: The riddling Sphinx brought our attention from ambiguities to more immediate concerns.

Oedipus: Once more I shall reveal all. Apollo, and you too, have done well to turn our attention to the deceased's avenging. You shall see - as well you should – that I too shall avenge our city and her god. I shall eradicate this abomination not for my friends abroad but for myself. The killer may want to take vengeance on me too, so in requiting Laios I save myself.

Children, quick as you can, quit these steps, take up your suppliant boughs. Someone go and rouse up Kadmos' folk. I shall do everything in my power. With our god's help we will either prevail or fall.

Priest: Up, children. We came here for the very reason Oedipus makes clear to us. May Apollo, source of these prophecies, save us and put an end to this plague.

Chorus:: Sweet voice of Zeus, from Pytho rich in gold,
You grace great Thebes. Now see my grief unfold.
I'm on the rack. I shake with mortal fear.
O Delian, it's you that I revere.
What is your remedy? Something untried?
Or validated well by time and tide?
Speak, child of golden Hope, reveal it all.
Divine Athene, first on you I call,
And sister Artemis, who guards our land,
And Phoibos too, with weapons in your hand.
You quenched the dark flame of our grief before
When danger loomed. Appear to us once more.
My woes are countless. Sickness now holds sway,
And no man's thoughts a weapon's part can play.
Our glorious land no longer yields its corn,
Birth-pangs produce no offspring – all stillborn.
Life after life speeds to the western strand,
Bird-swift, yes, swifter than a firebrand.
The corpses pile up, families on the ground
Unpitied lie, at altars may be found
Our women who in supplication groan.
Goddess, send fair-faced aid! Protect your own!
This war which rages weaponless commend
To Amphitrite's vastness or else send
Into that turbulent Thracian waterway.
Those things which night neglects are left for day
To ravage. Zeus, the Lightner, let me urge
That with your thunderbolt you quell the scourge.
Lykian Lord, let loose your darts of steel
From gold-encrusted quiver! Let it feel
Your power! The flames of Artemis let fly,
The flames she carries through the mountains high
In Lykia. Bacchus, with your gold headband,
O god of wine, and named after our land,
Come with the light your piney fires afford,
Attack the god by other gods abhorred.

Oedipus: I hear your prayer. Listen to me. If you would deal with pestilence, you may take heart and obliterate the menace. I speak as one who is ignorant of the story and the crime. I could not investigate too deeply without some clue or other. But now, as a recent addition to the citizenry, I proclaim the following to all descendants of Kadmos: whoever among you knows who killed Laios, son of Labdakos, you are to reveal him to me, even if you fear the consequences of its long suppression. You will incur no ill and will be able to leave Thebes unharmed. And if someone knows the murderer is a foreigner, let him not keep it back. I will reward him and he will receive the gratitude of all. But if you keep silent, if someone ignores my proclamation out of fear for himself or another, hear my response: Whoever that man is, no citizen of this land where I rule and hold sway shall

receive him in his house nor speak to him. He may participate in no prayers or sacrifices, he is denied the use of holy water. Thrust him from your homes, all of you – he is an abomination, the Pythian god has just told us so. Thus do I align myself with the deity and with him who lies dead. I curse the unknown man, or men, who did this, and condemn him, hateful as he is, to a hateful life. And further, if the guilty one shares my hearth with my cognizance, may I receive the same fate. Look to it, I command you - do it for yourselves, for the deity, for your city which is dying by degrees, barren, godless. Even if the command was not sent by the god it would not be right to let the death of your excellent king go unatoned. No, it would still require investigation. But now, since I hold the reins of power he once held, and have married his widow and begotten children, as he would have had he not been unfortunate – well, fate dealt a crashing blow – I will champion him to the utmost, as though he had been my own father. I shall prevail. I shall apprehend the slayer of the son of Labdakos, the descendant of Polydorus, of Kadmos before him, of ancient Agenor. May those who don't assist in the search, I pray, have barren fields, barren wives. May they perish in this present pestilence, and worse! But may those who approve of my plan be always blessed by Justice and all the gods.

Chorus: Under threat of your curses, lord, I shall speak. I neither killed Laios nor can identify his murderer. The question came from Apollo – perhaps he can say who it was.

Oedipus: Well said! But no-one can make a god speak against his will.

Chorus: Let me give you my second thoughts on the matter.

Oedipus: Have you a third? If so, don't hesitate to render it up.

Chorus: Lord Teiresias understands Lord Apollo better than any. Ask him and you will get the plain truth.

Oedipus: I have not neglected this point. After Kreon spoke to us I sent two envoys to Teiresias. I am surprised he's not here already.

Chorus: That old story made no sense.

Oedipus: What story's that? I want to leave no stone unturned.

Chorus: That Laios died at the hands of highwaymen.

Oedipus: I too heard that, but no-one saw the deed.

Chorus: Anyone with a smidgen of fear at your imprecations will surely be flushed out.

Oedipus: Would he be afraid who had no fear to do this deed?

Chorus: There is one who will point him out. These fellows are conducting hither the god's interpreter – he alone holds the truth.

Oedipus: Teiresias, who observe all, know all – both sacred and profane – blind though you be, you see the city's pitiful plight. You alone we regard as her champion and saviour, lord. We sent messengers to Apollo – perhaps you heard – and he has returned them. The sole release from this pestilence lies in identifying the killers and either executing them or banishing them from the land. Apply your skills in augury and divination. Save yourself! Save the city! Save me! Wipe out every stain from Laios' corpse. We are behind you. To help one's fellow-men is the worthiest deed.

Teiresias: Ah, it is a terrible thing when there is no profit in wisdom. I know this well but had blotted it from my mind. I should not have come here.

Oedipus: What's this? Such a despondent attitude!

Teiresias: Send me home. Trust me – we will bear our crosses the better for it.

Oedipus: If you withhold your words you will prove neither honourable nor helpful to the city that raised you.

Teiresias: Your own words are far from auspicious. I don't wish to say anything similarly untoward.

Oedipus: For God's sake, if you know anything, don't turn away. We are prostrate at your feet in supplication.

Teiresias: You know nothing, all of you. Let me not reveal your true wretchedness – or mine.

Oedipus: What? You'll not reveal what you know? You'll betray us, destroy our city?

Teiresias: I would not cause myself or you such grief. Why question me thus? You'll get nothing out of me.

Oedipus: You villain! You'd move a stone to fury! What, not speak? You'll remain hard and inexorable?

Teiresias: You reproach me for what I am, yet you won't acknowledge your own predicament.

Oedipus: Who can listen to you slander our city and not be enraged?

Teiresias: The truth will out whether I speak it or not.

Oedipus: If that is the case, then you WILL tell me.

Teiresias: Not a word more! Rage all you want!

Oedipus: I shall, I'll hold nothing back! I reckon you had a hand in this crime, as good as committed it yourself. If you had your sight, I would condemn you as the sole perpetrator.

Teiresias: Oh yes? Then abide by that proclamation of yours: henceforth speak to no-one, either these citizens or myself. YOU are the cause of this city's plague.

Oedipus: You would spew out such blasphemy? And how do you plan to escape its consequences?

Teiresias: I already have. I am the receptacle of the truth – it prevails.

Oedipus: Of whom did you learn it? It doesn't come from your skill as a prophet.

Teiresias: Of you. Yes, you forced me to say it.

Oedipus: To say what? Tell me again for my better understanding.

Teiresias: Did you not hear the first time? Are you tempting me to speak again?

Oedipus: Yes, to confirm it absolutely. Tell me again.

Teiresias: The killer you seek is yourself.

Oedipus: You shall pay for the foul news you have reiterated.

Teiresias: Shall I tell you the rest and inflame you further?

Oedipus: As you wish. It will be nonsense anyway.

Teiresias: You are living in abomination with those who are dearest to you, and yet you don't know it. You don't see your guilt.

Oedipus: Do you think you can get away with this nonsense forever?

Teiresias: Yes, if there is any validity in truth.

Oedipus: There is – but not YOUR truth. Your senses are shut – hearing, discernment, sight.

Teiresias: Poor man! You cast in my teeth the insults which everyone will soon be hurling at you.

Oedipus: Night alone is your constant nurse – you cannot harm me or any man who can look on the light of day.

Teiresias: Fate decrees that it is not at my hands that you will meet your downfall, but Apollo's.

Oedipus: Is this a fiction of Kreon's? Or whom?

Teiresias: Your doom is none of Kreon's doing, only your own.

Oedipus: Ah, wealth, kingship, ever-developing skill in an envied life! How much jealousy must you be harbouring if, to gain rule of this city – rule which was handed to me BY the city (I never asked for it) – Kreon, my loyal friend from the first, should secretly plot to unseat me and suborn a tricky charlatan, a subtle vagrant, one whose sight is perfect only when there is gain in the offing. Yes, he's sightless when his skill is needed.

So tell me, is your prophecy ever reliable? How come, when the dog-faced riddler was among us you didn't speak some comfort to the citizens? This riddle couldn't be explained by just anybody – it needed a prophet's skill. But you found nothing in your avian divinations, no sign from a god. Then I came – know-nothing Oedipus – and shut her up. I found the answer from my intellect – I needed no birds! And then you try to kick me out, hoping for promotion under Kreon's regime. You and your colleague will pay dearly for that, I think. If you weren't the old man you seem, you would learn, at considerable cost, how evil you have been.

Chorus: Oedipus, your words and his spring from anger, we suspect. Anger we don't need – let us rather think how best to interpret Apollo's prophecy.

Teiresias: Even though you rule here, yet my right to contradict makes me your equal. In that I prevail. I serve Apollo, not you. I'm not under Kreon's patronage either. Let me speak (since you have denounced me as blind): you have eyes, yet don't see your plight. You are unaware of where it is you are dwelling and of those who dwell with you. Do you know your ancestry? Don't you realize the rancour you have aroused among your kin both alive and dead? One day the double curse of both your mother and father will, with its ravishing strides, sweep you from this land. You see well now, but soon all will be darkness. What port will not hear your cries, where in Kithairon will they not reverberate when you fully recognize what sort of marriage you have – rudderless, despite the seemingly fair winds which blew you here? You yet have no inkling of the countless further woes to be heaped on both you and your progeny. So rage against Kreon. Rage against my prophecy. No mortal anywhere shall be crushed more utterly than you.

Oedipus: Must I listen to this? To hell with you! Leave this place now, and don't even THINK of returning.

Teiresias: I came here only at YOUR bidding.

Oedipus: How was I to know you would spout nonsense? If I had, I would hardly have sent for you.

Teiresias: That's what I seem to you – nonsensical? Your parents thought me wise.

Oedipus: My...? Wait! WHO were my parents?

Teiresias: This day will both create you anew and destroy you.

Oedipus: Everything you say is obscure riddling.

Teiresias: But are you not an expert at solving riddles?

Oedipus: Yes, make fun of my talent!

Teiresias: That's the very thing that has brought you down.

Oedipus: I don't care so long as I saved the city.

Teiresias: Then I'll leave. Boy, lead me.

Oedipus: Yes, take him away. You're a bother when you're here. Your absence will eradicate the inconvenience.

Teiresias: I have said what I came here to say, so now I'm leaving. You don't scare me. You can't touch me. Listen to me – the very man you have been looking for all this time, ever since you announced Laios' murder – he is HERE. An alien in name but, you will see, a true Theban – not a happy discovery. Blindness out of clarity, penury out of wealth! Prodding the earth with his stick he shall travel to a foreign land and be denounced as both brother and father to his children, son and husband to her who bore him, murderer of his own father. Go in, think it over. If you conclude it's all lies, then call me foolish, unfit to prophesy.

Chorus: The Delphic seer disclosed a bloody deed,
Denounced the felon, who must bid goodbye
To Thebes. He must take flight with greater speed
Than thundering horses. Now to him there fly
The unrelenting Fates, Apollo too,
With lightning-flashes and with fire arrayed.
Parnassus sent the order blasting through
Her peaks: sniff out, hunt down the renegade.
This man, like some lone creature of the wild,
Roams the dense woods, a piteous sight to see.
He shuns the augury of Zeus's child,
Yet it will haunt him through eternity.
This prophecy inflames the world with dread;
These words are unconfirmed, yet undenied.
I can no longer think what should be said;
I hope – yet darkness looms on every side.
What quarrel did the sons of Labdakos
Have with King Polybos? We know of none.
We'll probe the charge which faces Oedipus
And clear him of the deed they say he's done.
Zeus and Apollo know the hearts of man,
And, truth to tell, no-one can clearly claim
That I judge better than another can.
Yet, till I see the proof, I'll lay no blame.
The winged maiden, straight before our eyes,
In chilling fashion, catechized our king.
We loved him so, for he was proven wise –
A guilty verdict will we never bring.

Kreon: Citizens, so Oedipus has brought a monstrous accusation against me, it seems. My indignation knows no bounds. If he thinks that his suffering in this present misfortune can be traced to anything I have said or done, then I care not to stay long in this world. I'm accused not of some commonplace peccadillo. No, the charge is mammoth – disloyalty to the state and to you and to my friends.

Chorus: It is possible that the reproach against you is the consequence of anger, not good sense.

Kreon: And who was it said that I persuaded the prophet to tell such lies?

Chorus: He did say these things but I don't know what was really in his mind.

Kreon: His eyes were open, his mind was clear when he launched his denunciation, is not that so?

Chorus: I don't know. What our leaders do is not for me to question. Here he comes from the palace.

Oedipus: What are YOU back here for? Are you so rash that you have come to my very doorstep to murder me and appropriate my kingdom in broad daylight? God, do you think I am a coward, or an idiot, that you actually thought you could get away with this? Did you think I wouldn't notice your wily scheme or, if I did, that I'd not take steps to deal with it? What a ridiculous plan! Seek ultimate power without the backing of the citizenry, without the aid of friends? Such an act requires the mob's support, not to mention funds!

Kreon: Know yourself. Give MY words equal time, THEN judge.

Oedipus: You are eloquent, true, but I can learn nothing from you. You've always been troublesome to me.

Kreon: Just listen to me first!

Oedipus: Don't try to tell me of your virtue!

Kreon: If you think stubbornness beyond all reason is a trait worth possessing, you're mad.

Oedipus: If YOU think you can get away with crossing a kinsman, you're insane!

Kreon: I agree with you there, but what, pray tell, have you suffered at my hands?

Oedipus: Did you, or did you not, advise me to send for the seer?

Kreon: Yes, and I abide by that advice.

Oedipus: Well, how long has it been since Laios...

Kreon: Since Laios...? What?

Oedipus: Since he perished in that mysterious assault?

Kreon: It's been a long, long time.

Oedipus: And was the prophet functioning professionally at that time?

Kreon: He was - as revered as he is today.

Oedipus: Did he speak of me back then?

Kreon: Not in my presence.

Oedipus: Was there an investigation?

Kreon: There was of course. Nothing came of it.

Oedipus: And this wise man said NOTHING?

Kreon: I don't know. I prefer to keep quiet about the things of which I have no knowledge.

Oedipus: One thing you DO know. You'll tell it me if you have any sense.

Kreon: And that is...? If I know something I'll not hold back.

Oedipus: That unless you two had been in cahoots he would never have laid Laios' death at my door.

Kreon: If he does, then you yourself know the truth. But now I, in turn, would learn of you.

Oedipus: Do. I'll not be found guilty of murder.

Kreon: Alright. You married my sister?

Oedipus: I can't deny it.

Kreon: And the two of you rule this land jointly?

Oedipus: Everything she wants she gets from me.

Kreon: And am I not considered an equal partner also?

Oedipus: Yes, and for this you have turned out a false friend.

Kreon: Not so. Think it over, as I did. Consider this above all – do you think any man would wish to rule while beset by fears rather than while sleeping sound? I never wanted to wield power, merely to live a king's life, the same as anyone else who possessed wisdom. As it stands I live a tranquil life under your rule but if I were king, many of my duties would be done reluctantly. Why then would I prefer absolute monarchy to a trouble-free life of authority? I am not so deluded as not to prefer a comfortable and profitable life. Now I have the trust of all the people, and their love. Whenever anyone wants a favour of you, it's me they court. In me lies all their hope. Why, then, would I embrace tyranny and relinquish all that? God forbid that a sound mind should engender evil. That is anathema to me and I would not hold with such views in any other man.

Put me to the test! Go to the oracle, ascertain what must be done if my words prove true. But to that other matter – if you are convinced of my collusion with the diviner, then condemn me to death – it will not be your voice alone which damns me, but mine too. But don't convict me on conjecture only. There is no justice in taking bad for good, nor good for bad. To exile a good man is to lose your own precious life. Time will clearly prove this – time alone proves a man innocent, but a sinner is convicted in a single day.

Chorus: You counsel well, lord. A sensible man would do well to hear you. Those who make swift judgments live in peril.

Oedipus: When a subject makes lightning-fast plans in secret, I must respond in kind. If I quietly bide my time, his plots will soon have been carried out, and mine will miscarry.

Kreon: So what is it you want? To banish me?

Oedipus: Not at all. I prefer your death to your exile.

Kreon: When you can show what ill-will I...

Oedipus: You'll not listen to me? Believe me?

Kreon: I can see you lack wisdom.

Oedipus: Not in my opinion.

Kreon: Mine differs.

Oedipus: You are a villain!

Kreon: And if you are mistaken?

Oedipus: Still I must rule.

Kreon: Not if your rule is evil.

Oedipus: O my poor city!

Kreon: It's my city too.

Chorus: Silence, lords. I see Jocasta coming from the palace. How opportune! The three of you must deal with this tragedy.

Jocasta: Wretches, why this rash quarrelling? Are you not ashamed to indulge in personal strife when the land is so polluted? Come in, Oedipus, and, Kreon, go home.

Don't make a small grievance into a large one!

Kreon: Sister, your husband Oedipus here thinks it justice to condemn me to one of two evils – exile or death.

Oedipus: I do. Lady, I have apprehended him for cunningly plotting my death.

Kreon: May all good things desert me, may I die accursed if I ever did any of the things of which you accuse me!

Jocasta: For God's sake, believe what he says, particularly for the sake of the divine oath, but also for me and your citizens here.

Chorus: Listen to her, lord, willingly, wisely, I beg you...

Oedipus: You want me to submit?

Chorus: Respect him. He was never a fool and now he has sworn a great oath!

Oedipus: Do you know what you are asking?

Chorus: I do.

Oedipus: What are you saying?

Chorus: You cannot dishonour and exile a sworn friend on mere hearsay.

Oedipus: Then be aware – in asking that, you seek destruction or banishment for me.

Chorus: In the name of the Sun-God, god of all gods, no! If I think that, may I end my life abandoned by gods and friends. But if more misfortune is added to that you already have, the country's blight will lay me low.

Oedipus: In that case, let him go, even if it means my death or a dishonourable exile. It is your words which touch me, not his. Wherever he goes, I'll always despise him.

Kreon: You are sullen in submission, just as you are cruel when roused. These traits will rebound and cause you great distress.

Oedipus: Let me be. Leave.

Kreon: I'm off. You don't know me, but the citizens acknowledge me as an honest man.

Chorus: Lady, take him in.

Jocasta: I must know what has happened.

Chorus: A vague suspicion has reached our ears, and now justice is in tatters.

Jocasta: On both sides?

Chorus: Yes.

Jocasta: What was the suspicion?

Chorus: Think of our land - surely that suspicion should be laid to rest here and now.

Oedipus: See where your better judgment has brought you – trying to blunt my purpose.

Chorus: Lord, I have said it before and I will say it again, I would be mad and useless if I abandoned you – you who brought my dear, troubled land to a safe harbour. Now may you again be our good helmsman.

Jocasta: For God's sake, lord, I too must know whence this mighty rage.

Oedipus: I shall tell you for, lady, my respect for you is higher than for these people.

Kreon is the cause – Kreon who has plotted my downfall.

Jocasta: Explain your accusation.

Oedipus: They said that I murdered Laios.

Jocasta: Does he know this himself or has he heard it from someone else?

Oedipus: He sent a duplicitous seer to inform us, while keeping silent himself.

Jocasta: Forget what you said. Listen! The prophetic art belongs to no mortal. This I'll swiftly prove to you. Laios received an oracle (I shan't say from Apollo himself but from his ministers) that his death would be at the hands of one of his and my offspring.

Apparently highwaymen from another land would murder him at a place where three roads meet. Three days after my son was born Laios bound his feet and had him cast onto a barren mountain. So Apollo made sure that he did not kill his father and that Laios had nothing to fear from his offspring.

Such was the prophecy, and you had no part in it. The god will readily reveal his intention.

Oedipus: Listening to your tale, lady, my soul starts, my heart shakes.

Jocasta: What distress do you see in my words?

Oedipus: Did you not say that Laios was brought down where three roads meet?

Jocasta: I did, yes, and the story still holds.

Oedipus: In what country did this murder take place?

Jocasta: The land of Phokis. The road splits at one point, leading to Delphi and Daulia.

Oedipus: How much time has elapsed since then?

Jocasta: It was just before you took over the reins of Thebes that we heard the news.

Oedipus: Zeus, what is the destiny you have planned for me?

Jocasta: Oedipus, what is this that tortures you?

Oedipus: Don't question me! Tell me what he looked like, how old he was.

Jocasta: He was a big man, his hair just beginning to turn grey. He looked a lot like you.

Oedipus: No- - ! Have I cursed myself unawares?

Jocasta: How so? Your expression terrifies me.

Oedipus: I have a dreadful foreboding – the seer was right! You will reveal more than he, should you tell me one thing more.

Jocasta: I shudder at what you will ask of me.

Oedipus: Did he travel with a small company, or had he many attendants as befitting a leader?

Jocasta: They were five in all, including a herald. They were in one wagon.

Oedipus: God, it's all clear now. Who told you this, lady?

Jocasta: A servant. He was the only survivor.

Oedipus: Is he about the house now?

Jocasta: No. After his return and seeing you as king and knowing Laios dead, he clasped my hand and begged me to send him to the countryside to tend sheep. He wished to be far, far from the city. So I did. He was a good servant – he deserved a better position than that.

Oedipus: Can he be summoned here and quickly?

Jocasta: He can. But why do you demand this?

Oedipus: I fear my own self, lady. I fear the answers to the questions I must ask him. They'll be many and doubtless unwelcome.

Jocasta: We will have him here nonetheless. Lord, I too should learn the news that troubles you.

Oedipus: You won't be denied it now I have gone this far. Who better to tell my misfortune to than you?

My father was Polybos of Korinth, my mother Merope from Doris. I was reared as the greatest of my fellow-citizens until something happened – something worthy of wonder yet hardly worthy of all the passion it engendered. At dinner one day a man too full of wine questioned my kinship with my father. This tormented me – I could scarcely wait for the day to end, and on the next day I went to my parents and sounded them out. They were outraged at the man who cast this shame in my teeth, and I was happy at their words. Yet it nagged at me constantly – the report had spread so far! Without informing my parents I went to the oracle. Phoibos sent me away unsatisfied. He told me terrible things, dreadful things – I would sleep with my mother, my progeny would prove monstrous, and I would kill my natural father.

After hearing this I fled, calculating Korinth's position by means of the stars. I had no intention of going there and bringing about the outcome that the god predicted. I journeyed to the land where you say this king was killed. And, lady, I will tell you the

truth. When I reached the triple-road junction, a herald and a man traveling in a horse-drawn wagon, just as you describe, encountered me. The charioteer and the old man tried to drive me off the road. Angrily I struck the former, and as the latter glared at me, he waited till I was level with him, then dealt me a blow across my head with his two-thonged whip. He swiftly paid for this - and more:-I struck him with my staff and he fell back and tumbled from the chariot. I slaughtered them all. If there is any kinship between that stranger and Laios, who would be more abject than I, who more detested by the gods? No man, foreigner or citizen, may receive me in his home or speak to me. No, he must turn me out-of-doors. I alone have laid this curse on myself. I have polluted the dead man's marriage-bed - the hands that killed him have sullied you, his widow. I have sinned, I am impure, every part of me! I must flee, I must turn my back on my loved ones, shun my homeland, or else mate with my mother and kill Polybos, the man who engendered and raised me. Surely some brutal divinity has brought this judgment down on me! O you holy gods, never let me see that day - I would I could quietly leave the land of mortals before I suffer such a stain on my reputation.

Chorus: Lord, we feel your pain. But till you hear from the man we sent for, cling to hope.

Oedipus: This shepherd, indeed, remains my one and only hope.

Jocasta: When he arrives, what do you want of him?

Oedipus: I'll tell you. If his words prove the same as yours, I am vindicated.

Jocasta: What in particular have I said?

Oedipus: You said he reported that Laios was killed by highwaymen. If his story remains the same, I am guiltless. One man is not a number of men. But if he claims the murderer was just one lone traveler, the finger of guilt now points towards me.

Jocasta: Those were his words. He cannot take them back now. The whole city heard them, not I alone. So if he goes back on any of his testimony, then, lord, his evidence on Laios' murder will no longer be believable - Apollo said that a child of mine was destined to kill him. Yet that poor babe was innocent of the deed - he predeceased his father. I have no intention of consulting an oracle either now or in the future.

Oedipus: Well said. All the same send for the fellow - we mustn't leave this unresolved.

Jocasta: With all due speed. Let's go in - I wouldn't wish to upset you in any way.

Chorus: May I henceforth a holy life maintain,
Upholding all the laws the heavens ordain!
Their source is Zeus, immortal, watchful ever,
All-knowing, all-supreme, declining never.
Pride breeds the tyrant, who, when full of wrong,
From highest pinnacle is plunged headlong.
I pray the fight for civil right be laid
In Zeus's hands - He is my constant aid.
Should any swear at Justice and deride
The altars of the gods with heinous pride,
Let them be damned. God's weapons bring them down!
Farewell to joy if they should win renown!
The Delphic oracle I now eschew
If these clear prophecies should prove untrue.
Apollo gone! Barren divinity!

Yet, Zeus, preserve still your ascendancy!

Jocasta: Lords of our land, I have a mind to take up garlands and incense and visit the temples of the gods. Oedipus is too charged with incomparable grief. A wise man may judge new events by way of old ones, but he will listen to any who speaks panic. Since my advice counts for nothing, I beg you, Lykeian Apollo (you are closest to us), as a suppliant who brings you votive offerings, deliver us safely from pollution. We're all frightened – look! Our helmsman is horror-struck.

Messenger: Strangers, where may I find Oedipus' residence? If you know his whereabouts, that is even better. Please tell me.

Chorus: His palace is here, and he is within. This lady is the mother of his children.

Messenger: As mistress of the house, may she be blessed. Blessed too be her kin!

Jocasta: The like to you, stranger. Such good wishes become you. What is it you want? And what have you to tell us?

Messenger: Lady, there is good news for you and your lord.

Jocasta: What news? Who sent you?

Messenger: I come from Korinth. May my words make you happy – how could they not? But perhaps you will be upset also.

Jocasta: What is it? What double-talk is this?

Messenger: The Isthmians, so they say, will make your husband their king.

Jocasta: What? Is not Polybos still ruler there?

Messenger: No indeed. His body rests in its tomb.

Jocasta: No! Oedipus' father dead?

Messenger: Put me to death if I am not telling you the truth.

Jocasta: Servant! Go and tell your master this news! Quickly! Divine prophecies, where are you now? Long ago Oedipus fled for fear of killing Polybos, and now that king is dead indeed, but it was Fate killed him, not Oedipus.

Oedipus: Dearest Jocasta, why have I been brought from the palace?

Jocasta: Hear this man! Then – a fig for those divine prophecies!

Oedipus: Who is he? What has he to say to me?

Jocasta: He's a Korinthian. He says your father Polybos is no more.

Oedipus: Tell me your news yourself, stranger.

Messenger: If this is the first thing you wish to hear, then be assured the man is dead.

Oedipus: By treachery? Or illness?

Messenger: The slightest scruple may decide the closure of an aged man's life.

Oedipus: So – he died of a sickness.

Messenger: Yes, and after a long life.

Oedipus: O lady, what then may one think of Apollo's power or those screeching birds of omen? They told me I would kill my father. Now he lies beneath the earth, and here am I, no sword in hand. Perhaps it was my will that killed him – that alone could verify that I was the cause of his demise. So Polybos lies in the underworld with all his false prophecies – they're worth nothing!

Jocasta: Didn't I tell you this long ago?

Oedipus: You did. But my fears beguiled me.

Jocasta: Cast them from you now.

Oedipus: But how may I cast aside the fears of lying with my mother?

Jocasta: How may a man fear when fate rules all and clear foreknowledge belongs to no-one? One must live as justly as possible. Have no fear of an incestuous wedding. Many have dreamt of such a thing in dreams. But the man who pays no attention to such things lives the most untroubled life.

Oedipus: Fine words if my mother were not alive. Yet she is; then, even so, there is great cause for fear.

Jocasta: Your father's demise, at least, is great comfort.

Oedipus: Indeed. But there is fear in my mother's survival.

Messenger: Who is this woman in whom you fear?

Oedipus: Merope, old man, Polybos' consort.

Messenger: What is it in her that causes your fear?

Oedipus: A dreadful divine prophecy, stranger.

Messenger: May it be uttered? Or may no other man know it?

Oedipus: I may tell you. Apollo once told me I was destined to lie with my mother and shed my father's blood. That is why I have kept a great distance from Korinth all this while. Lucky for me – though it would have been most pleasant to look on my parents.

Messenger: And that is the dread which has kept you away from there?

Oedipus: Yes, old man. I did not wish to be my father's executioner.

Messenger: Then I can rid you of this fear – I come in friendship.

Oedipus: You will have my thanks, and deservedly so.

Messenger: My main reason for coming was to take you back home, and also to reap the benefit myself.

Oedipus: I'll never reunite with my parents.

Messenger: My son, it's clear you are unaware of what it is you do –

Oedipus: What's this, old man? For God's sake, explain.

Messenger: - if these are the reasons you'll not return to your home.

Oedipus: I dread the thought that Phoibos may have been right.

Messenger: Or is it the family curse you fear?

Oedipus: Old man, that is a constant dread.

Messenger: Can't you see that your fears are groundless?

Oedipus: How can you say that? I am my parent's child.

Messenger: Polybos was no kin to you.

Oedipus: What? Polybos didn't beget me?

Messenger: No more than did I.

Oedipus: No more than one who is nothing to me?

Messenger: We neither of us fathered you.

Oedipus: Why then did he call me his?

Messenger: You were a gift from me to him.

Oedipus: An alien child? And he loved me so?

Messenger: His childless state impelled him to do so.

Oedipus: Did you purchase me? Or was I found somewhere?

Messenger: I found you in the depths of a wooded valley in Kithairon.

Oedipus: Where were you heading?

Messenger: I tended my mountain-sheep right there.

Oedipus: You were an itinerant shepherd-for-hire?

Messenger: Yes, child, and I saved your life that day.

Oedipus: What ailed me when you took me up, then?

Messenger: Let your ankles answer that question.

Oedipus: O God, my old trouble!

Messenger: Your feet were pierced and I untied you.

Oedipus: I carry those marks with me today.

Messenger: And thus the name you bear.

Oedipus: O God, did my father do this? Or my mother? Tell me.

Messenger: I don't know. He who gave me you knows better than I.

Oedipus: You had me of another? Or did you yourself happen upon me?

Messenger: It was another shepherd gave you to me.

Oedipus: Who was he? Can you tell me?

Messenger: They say it was one of Laios' men.

Oedipus: This land's old king?

Messenger: Yes. This man was his herdsman.

Oedipus: Is this man still alive? Can I see him?

Messenger: You citizens must know him, surely?

Oedipus: Do any of you men know the herdsman of whom he speaks? Have you seen him in the fields? Or here? Point him out – it is time for all to be revealed.

Chorus: I know of no other than the rustic you sought earlier. Jocasta would be the best person to tell you.

Oedipus: Lady, do you know this man – the one I just sent for? Is this the man he means?

Jocasta: Why mention him? Pay it no mind. Forget what he said.

Oedipus: No! I must follow these tracks and unravel my origins.

Jocasta: Please, God, no! If you care at all about yourself, seek no more. I feel sick.

Oedipus: Courage! Even if I prove to be a third-generation slave, YOU will come out of this intact.

Jocasta: I beg of you, don't do this!

Oedipus: You can't prevail! I must know the truth!

Jocasta: I know whereof I speak. This is GOOD advice.

Oedipus: GOOD advice has hurt me for some time now.

Jocasta: You're doomed. May you never learn your roots.

Oedipus: One of you, bring me this shepherd. Let this lady stay happy in her honoured birth-line.

Jocasta: You poor wretch! Those are the only words I have for you – let me keep silent hereafter.

Chorus: Oedipus, why has your consort left? Mad grief overwhelms her. I dread the misfortune that may erupt out of her silence.

Oedipus: Let it erupt! I WILL find out my roots, however humble they are. Perhaps she will feel shame at my lowly origins – she has a woman's pride. I am a child of kindly Fortune. No disgrace shall attach to me. Fortune gave me birth. The months of my life, my brothers, have shown that I have fared both well and ill. Such a one am I - I would have it no other way. I MUST know my true kin.

Chorus: If I may judge myself an honest seer,
Not ignorant of what the gods can do,
The next full moon will surely find me here;
I'll dance for you, Kithairon – it was you

Who bore, begat and nursed our honoured king.
I'll bring you regal gifts. May all be well.
What goddess, with the goat-god lingering
On some high peak, gave birth to him? Or tell,
O Phoibos, prairie-lover – is he yours?
Bacchus, perhaps, or Hermes, took the child,
An outcast left abandoned out-of-doors,
From some wood-nymph who roams the mountains wild.

Oedipus: I have had no contact with the man, gentlemen, but I think I see the shepherd we asked for earlier. He and this man are of an age, and besides I see my own men are escorting him. You may have the advantage of me – you saw the shepherd first.

Chorus: You are right. He was a herdsman of Laios – none more honest.

Oedipus: Corinthian stranger, is this the man you speak of?

Messenger: Old man, look at me and answer. Were you servant to Laios?

Servant: I was. And not purchased – I was raised in the palace.

Oedipus: What was your trade, your livelihood?

Servant: Most of my life I tended his sheep.

Oedipus: And where did you house with them?

Servant: Kithairon or thereabouts.

Oedipus: Did you know this man when you were there?

Servant: What did he do there? Er, what man do you mean?

Oedipus: This man here. Did you have dealings with him?

Servant: I can't recall at this moment.

Messenger: It's no wonder, lord. It's clear his wits are dull. I'll jog his memory. He certainly knew me when we frequented Kithairon for three seasons, spring to early autumn, he with two flocks, I with one. My sheep and I wintered in cattle-folds while he drove his flocks to Laios' stables. Is that the truth? Or am I lying?

Servant: It's the truth. It was a long time ago though.

Messenger: Now tell me – did you not hand over to me an infant that I might raise him as my own?

Servant: What? Why do you ask this of me?

Messenger: My good man, this man was that infant.

Servant: The devil take you! Hold your tongue!

Oedipus: Ah, old man, don't chastise him – chastisement is the due of your words, not his.

Servant: Mighty king, what is my crime?

Oedipus: Not answering his question about the boy.

Servant: His words mean nothing. They're empty.

Oedipus: Speak freely, or I shall make you speak.

Servant: For God's sake, don't hurt me – I am an old man.

Oedipus: Bind his hands, someone! Quick!

Servant: O no! To what end? What do you need to know?

Oedipus: The child he mentions, did you give it to him?

Servant: I did. Would I had died that day!

Oedipus: You'll die now if you withhold the truth.

Servant: If I speak, my immediate death is even more certain.

Oedipus: He's stalling for time.
Servant: No! I told you I gave him the boy.
Oedipus: Where did you find him? In the palace? Or somewhere else?
Servant: He was not mine, I had him of another.
Oedipus: Who was he? To whose family does he belong?
Servant: For God's sake, lord, ask me no more!
Oedipus: You are a dead man if you won't tell me what I ask.
Servant: The child was of Laios' house.
Oedipus: A slave? Or high-born?
Servant: O! My words will have terrible consequences.
Oedipus: I dread to hear them, yet they must be heard.
Servant: They said he was Laios' son. Your wife within could best tell you this is true.
Oedipus: She gave you him?
Servant: Yes, lord.
Oedipus: For what purpose?
Servant: To kill him.
Oedipus: His own mother? The wretch!
Servant: Yes, but in fear of an evil prophecy.
Oedipus: What prophecy?
Servant: It was said he would kill his own father.
Oedipus: Why then did you give him to this old man?
Servant: Out of pity, lord. I hoped he would take him to another country. But his salvation led to immense misfortune. If you were the babe he speaks of, you are destined for tragedy.
Oedipus: O God! It's all out now! Let me take my final look on you, light of day! I was born of those I should not, I bedded with her I should not, I killed him I should not!
Chorus: We are all doomed to ruin and distress.
A mere delusion - such is happiness!
Poor Oedipus, your story makes it plain –
Contentment may no mortal man attain.
Once you were richly blessed with wealth and fame
When you had slain the sharp-clawed Sphinx and came
To Thebes, our bulwark, our protective shield,
Our king, to whom all citizens must yield,
This news has crippled you. What change is this?
You're yoked to ruin now, all is amiss.
One womb which housed both son and husband! How
Could Queen Jocasta keep her silence now?
All-seeing Time this union now decries
As sham. O Laios' son, would that our eyes
We'd never laid on you. In times before
You succoured me but now I am no more.
Second Messenger: You honoured leaders of this land, what things you are about to hear and see, what grief you will feel if you truly revere the House of Labdakos! I doubt the Ister or the Phasis could cleanse this house. Such secrets it holds, secrets now about to be

revealed, foul deeds knowingly performed. Those grievous acts that are willfully done hurt the most.

Chorus: What we already know causes too much grief. What more must you tell us?

Second Messenger: Know at once that our revered Queen Jocasta is dead.

Chorus: O poor, wretched woman! How did she die?

Second Messenger: By her own hand. The sharpest sting of this act is denied you = you did not see it. However, from what lives in my memory of the poor lady's pain you shall hear. She entered the anteroom overcome with emotion and immediately flew to the marriage-bed, tearing her hair with both hands. On entering she had slammed the doors shut and now she called upon the long-dead Laios as she recalled the son she bore so long ago, the son whose hand had slain his father, while he remained to make her the ill-fated mother of his own offspring. She threw wailing curses at the bed where, twice-married, the poor wretch had brought forth a husband of her husband, children of her child. I do not know the exact manner of her death, as Oedipus rushed in with a cry, preventing us from seeing the dread deed. But we watched him as he wandered wildly about. To and fro he went, demanding a sword of us, denouncing his wife as no wife at all, one whose womb nurtured both himself and his own children. Some demon held him in thrall as he raved, for none of us there in that room had control over him. With a shout he hurled himself at the double-doors as though following someone's lead. He dashed the hollow bolts from their sockets and fell into the palace. And there we saw the lady hanging from the ceiling and entangled in knotted cords. When he saw her, he bellowed – a terrible sound, poor wretch – and undid the cords from which she hung. And when the poor woman lay on the ground, what happened next was dreadful to behold. He wrenched away the golden brooches she wore and, lifting them high, drove them into his own eyes, yelling that they may no longer see what he had undergone, the sinful things he had done, but must henceforth live in darkness, not seeing what they should not, unaware of what he had been looking for. Uttering these harsh words over and over he assailed his eyes with the brooches. His bloody eyeballs plopped soggly over his beard. On and on he went as the blood continued to drip, and the black and gory gobs of moisture splashed him. The misfortune was on the heads of both of them, not his alone – man and woman inextricably entwined with evil. Their former happiness was well-deserved but now there is nothing but wailing, guilt, death, shame – such we call all manner of ills – all a great abundance.

Chorus: Has the poor man ceased this madness?

Second Messenger: He ordered the bolts shot that all the sons of Kadmos might see the parricide – mother's...vile words not to be repeated – he announced his self-exile, no longer to remain in Thebes, cursed as he was. But he lacks strength, he has no guide – the distress is more than he can bear. He'll make that clear to you – look, the bolts are being shot back. You'll see a sight which, albeit horrible, will move you to pity.

Chorus: A dreadful sight! The most dreadful I have ever seen. What madness has overtaken you, poor man? What demon has burdened you with the wretchedest of fates?

Poor man, I can't look on you. Yet I have so many questions, there is so much I must know and see. You make me shudder so.

Oedipus: God! Ahh! I am the fool of fortune. Where else can I go now? Whither does this voice of mine fly, hanging in the air? God, how you have tortured me!

Chorus: Dreadfully. Such things should not be heard or seen.

Oedipus: This darkness is vile. It advances on me, horrible, inexorable, charged with evil forces. Alas, I cry again. Those spurs sting me, as does the memory of my sins.

Chorus: No wonder such pain brings you a double grief. You bear a double load.

Oedipus: Friend, you are now my sole servant. You remain to minister to a blind man.

You don't escape my notice – no, I know your voice well even in this darkness.

Chorus: The things you have done! How had you the rashness to destroy your own eyes? What demon led you on?

Oedipus: Apollo, friends, it was Apollo! All my sinful deeds were prompted by him. The blow that fell was mine, no-one else's. What need have I of eyes when everything I saw was foul?

Chorus: Too true.

Oedipus: What is there for me to see or hear with delight, friends? Lead me away as fast as you can, I have done dreadful things, I am the most accursed man alive, no man is more hateful to the gods

Chorus: Damned in mind, damned in deed. Would you had never known the truth.

Oedipus: Cursed be the man who unfettered my feet and delivered me from destruction. He did me no favours. Had I died then I would not be this intolerable burden to my friends – and to myself.

Chorus: I too would have had this so.

Oedipus: Thus would I never have slain my father nor could anyone have called me the consort of her from whom I came. Here I stand, godless myself and of a sinful woman born, wed to the one who bore me. There is no more ancient a sin than that committed by Oedipus.

Chorus: I am beyond the ability to counsel you. You were better dead than a living blind man.

Oedipus: Don't tell me this act was not for the best. Counsel me no more. How could I look on my father when I meet him in Hades? Or my wretched mother? The sins I have let loose upon the two of them cannot be put to rest by mere self-strangulation.

Could the sight of my children delight me, considering their origin? Never could these eyes bear that! Unbearable too would be the city, the fortress, the holy shrines. I, the noblest of the Theban line, have denied myself these things, decreeing to all the exile of that unholy man denounced by the gods as a desecration to the very house of Laios – myself!

This stain of my own making I have descried – how could I now face these men unflinchingly? I could not! If I could have stopped up my ears at their source, I could not have prevented myself from shutting up this wretched body of mine – not only blind but deaf too! How sweet to dwell beyond all evil!

Kithairon, why did you take me in? Why did you not kill me then and there? Instead I made it clear that my origins are not with this house. Polybos, Korinth, ancient house, mine in name only, you have raised a seeming paragon who yet is rotten beneath the surface. Yes, I am discovered a sinful man with sinful roots. You three roads, you hidden valley, you glade, you narrow lane at those crossroads, which at my hands drank my blood – yes, my father's blood – do you remember what I did there on my journey hither? Marriage, you produced me, and a second time you engendered the very same seed and from it you formed father, brothers, sons, kindred blood, maids, mothers, the most monstrous of mortal acts. It is not fitting to give voice to what it is not fitting to do, so

quick, hide me somewhere beyond the sight of the gods, or kill me, throw me into the sea, never to be seen again. Deign to touch a wretched being. Listen to me, don't shrink from the task. No-one else can suffer for my sins – only I.

Chorus: Kreon is here to act on your requests and to counsel you – he is our sole protector here in your stead.

Oedipus: God, how shall I answer him? What true pledge can I make him? I am condemned on all counts for my past deeds.

Kreon: Oedipus, I am not here to mock nor to dredge up your crimes. But, gentlemen, if you no longer respect the generations of man, at least respect Lord Helios' all-nurturing flame. An abomination such as this must remain hidden – neither earth nor the rain from Heaven, nor the light of day must encounter it. Take him with all speed. It is proper that only his family should know his dreadful guilt.

Oedipus: By the gods, since you have taken away my worst fear, a paragon in the presence of the most wretched creature alive, listen to me – for your own sake, not for mine.

Kreon: What would you have me do?

Oedipus: Rid this land of my presence as soon as you can. I must not commune with a living soul.

Kreon: I would do so, be assured, but first I must ask the god for guidance.

Oedipus: But his entire decree was clear – destroy the wicked parricide.

Kreon: Those were his words, true. But, as it stands it is better to find out what action to take.

Oedipus: You wish information on a wretched man?

Kreon: Yes – now you can put your faith in the god.

Oedipus: I humbly entreat you – choose a tomb yourself in the palace for the lady (that is the duty you owe your kin), but don't let me be part of my native city while I live. No, let me dwell in the mountains in my own Kithairon, where my mother and father exposed me to oblivion, willing executioners, and so die.

This I do know – no sickness, no, nothing can kill me. I have been saved for some dreadful denouement. Regardless of where my doom leads me, go. As for my sons, don't give them another thought – they are men and will not lack for means of sustenance, wherever they settle. But my poor little girls, who never broke bread without their father but shared everything with me – take care of them. But, please, let me hold their hands and weep with them for my sins. Go, lord, go, noble man. If I held them it would be as though they are still mine, as they were when I had my sight. What? O God, do I hear my sweet ones in tears? Has Kreon taken pity on me and sent me my dearest young girls? Has he?

Kreon: He has. I arranged this – I know the joy you took in them in times past and still do to this day.

Oedipus: I wish you joy. May the god preserve you better through your life than he did me. Children, where are you? Come, take the hands of your brother, hands which have reduced the once-bright eyes of the father who begot you to what you see now. When I fathered you, children, on her of whom I myself was born, I was sightless, ignorant.

I lament for you both, though I am unable to see you, when I reflect on the painful life you must henceforth lead, what company you must keep, what festivals, what spectacles you will attend only to return home weeping. When you are old enough to wed, who will

your husbands be? Who will be willing to take on the shame which was the ruin of both you and those who gave me life? You'll not escape adversity. Your father is a parricide. He bedded the woman who bore him, begetting you by the same womb from which he sprang. Such will be the reproaches heaped on you. Who, then, will marry you? No-one, children, you are destined to die barren and single.

Menoikeus' son, you are now sole father to these girls (we who created them are no more), so don't leave them to wander the world penniless and unprotected. Don't let them sink to my level of misfortune. Pity them – they are alone in the world but for you.

Acknowledge them, noble one, and consent. Children, I could impart much advice, could you but understand me. Aspire to live as well as you can and to be more fortunate than the man who begot you.

Kreon: No more weeping. Go in.

Oedipus: I must, unwilling as I am.

Kreon: All things have their season.

Oedipus: I shall go, on certain conditions.

Kreon: What conditions? Tell me.

Oedipus: That you exile me.

Kreon: That is a decision for the god.

Oedipus: But the gods revile me.

Kreon: Then you have your wish.

Oedipus: Do I have your consent?

Kreon: I never speak from ignorance.

Oedipus: Lead me then.

Kreon: Go now. Leave your little ones.

Oedipus: Don't separate us.

Kreon: Don't presume that you still have authority. That which you had did not remain constant to your life.

Chorus: Thebans, behold Oedipus – he solved the famed riddle and became the most powerful man in the state, his success envied by all. Yet see to what misfortune he has been reduced! Let all mortals prepare for their final day and let none be deemed happy until he has reached life's end with no pain.