

ACT I

SETTING:

The bedchamber of JOCASTA, the newly-widowed Queen of Thebes. The room is dominated by her bed and a large open window. There is a dressing screen and a table with all of her make-up. Another table overflows with fruits, bread, olives, water and wine.

AT RISE:

JOCASTA is putting on her make-up when IRIS begins to entertain her with one of her dramatic poetry readings.

IRIS

The night sighs.
Ahhhhh.
She kisses the moon.
Ohhhhhh.
Morning rises.
Listen. Remember. Sleep.
(pause)
Well?

JOCASTA

It's over?

IRIS

Completely.

JOCASTA

Oh, of course it's over.

IRIS

Then you don't think the ending was too abrupt?

JOCASTA

I admit I was surprised.

IRIS

I could restore the other verse.

JOCASTA

No, no, no.

IRIS

I could start again then. Perhaps it was too quick.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

JOCASTA

Absolutely not. It was perfect just as you recited it. Very dramatic, please restore nothing.

IRIS

But abrupt.

JOCASTA

I was surprised at first, but it was such a moving performance -- you were moving. The poem was moving. Restore nothing.

IRIS

I feel I'm making progress.

JOCASTA

Absolutely. You should be happy with your progress. Tonight we should both be very happy.

(JOCASTA begins to put on her makeup. IRIS continues attending her, bringing food and drink or anything else JOCASTA may want as well as constantly straightening up the room.)

IRIS

You'll be a beautiful bride tomorrow. I can't wait to see you. All of Thebes is waiting to see the Queen marry King Oedipus.

JOCASTA

I'll be a bride tomorrow if my mother remembers to bring my wedding gown.

IRIS

She'll remember. She's your mother.

JOCASTA

Exactly. When I married Laius, she was so drunk she thought it was her wedding.

IRIS

I'm sure she'll bring your dress and it will be beautiful.

JOCASTA

I wish I had your optimism.

IRIS

They say your wedding is the biggest celebration Thebes has ever had.

JOCASTA

They always say that.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

IRIS

It must be true. The entire city is shining like a jewel.

JOCASTA

Iris, you are the poet tonight. Come here.

IRIS

Everyone is so happy King Oedipus came to save us from that terrible Sphinx and her stupid riddle.

(mocking)

"What walks on four legs in the morning, two legs in the afternoon and three legs at night." Can you believe the answer was a man?

JOCASTA

You're cheeks are flushed and your forehead's burning. Are you sick?

IRIS

I'm fine. Wonderful. You know if it had been up to me to solve that riddle, we'd all be dead.

JOCASTA

Only men could try to guess the answer, those were the rules.

IRIS

And only men could have their manhood ripped from beneath their legs when they failed! (pause) Oh, forgive me.

JOCASTA

It's all right, Iris. We're safe. The riddle's solved. The Sphinx is dead. The plague is over. Now be a good girl and bring me some water.

IRIS

That old Sphinx killed herself just as she said she would which is one good thing about her. I couldn't believe how she just leaped from the mountain straight to her death. It was too horrible.

JOCASTA

You went to see her die?

IRIS

Oh, no, I only went to see justice done. You should have heard that crowd, all shouting up at her, "Jump, jump, jump," and then suddenly, she did it, just like that, she leaped right off the cliff and dropped straight down to the rocks below. It was so terrible. I couldn't look.

JOCASTA

Not even a little?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (3)

IRIS

Oh, no.

JOCASTA

The truth!

IRIS

The truth is that beast would have killed all our men if Oedipus hadn't come to save us. We're so lucky to have someone who's smart and handsome. They say that's a rare quality in the same man.

JOCASTA

Who says such things?

IRIS

Everyone.

JOCASTA

Royal gossip Iris, don't listen.

IRIS

I think it must be wonderful to think of marrying such a hero.

JOCASTA

I'll tell you tomorrow.

(IRIS cries out frightened by the passing storm.)

It's just a storm. It's almost over now. (pause) I'm surprised at you. It's been years since I've seen you so frightened.

IRIS

It's embarrassing.

JOCASTA

I can still remember you were small enough to hide under this bed. Then Melina would come and coax you out with something sweet.

IRIS

I'm not a child anymore. I'm First Servant to the Queen now, and I shouldn't be frightened of anything.

JOCASTA

You're the Queen's First Servant now, and someday you won't be frightened of anything. Now, bring me my jewel box and then take the rest of the evening for yourself.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (4)

IRIS

Wouldn't you like a nice warm bath of olive oil and flowers?

JOCASTA

I'm working on my makeup.

IRIS

The flowers smell heavenly. I picked them this morning.

JOCASTA

If I have one more bath today, I'll shrivel up like one of those olives.

IRIS

I could start on your hair? You always love the way I brush it just so and put it up in a crown on the top of your head.

JOCASTA

I do love it, but I'm sure my mother will have something to say about my hair, so we'll leave it until tomorrow. Now, just bring me my box and then you can go.

(IRIS doesn't move.)

Iris, what's wrong?

IRIS

The other servants have been talking.

JOCASTA

What is it this time!

IRIS

They said that perhaps now the Queen will want a new servant in her bedchamber.

JOCASTA

The Queen's marrying a new husband. I don't need a new servant, too. They're teasing you because you let them. Don't listen.

IRIS

I thought they might be right.

JOCASTA

Assume nothing. You're here because I trust you. You take care of my every need, and I'm happy with your service. I've always been happy with you. I'm simply giving you the night off as reward, not a punishment. Why can't you understand that?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (5)

IRIS

What would I do if I wasn't here?

JOCASTA

Listen to me, you'll serve me tomorrow and all the years to come. I've no intention of replacing you, ever.

IRIS

Oh, thank you, my Queen. I'm so happy. Shall I take all these things away now?

JOCASTA

No, leave them all. I'm sure Ismene will have a ferocious appetite.

IRIS

I could bring more food later.

JOCASTA

Good night, Iris.

IRIS

Good night. (exits)

ISMENE (O.S.)

Jocasta? Jocasta?

(JOCASTA hears her mother's voice coming from the hall and hurries behind the dressing screen.)

It's Ismene. Your mother? Remember?

(ISMENE comes in carrying a wedding gown.)

Jocasta? Where are you?

JOCASTA

I haven't forgotten who you are, mother. I'm changing. Just sit down. I'll be right there.

ISMENE

Oh, my dear daughter, I love what you've done to this room.

JOCASTA

It's exactly the same as it was the last time you saw it. Nothing's changed.

ISMENE

So, what have you been doing all day? Tell me everything.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (6)

JOCASTA

I've been waiting all day for my mother to bring my wedding gown.

(ISMENE smiles to herself, then playfully hides the dress out of sight.)

Mother?

ISMENE

Doesn't this food all look so delicious! And expensive, too.

JOCASTA

I hope you like it. You sent it.

ISMENE

Only the best for my daughter on this special night.

(ISMENE starts to pour a glass of wine.)

JOCASTA

There's wine, too. If you're interested.

ISMENE

Will you be drinking with me?

JOCASTA

Yes, I'll drink with you.

ISMENE

Wonderful. What good taste I have. Though I guess you didn't find this food quite as appetizing as I do. These grapes are delicious. And these olives are divine. No matter what they say Jocasta, a man finds a woman who eats much more desirable than one who's all skin and bones.

(JOCASTA comes out from behind the screen in her dressing gown. She wears a brooch.)

Oh, there you are, my beauty. Didn't I give you two of those beautiful brooches? Well, you look lovely anyway, dear. Now why don't you come here and eat something.

(JOCASTA doesn't move)

Don't look at me that way, I only want to make my daughter's wedding day special.

JOCASTA

Second wedding day, Mother. But then it's been years since we celebrated anything together.

ISMENE

Second, first, fourth, each wedding can be special in its own way. No one is counting but you.

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (7)

ISMENE (cont'd)

(pops food into her mouth sensuously)
HMMMM. Heavenly.

JOCASTA

I'm surprised you ever needed lovers at all.

ISMENE

Have I mentioned what a wicked sense of humor you've acquired since your first wedding?

JOCASTA

No, but I'm sure you will.

ISMENE

I mention it only because it's not that becoming.

JOCASTA

I had the best teacher.

ISMENE

It's true. Melina was a wonderful servant, but she had absolutely no sense of humor.

JOCASTA

Melina wasn't my mother.

ISMENE

A disappointment to be sure. Here. Eat.

JOCASTA

If I ate everything you sent, I wouldn't fit into my beautiful wedding gown. You do remember that dress you were bringing me? Your gift?

ISMENE

Patience, Jocasta, it's a virtue men think they love.

JOCASTA

Perhaps you've decided you'll be the bride this time and had my wedding gown fitted for your own sweet torso.

ISMENE

That's not amusing. I'm old enough to be his grandmother.

JOCASTA

That's never stopped you before.

ISMENE

Oh, those old rumors again. I told you not to listen to gossip. Everyone out there loves to exaggerate about everyone in here. Especially the Queen Mother. They lie about everything I say and do. Not a word is true. (announcing)

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (8)

ISMENE (cont'd)

"There'll be no more marriages for Ismene!" Now you've heard it straight from your mother's mouth.

JOCASTA

Why not marry again and again!

ISMENE

You approve?

JOCASTA

Why shouldn't I? You know you love it.

ISMENE

Women my age are supposed to be dead, or at least boring. Certainly not thinking of marrying again.

JOCASTA

You're still beautiful.

ISMENE

That is my curse.

JOCASTA

You love the ceremonies.

ISMENE

It's true.

JOCASTA

The gifts.

ISMENE

I have absolutely everything.

JOCASTA

The funerals.

ISMENE

You've convinced me. I'll marry again!

JOCASTA

Good. And don't worry, you could never be boring.

ISMENE

You are wicked.

JOCASTA

You know I'm teasing. You make me smile.

ISMENE

I don't make you smile, so if you find me amusing tonight I'm very happy. You do want to smile, don't you?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (9)

JOCASTA

Yes, Mother, tonight I want to smile very much.

ISMENE

Good, now let's get to work. There's so much to do and so little time. Where shall we start? Oh, when did you say that girl is coming back?

JOCASTA

Her name is Iris or do you still dislike her?

ISMENE

How could I dislike her, dear, she's a servant. I just meant there's so much to do tonight and so little time, I didn't want any distractions.

JOCASTA

Well, take as much time as you need. I've sent her away.

ISMENE

For the whole evening?

JOCASTA

I'm yours completely.

ISMENE

Oh, this is too, too delicious. More wine and then let's get started on your hair. It's just like a tree root.

JOCASTA

You always left my hair to Melina.

ISMENE

Melina had patience. I don't. Especially when it came to your hair.

JOCASTA

After all these years, I still miss her.

ISMENE

I miss her, too. She was a very good servant.

JOCASTA

She was much more than a servant. She was part of our family.

ISMENE

I miss having you around. And you are my family.

JOCASTA

Don't let Creon hear you.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (10)

ISMENE

Oh, Creon is a son. You're my daughter. A mother grows old so much faster when she has no daughters to tend.

JOCASTA

You make me sound like one of your pet goats.

ISMENE

(ISMENE gets down on her knees before JOCASTA mimicking a goat)

Baaaa. I'm the goat who must bow and scrape to her very own daughter who is soon to be our Queen for the second time. But then, who's counting? Baaaa.

JOCASTA

You're impossible. Get up.

ISMENE

I'm your loyal subject.

JOCASTA

Get up before your knees lock.

ISMENE

Whatever pleases my Queen.

JOCASTA

You'll never change.

ISMENE

Oh, I change all the time. Set me in the sun, I grow warm. Put me in the shade, I turn cold. Hold me in the moonlight and I disappear. We all must change, Jocasta, or we don't survive.

JOCASTA

I'm not like you, Mother. That must be a terrible disappointment.

ISMENE

Absolutely not. One of me is quite enough. Being in Thebes these last few weeks has only reminded me how empty my life is without you.

JOCASTA

You've been gone a long time. And from what I've heard, your life hasn't been all that empty.

ISMENE

I still miss you.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (11)

JOCASTA

What you miss is your last lover.

ISMENE

Is that what they say? Poor Ismene's all alone now, what a pity. They always have something to say about Ismene and her men. Ismene and her women. Ismene and her wine. Well, let them say what they want, Ismene never whines about her lovers to anyone. BAAAA. That's what I think of all of them. Baaaaa. That's what I taught you.

JOCASTA

You taught me not to tell anybody anything.

ISMENE

A good rule to live by. A Golden Rule.

JOCASTA

We barely see each other. If I didn't listen to the gossip, I'd never know what you were doing. And if I hadn't been widowed, I don't know when I would have seen you again.

ISMENE

Well, here I am. Flesh and blood. Ask me anything and I'll tell you everything.

JOCASTA

When did you know about Laius?

ISMENE

As soon as I heard he'd been murdered, I came right here.

JOCASTA

I meant, when did you know about Laius and the Oracle?

ISMENE

These last few months have been filled with grief and pain for all of us. But tomorrow all of that will disappear. Thebes will have a new King and you will have a new marriage. It's true. Everyone's hungry for a celebration. Just walk through the streets and you can feel how much they love their Queen. How hungry they are for her happiness.

JOCASTA

You're the one who's hungry for a wedding. You're the one who loves them.

ISMENE

It's true. You'll have the biggest wedding in the history of Thebes, and no one will ever forget Jocasta.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (12)

JOCASTA

Or the mother of the bride.

ISMENE

I'm happy to be your mother. I admit that. I'm even happier to be here with you now. I wish this night would never end.

JOCASTA

That's a long time for us to be together.

ISMENE

I take a vow right here. Tonight I'll only speak words of comfort and love. I'll be a perfect mother, I promise. You'll see, we'll sing and dance and whisper secrets. Trust me, Jocasta, we're going to have the best night of our lives.

(ISMENE goes to JOCASTA to dance.)

JOCASTA

I want to believe you.

ISMENE

Come on then.

JOCASTA

I'm not dancing.

ISMENE

Yes, you are.

JOCASTA

I hate dancing.

ISMENE

There's no celebration without dancing.

(ISMENE begins dancing wildly)

Daughters of Aphrodite,...come dance and sing...Come, dear, don't make this old goat a fool dancing out here all alone.

(JOCASTA reluctantly joins ISMENE dancing. The actors should improvise dialogue as ISMENE tries to get JOCASTA to let herself go, but JOCASTA, who is awkward and unsure, complains about whatever dancing style is attempted. JOCASTA eventually trips and falls.)

JOCASTA

Oh, no!

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (13)

ISMENE

(Helping JOCASTA to the bed.)

It's the wine. I didn't put enough water in yours. Here, put your feet up and your head down. Oh, you're all flushed. Here's some water. Drink it slowly.

(ISMENE holds the water as JOCASTA is drinking.)

No, not so quickly or you'll be sick. There. More.

(ISMENE stands over JOCASTA until she drinks all of the water.)

Now, that's so much better, isn't it? You're not going to be sick, are you? I'd never forgive myself.

JOCASTA

I'm fine, Mother.

ISMENE

Here. Give me your foot.

JOCASTA

Carefully.

ISMENE

I promise I won't hurt you.

(ISMENE takes JOCASTA's feet in her hands and starts to rub them as JOCASTA relaxes back in pleasure.)

JOCASTA

Oh, that is good.

ISMENE

You always said my foot rubs were the only thing you'd miss about being married.

JOCASTA

You always knew my weakness.

ISMENE

You said no one could rub your feet better than your mother. Actually, I think you once said it was the only thing I did well.

JOCASTA

You remember everything, don't you?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (14)

ISMENE

Not everything.

JOCASTA

And you never get tired.

ISMENE

If I did, I'd never admit it. I'm too vain. Especially at my age. You'd be surprised how invisible a woman can become. Things will be different for you. I'm sure of that.

JOCASTA

You could always convince me of anything. Like that woman in the moon.

ISMENE

You remember that story?

JOCASTA

How could I forget it! You ruined me. You told me you could make that moon grow bigger or smaller just by thinking about it. And you did. Or I thought you did. I believed you were that moon for years.

ISMENE

Every night it would grow smaller and smaller, and your eyes would grow bigger and bigger and then - Poof!....It would be full again and you thought I'd done it just for you. It was a wonderful story and I loved to tell it. And you loved to listen while I rubbed your feet. Just like this.

JOCASTA

And when everyone else insisted they saw a man's face, you said:

TOGETHER

Absolutely not.

ISMENE

Because it's definitely a woman's face. Don't you think?

JOCASTA

I think it's a wonderful lie. And you're a wonderful liar.

ISMENE

But you still loved it.

JOCASTA

They were good stories. I loved them all. But that was my favorite.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (15)

ISMENE

Your father liked that one, too. He told me he could see my face in that moon. He said I was the woman up there, and when he was away from me, he would look up and talk to me and feel less lonely.

JOCASTA

That sounds very romantic.

ISMENE

Oh, your father could be very romantic about explaining all the nights we spent apart. I guarantee you that woman up there knew more about him than I ever did.

JOCASTA

I never heard you complain.

ISMENE

Why complain? I knew the rules when I married him.

JOCASTA

Sometimes I don't think Laius knew me at all.

ISMENE

Of course not, he was your husband.

JOCASTA

You never said you were unhappy with my father.

ISMENE

Happiness and marriage aren't necessarily the same.

JOCASTA

Were you unhappy?

ISMENE

We made a Queen together. That was enough happiness for me.

JOCASTA

You like being the mother of the Queen, don't you?

ISMENE

I like being your mother. The fact that you'll be Queen again just makes the whole day sweeter.

JOCASTA

Did it matter who I married, or only that I would be Queen?

ISMENE

You're much too young to be a widow. Laius' murder was tragic, but seeing you walk around in black for the rest of your life would have been worse.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (16)

JOCASTA

So you intend to be here for the rest of my life?

ISMENE

I don't imagine I'll live forever. But I am very fond of this room. I think I'll always like it.

JOCASTA

You must have been very happy when Creon said the man who solved the riddle would be my husband and I wouldn't have to leave this room.

ISMENE

I admit I was ecstatic Creon made you the prize. It was a stroke of genius. Everyone in Thebes wanted someone to save us, and I wanted you to stay here as our Queen. If we can satisfy both my wishes with one man-so be it! Oh, that's a very good toast, don't you think. I should remember it for tomorrow. "So be it!"

JOCASTA

Then you did have something to do with Creon's decision.

ISMENE

It was your brother's idea.

JOCASTA

I knew it.

ISMENE

He had the power, not me.

JOCASTA

But you gave him the idea.

ISMENE

I may have mentioned something.

JOCASTA

The truth is you gave him that idea the way you always did.

ISMENE

The truth is I gave birth to one genius and it wasn't your brother. The city needed a hero. If we were going to ask a man to risk his life against the Sphinx, the prize had to be worth dying for, and the crown has always been worth it. I simply made you part of the bargain and Creon agreed. If he thought it was his idea-so be it. (pause) A mother's supposed to help her children.

JOCASTA

I'm a Queen, I didn't need your protection.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (17)

ISMENE

Even a man like Creon gets envious of an empty throne.

JOCASTA

You think my brother wants to be King.

ISMENE

Why not? I do. You leave power in his hands too long and he'll grow fond of it. You leave the throne empty too long and someone else will take it. I simply suggested that the one who solved the riddle should take both our throne and our widowed Queen.

JOCASTA

But, by making me the prize, you risked marrying me off to my own brother.

ISMENE

I didn't risk anything.

JOCASTA

But what if my brother had solved that riddle? Oh, no, I can't even think about it.

ISMENE

That's ridiculous. The Sphinx was smarter than Creon and the riddle beyond anything he could ever imagine.

JOCASTA

You couldn't be sure of that.

ISMENE

I am his mother. I calculated the odds. The Sphinx was brilliant. I admired her.

JOCASTA

You admired that beast?

ISMENE

Why not! I've been called far worse for doing much less.

JOCASTA

Everyone else hated her.

ISMENE

I admired how she brought those men right to their knees. She had their complete attention. How many women do you know who will ever command that kind of respect?

JOCASTA

That was fear, mother, not respect.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (18)

ISMENE

It worked. And in the end, she united all of Thebes against her. You won't see that again in this life.

JOCASTA

She would have killed all of us.

ISMENE

I didn't say she was perfect.

JOCASTA

She murdered without any conscience.

ISMENE

I'm told that's the best way. And when she was defeated, she killed herself. Just as she promised. A true woman of her word.

JOCASTA

But what if you'd been wrong about your calculations?

ISMENE

I was right.

JOCASTA

But if it had turned out differently?

ISMENE

"What if"... "But if..." Why must you torture yourself thinking about things that never happen? Why can't you just accept these gifts- even if they come from your mother.

JOCASTA

(pause) And how did you calculate our stranger?

ISMENE

Oedipus? Now, he was a surprise.

JOCASTA

So you didn't calculate everything?

ISMENE

No, I don't think even I could have imagined such a young and handsome man coming to our rescue.

JOCASTA

We don't know a thing about him.

ISMENE

He was smart enough to save Thebes and win you.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (19)

JOCASTA

Why should we trust him? He isn't even one of us.

ISMENE

Being King will make him more loyal than your own flesh and blood. You'll see.

JOCASTA

We don't even know why he came here.

ISMENE

Thebes is a great city.

JOCASTA

Why now?

ISMENE

Why not?

JOCASTA

He's a stranger.

ISMENE

They're all strangers until we get them into bed!

(ISMENE struggles not to smile or laugh)

JOCASTA

You know something.

ISMENE

Me?

JOCASTA

What are you keeping from me, Mother? Tell me what you know.

ISMENE

I know nothing.

JOCASTA

You're lying.

ISMENE

No, I'm not. (giggles)

JOCASTA

You could never lie without laughing.

ISMENE

I lied to your father for years without laughing.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (20)

JOCASTA

Fine. As usual, you're right and I'm wrong.

(JOCASTA returns to putting on her makeup)

ISMENE

(pause) I was walking in the garden today. I heard a voice singing. You can imagine how surprised I was to find it was the voice of your husband-to-be.

JOCASTA

Oedipus?

ISMENE

I caught him by surprise down by the-

JOCASTA

No! Not one more word.

ISMENE

But-

JOCASTA

I don't want to know how you found him-or what he was doing or who he was doing it with!

ISMENE

You're wrong, Jocasta, this was a happy accident.

JOCASTA

There are no "accidents" with you. And I'll decide if it was happy.

ISMENE

(pause) I told you I was walking in the garden when I heard someone singing. I followed the voice to the baths and there he was.

JOCASTA

You spied on him bathing.

ISMENE

It was an accident, Jocasta. I didn't know he would be there naked.

JOCASTA

He was there naked?

ISMENE

Completely. And looking quite ready for marriage.

JOCASTA

I can't believe this. You have no shame.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (21)

ISMENE

I swear I didn't know I would find him there. Naked.

JOCASTA

Now my husband will come to our wedding thinking I've sent my own mother to spy on him!

ISMENE

I was very well hidden, while he was quite exposed. And let me tell you, my dear daughter, he has a very lovely singing voice. Ah-ahhhhhhhh.

(ISMENE dances up to JOCASTA very suggestively.)

JOCASTA

Stop this.

ISMENE

Ahhhhhhhh.

(Continues to provoke her)

JOCASTA

Stop this now before you ruin everything!

ISMENE

I'm sorry.

JOCASTA

You're not sorry.

ISMENE

I'm happy for you.

JOCASTA

(pause) You're sure he didn't see you?

ISMENE

He never saw me.

JOCASTA

And you think this man's -- song -- can make me happy?

ISMENE

From what I've heard, you have nothing to worry about.

JOCASTA

Because tomorrow I want him to hear him sing as long and as loudly as he wishes.

(JOCASTA makes some very suggestive moves back to ISMENE.)

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (22)

ISMENE

Oh Jocasta, you are my daughter!

JOCASTA

But that's the last accident you'll have while I'm Queen.

ISMENE

I promise. (pause) I've watched you. Seen your face when Oedipus comes into a room. You don't turn away.

JOCASTA

No.

ISMENE

Then you do find his face pleasant?

JOCASTA

Yes, I admit his face very pleasant, almost familiar.

ISMENE

You are looking forward to this marriage tomorrow?

JOCASTA

I am looking forward to this marriage.

ISMENE

Good! Then everything's settled. You really should try these figs. I ordered them specially for this evening. I'm told they have wonderful effects on the one who eats them and the one who sleeps with the one who eats them. (laughing)

JOCASTA

Look at you. So pleased with yourself. I unburden my soul and you talk of figs and figs.

ISMENE

When I'm happy I'm hungry. And I'm very hungry.

(Holding out the food.)

Eat.

JOCASTA

I couldn't swallow a thing.

ISMENE

(Pacing around the room, moving things around.)

I was thinking, if we just moved a few things around, it might make the whole room a lot more dramatic. You'll see what I mean. With the window up here and the bed down there, if you moved up here -- oh, yes, yes, yes, that's it! When he first comes into the room, down there, you should appear up here, so the moonlight can silhouette your naked body against the bedroom wall.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (23)

JOCASTA

This is my bedroom mother, not a theatre.

ISMENE

No, no, no, you're wrong. This is where the most important plays of our lives take place. Right here. Yes, you should definitely think about standing right there.

JOCASTA

Are you trying to manage my wedding night?

ISMENE

I'm trying to give you power in the only place we have it. Our men may start a war out there, but when they come in here, they bring us flowers and perfume. They lower their voice and soften their touch. They whisper sweet words in our ears, trying to convince us to give them the one thing they don't have -- the power to make life.

JOCASTA

That's not what happened in this bedroom the first time mother, but then you weren't here.

ISMENE

Oh, Jocasta, I've made you angry.

(JOCASTA turns away as ISMENE goes to bring out the wedding dress that she's been hiding.)

Here's your wedding dress. I hope you like it.

JOCASTA

I don't know what to say.

ISMENE

Yes, you do.

JOCASTA

I've never seen anything like it.

ISMENE

And you never will. I made them swear they'd never make another one.

JOCASTA

So elegant and simple. Poetry.

ISMENE

Put it on.

JOCASTA

Now?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (24)

ISMENE

Please, try it on now just for me.

JOCASTA

All right.

ISMENE

Go behind that screen and return as a goddess. Take as long as you need. You said we have the whole night.

(JOCASTA goes behind the dressing screen, and ISMENE pours a cup of wine as she begins to carry on a two-way conversation with herself.)

More wine? Why, thank you, I'd love some-though my daughter probably thinks I drink too much already. It just puts me in a better humor, really. No one likes me sober. Come to think of it, I don't like me sober.

JOCASTA

Who are you talking to out there? Did someone come in?

ISMENE

Oh, no, don't worry, I'm just talking to myself. I do it all the time. I tell myself wonderful stories which I find very witty and clever.

(dramatically)

"As I kissed Agathon my soul swelled to my lips....
...his lips swelled to my hips,
and on and on we swelled til the lips met the hips."
You know, I really am my best audience.

JOCASTA

That's not true. I remember you and father having long conversations.

ISMENE

They just seemed long. Believe me, time is totally different when you're a child.

JOCASTA

I do remember. You both would be talking and laughing together.

ISMENE

You're right. Your father actually liked my stories. We did laugh, and I always had the last word. You should have seen his face. Just when he thought the conversation was over, I'd launch into another one, and he'd throw up his hands and plead with me to go to follow him to bed where we would have the most incredible-

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (25)

JOCASTA

(interrupting) That's quite enough, Mother.

ISMENE

I'd forgotten how I always embarrass you. But it's true, I never could refuse him anything in bed. I never wanted to. Then we'd both end up laughing and singing. Oh, yes, you're right, there were good times. Do you need any help? I feel so useless standing here drinking. I hope it's not too hard to get out of.

JOCASTA

Be patient.

ISMENE

I never had patience. You got that from your father along with his thick hair and thin waist. I don't remember having such a wonderful evening the last time you married? And I certainly don't remember drinking, which was probably a big mistake.

(JOCASTA comes out in the bridal gown)

But this is not a mistake.

JOCASTA

Tell me the truth.

ISMENE

The truth is you need one more thing.

JOCASTA

Where are you going now? Mother!

ISMENE

Don't move.

(ISMENE runs and retrieves the veil and carries it to JOCASTA)

This veil is from my own wedding to your father. I swear I never wore it to any of the others. I don't know why I didn't give it to you before. Something old and something new. I love ceremonies. The magic. The promise of better things.

(ISMENE places the veil on JOCASTA's head)

Now you are perfection.

JOCASTA

The dress is lovely. Thank you. The veil was very thoughtful.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (26)

ISMENE

So even the most unkind mother in all of Thebes can be thoughtful?

(JOCASTA starts to walk away.)

The last time you said I was the most unkind mother in all of Thebes, we were also standing in this room together.

JOCASTA

It was a long time ago.

ISMENE

We barely spoke all these years. I thought I'd die without a word passing between us.

JOCASTA

I was fifteen. My son was dead or soon would be dead. What was I supposed to do?

ISMENE

And what was I supposed to say?

JOCASTA

You were my mother. You were supposed to make me feel better. I was grieving. I didn't know who to blame.

ISMENE

Then you didn't mean what you said?

JOCASTA

It's always this way, isn't it? Me comforting you.

ISMENE

Then you did mean it.

JOCASTA

You promise only sweet words, but it's never that way between us.

ISMENE

I'm sorry. I would gladly have died in that baby's place if it could have changed your difficulty.

JOCASTA

My difficulty. Is that what you called it?

ISMENE

I didn't want to call it anything. I knew it wasn't easy.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (27)

JOCASTA

No, it wasn't easy giving birth to a son, binding his feet, then handing him over to a shepherd who taking him to die in the mountains. None of that was easy. But I did it. I just don't know why.

ISMENE

You do know why.

JOCASTA

Why?

ISMENE

There are rules. There are always those damned rules.

JOCASTA

When did you ever follow them?

ISMENE

I couldn't change those rules or I would have.

JOCASTA

You told me when I married Laius, "Now you'll be a Queen. Things will always be different for you."

ISMENE

Even a Queen is a woman first.

JOCASTA

"Have a boy first," you said, and your husband will be yours forever. They like the boys first. So give them one and then they'll be happy." Well, that baby was a boy and he was our first. A King's son so perfect he took my breath away, but Laius wasn't happy.

ISMENE

Laius could not claim that baby.

JOCASTA

It was his son.

ISMENE

Did Laius ever claim that boy as his own? Did he ever give that baby his name?

JOCASTA

No.

ISMENE

Then the rule is he never existed. It's the law. Their laws. And if the father doesn't claim the baby, it's not his child and the mother has two choices. Give him to someone else to

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (28)

ISMENE (cont'd)

raise or put the child out to die. Women do it everyday. You just couldn't give that boy to anyone else and you knew it.

JOCASTA

You saw him.

ISMENE

The Oracle said if Laius had a son and the boy grew up, he would kill his father and...you know the rest.

JOCASTA

It was his own flesh and blood. My flesh and blood.

ISMENE

The boy was better off dead.

JOCASTA

Then what difference does it make to be a queen! We're the same as any of them except we suffer in silence.

ISMENE

No, we're not the same. We're their royal family. They might not think of us from day to day except to curse our wealth or gossip about who's in our beds. But let someone, anyone or anything, threaten them and they will be at our gates. Crying, begging, bleating to be saved, by us. That is the difference. No one will save us but ourselves.

JOCASTA

And the Gods?

ISMENE

The Gods sleep, too.

JOCASTA

Then why bother.

ISMENE

There's no logic in marriage, less in love. I prayed you would find someone to love in this life.

JOCASTA

Laius was twice my age.

ISMENE

They're never too old and we're never too young.

JOCASTA

I never knew any man before Laius. You made sure of that.

ISMENE

I made sure you could be a Queen. I should have told you what to expect then. I'm trying to tell you now.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (29)

JOCASTA

I had to ask Melina to tell me what to expect.

ISMENE

She was a good teacher for me, too.

JOCASTA

Did she teach you how to kill your son?

ISMENE

It's not easy to tell your daughter what to expect of being a wife. I admit I never did it because I never knew what to say. I left it to Melina to tell you what to expect with your husband because that's what my mother did to me. Look at me. Look at what a failure I am. It won't be like that for you this time.

JOCASTA

How do you know that? Because unless you've been to Delphi and heard the Gods promise me happiness, you don't know what my life will bring. You can't tell me I'll be happy. You can't promise me anything.

ISMENE

This time there's no curse. This time you will be in charge.

JOCASTA

Did you know about the Oracle before I married Laius?

ISMENE

Your father made the contract. It was supposed to be a grand union.

JOCASTA

With many children.

ISMENE

That was part of it.

JOCASTA

Then he didn't know when he promised me to Laius.

ISMENE

They never told me until the contract was signed. I didn't know about the Oracle until you were already married.

JOCASTA

But no one told me. Ever.

ISMENE

You were still young. I hoped you'd be happy anyway.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (30)

JOCASTA

You should have told me my son would have to die. I wasn't too young to understand that.

ISMENE

Your father forbid it.

JOCASTA

And this time you obeyed him?

ISMENE

I obeyed him because it wouldn't change anything. You were already married. I obeyed him, and when I found out you were pregnant, I prayed for a girl.

JOCASTA

You prayed for a girl and told me nothing.

ISMENE

I prayed for a daughter like you. A prize. And hoped it would be enough for both of you.

JOCASTA

I deserved the truth. Why didn't you tell me the truth!

ISMENE

What difference could it possibly have made then? You were already married.

JOCASTA

I seduced him, Mother, that's the difference. He went to Delphi but he never came to my bed. Night after night, I slept alone but I didn't know why. I sat in front of my mirror and I thought, "I must be too fat, or thin, or young, or stupid, or just ugly." I didn't know about the Oracle. I didn't know anything. So I asked Melina how I could be a woman to my husband and she told me. Everything. When I was ready, I sent Laius our best wedding wine to drink; and then a few hours later, I sent her to tell him I was sick. He followed her to my room, and I was here at the window, my gown invisible in the moonlight. I stepped out of it just as she told me to and he moaned just as she said he would. He followed me to the bed and lay beside me. I stroked his beard. I licked his lips. I did everything to him that Melina told me he would do to me. I did them in a passion, I did them in a frenzy, I did them til he rose up and begged me to stop, but I didn't. Not until I was his wife and then a mother. My reward was killing my son. And that has made all the difference in the world.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (31)

ISMENE

Would you rather have slept with your son? Or have you forgotten that part of the Oracle.

JOCASTA

I never forgot any of it. Laius told me the boy must die before the blood had been wiped from this bed. Before the milk came into my breasts. He planned his son's death in this room then called the Kronos to take him to the mountains before we ever said the boy's name out loud.

ISMENE

I deserve your scorn, perhaps your eternal hatred, but you deserve this marriage. I'm sorry I wasn't there to soothe your pain then. But I'm here now to help you bury it forever.

JOCASTA

(JOCASTA goes and gets a jewelry box)

Here's the other brooch you gave me. It is beautiful. I pierced the boy's feet with it. This is the cloth Melina wrapped him in when he was born. It still smells of his sweetness. This is a lock of hair I clipped before Kronos took him away. This is all I have to remember him by. These things and dreams that never let me sleep.

ISMENE

You must let his memory go before it destroys you.

JOCASTA

And if I let it go will I be happy? A mother again? Will I sleep at night without red eyes?

ISMENE

If you don't, I won't sleep. Forgive me. (pause)
Forgive yourself.

JOCASTA

(pause) He'll ask why there weren't any children.

ISMENE

You say it was because of Laius. And then you tell him how you long for his children.

JOCASTA

I do long for them.

ISMENE

And you want to have them as soon as possible.

JOCASTA

Yes, yes, as soon as possible.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (32)

ISMENE

You sip wine with him in this room. You draw him close to you and you whisper in his ear how much you long for his children and you never speak of Laius or that baby again.

JOCASTA

After I told Laius I was pregnant, he came to me every night until our baby was born. Then he never came again. And we never spoke of our son.

ISMENE

You had a name for him. What was it, Jocasta? Tell me. What did you call that boy in your heart?

JOCASTA

I called him Deimos.

ISMENE

Deimos, a good name. A strong name. Tonight you and I will welcome Deimos into our family.

JOCASTA

What are you doing? The father names the child.

ISMENE

We'll break the rules together and put an end to this forever.

JOCASTA

It's not possible. We have no right.

ISMENE

Trust me. We're the only ones who do. You've sacrificed enough. We've both sacrificed enough. We'll give your son the name he deserved so you can have the peace you need to love another one as well. Say his name out loud.

JOCASTA

Deimos.

ISMENE

Louder.

JOCASTA

Deimos!

ISMENE

Shout it one more time until it pierces the heavens.

JOCASTA

Dei-mos!

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (33)

ISMENE

Yes. Yes. Yes! I told you, together anything is possible.
Take my hand, Jocasta, and let this boy sleep. Take my hand,
my dear daughter, and let me comfort you.

END OF ACT ONE

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (34)

ACT II

SETTING:

JOCASTA's bedroom many years later. The room reflects the addition of four children since her marriage to King Oedipus. There are also flowers marking her anniversary.

AT RISE:

JOCASTA rushes into the room speaking excitedly and gathering up her clothes and belongings. She throws everything onto her bed.

JOCASTA

Did you hear him, Mother? "I will solve the murder of Laius. I will stop this plague. I--I--I!" So eager to save his country twice, our King demands to know everything, no matter what the price.

(Picks up Ismene's sash.)

I remember the last time you were here. How strange your words seem now. "This time you will be in charge, Jocasta. This time things will be different, Jocasta, I don't think I'll live forever, Jocasta." And then you died. Oh, Ismene, how I envied your certainty. How very much I wanted to believe you. Too much. All these years I slept as soundly as my dear little children and I was happy.

IRIS

(IRIS enters with an armful of flowers.)

My Queen, you're here.

JOCASTA

Where have you been, Iris, you're supposed to be here.

IRIS

I was gathering flowers for your anniversary. Aren't they beautiful.

JOCASTA

When did I command this?

IRIS

You didn't.

(JOCASTA continues bringing her clothes to the bed.)

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

JOCASTA

Exactly. Now help me pack these things.

IRIS

I know because of this terrible plague you didn't want any big celebration but I thought that just something -

JOCASTA

There's no need for you to think. There won't be any celebration. Here.

IRIS

I'm sorry. I'll change everything.

JOCASTA

No! I want you to help me pack these things now and then prepare the children to leave.

IRIS

Leave? Now? Where will we all be going?

JOCASTA

The King has ordered that old servant who was with Laius the day he was murdered to come here and I don't intend to be here when Kronos comes.

IRIS

Kronos?

JOCASTA

Yes, you must remember him. He liked you. Kronos asked to leave Thebes and retire to the mountains. He left the night before I married the King. Now Oedipus wants to question him about the murder, and I don't intend to be here when he comes up those steps. Why are you standing there when I told you to pack my things?

IRIS

He won't come.

JOCASTA

Who won't come?

IRIS

Kronos. He won't be coming.

JOCASTA

Don't waste my time. No one disobeys the King. If he's not here already he will be soon. Now go and get my children.

IRIS

He won't be coming because he's dead.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

JOCASTA

What?

IRIS

Yes, it's true. He's dead.

JOCASTA

The old man is dead?

IRIS

Completely.

JOCASTA

How can you know such a thing?

IRIS

Herakles told me.

JOCASTA

I was there when the King sent Herakles and the other out to find the old man. Where did you see him?

IRIS

I met him in the hall.

JOCASTA

When?

IRIS

Just now.

JOCASTA

I saw no one when I came in.

IRIS

I sent him off the back way. You must have missed him.

JOCASTA

Herakles told you Kronos was dead?

IRIS

Oh, yes, he wanted to tell you himself but when he saw I was coming here myself, he told me instead. I was just about to tell you when you said we were leaving. You know how foolish your servant can be when she has too many things on her mind.

JOCASTA

Did Herakles tell you whether the old man said anything before he died?

IRIS

He said nothing.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (3)

JOCASTA

Nothing?

IRIS

The old man said nothing because he was already dead when they found him. He lived alone in the mountains. It was a tragedy, of course. But they were fortunate to have found him, don't you think?

JOCASTA

I don't know what to think. I never imagined he would die. I thought he would be here by now. Coming up those steps as we speak.

IRIS

They said he must have been dead for days.

JOCASTA

Then he really isn't coming.

IRIS

He was old when he left Thebes, and that's more than fifteen years ago. Herakles said the King was quite shocked.

JOCASTA

The King knows he's dead too?

IRIS

Oh, yes. He told him first, of course.

JOCASTA

Of course.

IRIS

He was very surprised. Shocked. Here. This must be quite a shock for you as well.

(IRIS hands JOCASTA a cup of wine but she doesn't take it.)

JOCASTA

I'm surprised. Almost speechless. What did the King say when he found out the shepherd wouldn't be coming?

IRIS

He said he was happy?

JOCASTA

Happy?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (4)

IRIS

He was happy that the old man didn't suffer. Are you happy?

JOCASTA

If this moment wouldn't end, I would be the happiest woman in Thebes.

IRIS

Then let's drink to the happiest woman in Thebes. Here. It's your favorite.

JOCASTA

I shouldn't.

IRIS

Just a little wine. You haven't had a moment's peace since this terrible plague began. Even royalty must have a moment to relax.

JOCASTA

No, I need to think.

IRIS

Which is why you need to sit and have a little wine. Clear your head. Breathe.

JOCASTA

Just a sip.

(JOCASTA takes the wine.)

You must remember Kronos. He always brought you some toy he made. He liked you. He was the only one to survive when Laius and his guards were murdered. The only man who came back to Thebes alive. Naturally, when he asked permission to leave this palace and go to the mountains I had to say yes, what else could I do? It was such a small request, even Ismene thought it was the right thing. And she never agreed with anything I did.

IRIS

Is the wine spoiled?

(IRIS is fussing over JOCASTA, rubbing her neck.)

JOCASTA

No, you spoil me. My head's still spinning from this heat.

IRIS

That's what I'm supposed to do. You haven't slept in days. You need to rest. See, you feel better already.

JOCASTA

It's true. You always know what to do. So I'll rest and drink this wine, but this time you must drink with me.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (5)

IRIS

Me?

JOCASTA

I insist.

IRIS

But I'm working.

JOCASTA

No, you're not working. You're sitting here with your Queen in her bedroom, and she wants you to drink wine with her. Come sit and keep me company.

IRIS

I shouldn't. Wine goes to my head.

JOCASTA

That's where it's supposed to go. I need your company now. Drink up and don't keep your Queen waiting.

IRIS

The Queen doesn't like her servants drunk.

JOCASTA

My dear Iris, you're much more than a servant to me. You must know that. Oh, this wine is very good, isn't it?

IRIS

Yes, it's your favorite.

JOCASTA

Ah, I can breathe again. It does feel wonderful to just stop and relax. You always know what I need. (pause) This plague makes everything smell like death. The air in the courtyard was so foul I nearly fainted. Can you imagine if I'd fainted in front of all those people! It would have been worse than dying. The Queen out cold on the floor. What stories they would have told.

IRIS

There's a breeze here now. They said it might rain. Can you feel it?

JOCASTA

Look, I've ruined my shoes.

IRIS

Oh, don't worry. I'll clean them as good as new. It'll be good to have the rain come and wash all this dust away.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (6)

JOCASTA

I remember when you hated storms.

IRIS

I was a child then. Now I like to sit and watch the dark clouds come over the mountains.

JOCASTA

And you can rub my feet just like Ismene.

IRIS

You can see the rain way out there before it ever gets here. Even the air smells different. I love it.

JOCASTA

When you were a little girl you used to be so afraid of storms. Do you remember? You'd run and hide under my bed.

IRIS

I loved hiding in this room. You and Melina always gave up trying to find me.

JOCASTA

We fooled you.

IRIS

You didn't know where I was. You always gave up.

JOCASTA

We knew exactly where you were. Melina saw you slide under the bed the first time you did it.

IRIS

No, she didn't.

JOCASTA

"Shhhhh," she said, "the girl's hiding but we'll leave her there."

IRIS

The Queen's joking with me.

JOCASTA

I'd stand outside the room and call your name, and you thought you were so smart to fool the Queen. Then you'd run around this room and squeal with laughter. You were fearless. And you were always running into something. That's how you got that scar. You'd fallen and cut your chin. I was terrified, but Melina said you'd be fine and you were.

IRIS

I always thought I was such an easy child.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (7)

JOCASTA

Melina said you were the best baby to raise and my mother was the worst. And we all know Melina never lied. Even when she found you standing right here on my bed dressed in my best gown, she just stood there and laughed.

IRIS

I remember when she caught me. She had such a terrible look on her face, but she never punished me.

JOCASTA

Exactly, Melina never punished anyone. She loved babies. And she loved you from the moment she saw you. She sang you to sleep right in this room the first night you were born. It was raining and there was lightning everywhere and you were screaming. I remember it like yesterday.

(They continue drinking.)

IRIS

She gave me honey water.

JOCASTA

And sang till you fell fast asleep.
(dreamily) "Iris...Iris...goddess of the rainbow...."

IRIS

"Iris...Iris...messenger of love."

JOCASTA

You still remember your song!

IRIS

I loved to hear Melina singing. I still miss her.

JOCASTA

I miss her, too.

IRIS

I don't know what would have happened if she hadn't brought me here to you. I'd probably be dead.

JOCASTA

You were a beautiful baby.

IRIS

Even beautiful babies can be left out to die. You saved my life. I owe you everything.

JOCASTA

You owe me nothing.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (8)

IRIS

I know the Queen's mother never really liked me.

JOCASTA

My mother never liked any babies. Ismene was the only baby she could ever really care about.

IRIS

But my mother was her servant?

JOCASTA

Yes, and Ismene liked her very much.

IRIS

Is that why she wanted to give me away?

JOCASTA

After your mother died, Ismene gave you to Melina and Melina gave you to me and that has proved to be the best way, don't you think? You are happy here?

IRIS

Of course, I'm very happy.

JOCASTA

Your mother was a a good woman. She died giving you life and that's all you need to remember.

IRIS

Was Iris the name my mother gave me?

JOCASTA

No, I named you. The morning after Melina brought you to my room, I stood by this window and watched the most beautiful rainbow appear, way out there in the mountains. That's when I called you Iris.

IRIS

It's a good name. I'm glad you chose it.

(opening a locket)

I have this lock of hair Melina gave me, she said it was my mother's. I hope it was.

JOCASTA

She loved you. Melina, too. And your Queen loves you. That's what you need to remember. Do you remember when you'd stand on this bed and proclaim yourself, "Iris, Queen of the World." I used to love watch then. I wonder what you think of being Queen now?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (9)

IRIS

(IRIS is a little tipsy from the wine.)

Now? I think I'll recite poetry.

JOCASTA

You still write?

IRIS

You always loved my poems.

JOCASTA

Iris's "Lamentations for the Dead." Oh, you were so dramatic.

IRIS

Everyone else hated them. Even the dead hated my verse. But the Queen always loved them.

JOCASTA

I did love them. Yes, you're right, poetry is exactly what I want to hear.

IRIS

"I am an apple, and one who loves you
tossed me before you. O yield to him,
Both you and I decay." (pause)

"Only a simpleton would put
cucumbers and the like on a par
with the sun and the moon. (pause)

"Remorse:
Do I still long for my virginity..."

JOCASTA

Now stop Iris, that's really much more than I want to know.

IRIS

It's not my poem.

JOCASTA

I certainly hope not.

IRIS

I heard it from one of the other servants. Everyone laughed when I repeated it.

JOCASTA

They probably heard it from my mother. Ismene was the Queen of bawdy poems. Especially when she was drinking, which was usually when she was breathing. She thought the wine made her so much more creative. She wasn't always good but she was always very loud.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (10)

IRIS

(A little tipsy, IRIS dramatically recites
ISMENE's bawdy poem.)

"As I kissed Agathon my soul swelled to my lips....
his lips swelled to my hips, and on and on we swelled till
the lips met the hips."

JOCASTA

(JOCASTA smashes down the wine.)

You listened at the door on my wedding night, you little spy!

IRIS

I never had any other place to go.

JOCASTA

You listened when my mother sat here singing those rhymes and
drinking my wine. Iris, how could you?

IRIS

I swear I didn't mean any disrespect. I thought she was
funny.

JOCASTA

She was funny. And terrible. Everything and nothing. The more
time passes, the more I think of her. I talked to her today.
I talk to my mother dead more than we ever spoke when she was
alive. I see so much more of her in the mirror now...but I
will never have her head for wine.

IRIS

You didn't eat all day, and I'm not sure you ate yesterday,
either.

JOCASTA

Well, I'm hungry now.

IRIS

Here's some cake and fruit. I had them bake your favorite.
Eat. Please.

JOCASTA

I swear, a bawdy verse and a plea to eat. You sound just like
Ismene. "Listen to me, Jocasta, do this, fix you hair that
way, Baaaaaaa. Eat Jocasta, your favorites, they'll make you
so much more attractive, Baaaaaaa."

IRIS

I promise I won't recite any more poems.

JOCASTA

Don't be upset. You're the best baby Melina ever raised.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (11)

IRIS

The Queen is always so kind. What did Melina say about you?

JOCASTA

Me? I was the Queen. No one says anything bad about the Queen.

IRIS

I meant, if you were a good baby.

JOCASTA

I was Jocasta. I did whatever I was told. No complaints. So compliant. Smile Jocasta; wave Jocasta; always be seen and never heard, Jocasta. Good little girls grow up to be the best queens." I was always very good and this has made me very bad. But I loved saving you Iris; you were beautiful.

IRIS

I was never beautiful.

JOCASTA

I say you were beautiful, and I'm the Queen so it must be true.

IRIS

The Queen is telling stories.

JOCASTA

It's true, so it's not a story.

IRIS

I always love the Queen's stories.

JOCASTA

And my children love yours.

IRIS

Oh, let me tell you their favorite story. (Pause) One day Europa was picking flowers in the fields with her friends. Up in heaven the Great God Zeus was watching her play when suddenly, Cupid shot an arrow straight into his heart. Zing. Ping. Ahhhh. Zeus fell madly, passionately in love with Europa. He had to have her. He couldn't live without her. But how could he keep his jealous wife Hera from seeing his indiscretion. Ahhhh, he thought. I'll change myself into a bull and Hera will never find me. And so he changed himself into a sweet, brown-eyed bull and set himself right down in that field. Who could resist him? So beautiful and so gentle with a silver circle on his brow and horns like the crescent moon. Oh, the girls just loved him. As they came closer to him, the bull bellowed so musically and lay so gently at her feet that Europa couldn't help but jump on his great broad

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (12)

IRIS (cont'd)

back. Before she could get her friends to join her, she was up, up and away into the sky, flying across the fields and whoosh-sailing above the oceans. Frightened, she begged the creature to stop, but he flew on and on. This was no ordinary bull, she thought. This must be a god!

(There is an increasing commotion outside with crowds growing louder and more cheering)

JOCASTA

Iris?

IRIS

(IRIS tries to carry on speaking over the noise)

This is the part where he tells her he's the Great God Zeus and he loves her...and they live happily ever after.

JOCASTA

What's going on out there? Why are they all cheering...

(JOCASTA runs past IRIS, who now seems frozen. She stares out the window))

My God, it's Kronos. The old shepherd's alive. You lied to me. He's coming here now.

IRIS

Please sit down, my Queen.

JOCASTA

(JOCASTA begins to unravel and they overlap.)

Oh, Laius, I remember his face, do you remember his hands? Those hands took my baby boy to the mountains.

IRIS

Let me get you some water.

JOCASTA

I swear I never wanted him to leave this room. Iris?

IRIS

Here, my Queen.

JOCASTA

Where are my children? What have you done with them?

IRIS

You said it was too hot and this air too foul. You told me to pack up their things and you sent them away to the mountains.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (13)

JOCASTA

And they were all alive.

IRIS

Of course. You kissed them right here in this room. You do remember?

JOCASTA

I remember kissing them, yes. Polyneices, Eteocles, Antigone and Ismene after her grandmother.

IRIS

Ismene was crying because Polyneices had pushed her. You kissed her tears away before you said good-bye.

JOCASTA

And they're all alive now?

IRIS

They're in the mountains where it's cool and safe.

JOCASTA

No, it's not safe there. I hear my baby boy crying in those mountains. He's so cold because the sun's gone down and he has no blanket to keep him warm. He'll die if someone doesn't cover him. I have his blanket here. I can go to him now.

(JOCASTA grabs a baby blanket from the bed and hugs it.)

Such a good baby, you never cried.

(singing)

Deimos, son of Laius....Deimos...

Oh, you're such a good baby boy.

IRIS

Don't you smell the breeze coming in now? Tell me you smell the breeze.

JOCASTA

Look, he's asleep already. Here, you take him Melina.

(JOCASTA tries to hand the baby to IRIS.)

I know how much you love babies.

IRIS

Let me call someone.

JOCASTA

Laius! The shepherd's come to claim our son. Don't make me do this.

IRIS

I'll call the doctor.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (14)

JOCASTA

No! Call no one. If they know he's here, they'll take him away. I couldn't stand to lose him twice.

IRIS

I won't call anyone.

JOCASTA

You promise?

IRIS

I'll call no one. I promise.

JOCASTA

You can see how much he looks like his father. Laius, see how his dark eyes stop the light. So much like yours. He's your son. I promise. You never have to be afraid again.

IRIS

Lie down here, my Queen. Rest a moment.

JOCASTA

No, I can't lie on that bed.

IRIS

Just a moment.

JOCASTA

There's no room for me or my baby on that bed.

IRIS

But it's empty.

JOCASTA

Don't you see them slithering across the sheets? So many dead writhing on that bed I would have to sleep standing up.

IRIS

There's no one there, I swear.

JOCASTA

Pack our things, Melina. Put on our wings and we'll fly straight from the window - out, out, out across the city and off to the sea. Our feet will never touch the ground. Our wings will never melt.

(JOCASTA rushes toward the open window and IRIS grabs her and brings her back.)

(singing) "Deimos, son of Laius. Deimos, joy of my heart..."

IRIS

It was a terrible prophecy.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (15)

JOCASTA

Here's your dress, Jocasta. Such a mess, Jocasta. So much blood, Jocasta. How will we ever get it out?

(Throws her blanket to IRIS)

Here, take my wedding gown. I want to wear my purple robe. The one Laius gave me when we married. When I was young and had my whole life ahead of me. I want to be that girl again.

(whispering)

Did you know Zeus courted Europa in the likeness of a bull? Can you imagine what that was like?

IRIS

No.

JOCASTA

You listened at the door the night I told my mother about my son.

IRIS

I heard her poems.

JOCASTA

You heard the Oracle. You knew about my baby.

IRIS

The Queen is a very good mother who loves her children.

JOCASTA

The Oracle said the son of Laius would lie with his own mother and breed children from whom all men would turn their eyes. Can you imagine? What do you know?. Tell me!

IRIS

I don't know anything.

JOCASTA

Kronos talked to you before he left. What did he tell you?

IRIS

I know the Queen is a good mother who wouldn't hurt anyone.

JOCASTA

Why did you lie to me?

IRIS

The Queen is a very good mother who loves her children.

JOCASTA

Why did you stop me from leaving when there was still time to go? Why did you tell me the shepherd was dead?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (16)

IRIS

I prayed Kronos would die, or forget, or never make it up those stairs alive. I lied because I loved you. Because I wanted everything to be the way it was before.

JOCASTA

Who killed Laius? The truth!

IRIS

Oedipus killed Laius.

JOCASTA

Who is Oedipus? Say it.

IRIS

Oedipus is your son.

JOCASTA

(whispering) Deimos.

IRIS

King Oedipus was my hero. Everyone loved him.

JOCASTA

I married him as our savior.

IRIS

I would forgive the Queen anything.

JOCASTA

But I can't. You and I are the only ones who know everything now, but soon everyone will.

IRIS

Kronos swore he would never tell.

JOCASTA

The King will save our country twice whatever the price.

IRIS

Kronos wouldn't have told me if he hadn't caught me at the door.

JOCASTA

You've sat in this room with me all these years and said nothing.

IRIS

I swear I'd never speak a word to anyone. I'd cut out my tongue and be silent forever.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (17)

JOCASTA

Look what my silence has brought me?

IRIS

You're like a mother to me.

JOCASTA

I can never be anyone's mother again in this life.

IRIS

I can't bear to think of never seeing you again.

JOCASTA

Let me go and end this curse now. Let me go and pray they will take pity on my motherless children. Let me go, please.

IRIS

(pause) The children will never be out of my sight. I'll never leave them. I'll love them as you would have, always.

JOCASTA

And you'll tell them everything?

IRIS

Everything.

JOCASTA

Then it is settled. Good. The light's already fading. There isn't much more time. How long before the children come through that door?

(JOCASTA begins her final preparations.)

IRIS

I told the servants to bring the children back before dark. You never let them sleep in the mountains.

JOCASTA

No, I would never let them sleep there alone.

IRIS

You always said the children must come home no matter what and sleep in their own beds.

JOCASTA

I like them to sleep in their own beds. It's a good order, don't you think?

IRIS

I think it's very good to have your children with you. To kiss them good-night. To love them as you and their father do. It's what makes this house so strong. Thinking of your children first.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (18)

JOCASTA

Sometimes I don't think of them first. Sometimes I make terrible mistakes.

IRIS

Everyone makes mistakes.

JOCASTA

Unspeakable mistakes.

IRIS

Even the Gods fail. You told me that.

JOCASTA

I lied. The Gods don't fail. Not like we do. And we suffer so much more than they could ever imagine.

IRIS

You're the Queen. It must mean something.

JOCASTA

Not so much as it did.

IRIS

Even the Gods must make mistakes.

JOCASTA

It's all right Iris, I didn't make a mistake with you. I did the right thing when I brought you here. I'm doing the right thing by leaving. Promise you'll tell the children how much I loved them. How I see their faces when I close my eyes. That I always did everything for them.

IRIS

I'm sure they know. You tell them how much you love them every night.

JOCASTA

Don't be sure of anything in this life until it's over. Swear you'll tell them.

IRIS

I swear.

JOCASTA

How much their mother loves them.

IRIS

How much their mother loves them.

JOCASTA

Tonight.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (19)

IRIS

Tonight.

JOCASTA

And every night.

IRIS

And every night.

JOCASTA

As long as they live.

IRIS

As long as they live.

JOCASTA

Put my hair up in a crown when I am dead.

IRIS

The Queen has beautiful hair.

JOCASTA

My mother hated my hair. She said she could never get it right.

IRIS

Antigone has hair just like yours, but she won't let anyone touch it but her father.

JOCASTA

I don't know why I named Ismene after her grandmother. Antigone's the one who's so willful.

IRIS

Antigone loves breaking the rules and her sister loves following right after her.

JOCASTA

You've got to help Antigone. Not to change her, but to keep her from hurting herself. And Ismene has to stop doing everything her sister tells her.

IRIS

I talk to them all the time. At least the girls listen. The boys just fight.

JOCASTA

Ismene used to say, "Boys can't help fighting," and then she'd start a fight with me in the next breath. I think of my mother so much more sweetly since she's gone.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (20)

IRIS

They say you shouldn't speak ill of the dead, and I think it's a good rule.

JOCASTA

Do you think the children will remember me sweetly?

IRIS

You've been a kind mother.

JOCASTA

Will they think I was a good mother?

IRIS

Always. You loved them. It's not a crime to love your children.

(There is a growing commotion outside.)

JOCASTA

Someone's hear. I can feel it on the back of my neck. Go to the window. Quickly. (whispering) What is it?

IRIS

Kronos. He's entered the courtyard.

JOCASTA

I knew it. (silence) What is he doing now?

IRIS

He's using a stick to steady his walk. He's so old he's bent over and moves very slowly. (pause) I can almost see his face.

JOCASTA

And soon the King and that old man will see one another face to face, just as they must have looked upon each other at the crossroads where they met. I wonder if the boy remembers what his father looked like. (silence) Make me beautiful Iris, when I'm gone, cut me down, and paint my cheeks. Make me shine so my children won't be afraid to look at me one more time.

IRIS

I promise.

(JOCASTA starts to gather up some family things)

*

JOCASTA

Put these precious things in the grave with me. Remember to cut locks of hair for all the children. I think I've remembered everything. (silence) What's happening now?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (21)

IRIS

Creon's come down the steps to meet the old man. They're walking the last few steps together towards the King. Kronos is leaning on Creon who seems to be laughing.

JOCASTA

Where is the King standing?

IRIS

He's at the top of the steps. His arms are crossed. He looks quite serious.

JOCASTA

He was meant to be King. I don't know how I missed that.

IRIS

They've reached the steps. The King is coming down to meet them now. He's put out his hand to the shepherd who's handed his stick to Creon. They're going up the stairs together.

JOCASTA

Have they spoken?

IRIS

I don't know. They're too far away. I can't hear anything. *

JOCASTA

(silence) And now? *

IRIS

They're gone.

JOCASTA

Already?

IRIS

They've all gone inside. There's no one there. *

JOCASTA

Then it's time for you to go, too.

IRIS

So soon?

JOCASTA

There's nothing more for you to do here except to pin these two brooches to my gown, then take something for yourself and give the rest to my girls.

(IRIS pins the brooches on her gown.)

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (22)

JOCASTA

Thank you. Now, one kiss good-bye, and then you really do have to go.

IRIS

I'd like to think we'll meet again somewhere.

JOCASTA

Then we will.

(IRIS leaves the room.)

Don't look back, Iris.

(JOCASTA retrieves ISMENE's sash, which she drapes her around her neck)

Oh, Ismene, the true Mother of Thebes, I wore your sash when you died as a sign of my respect, I wear it now as a sign of our love. Pray it's strong enough to bear the full weight of a Queen. Reach out your hand, dear Mother, and give me all your strength. Reach out your hand and kiss me hello.

END OF PLAY