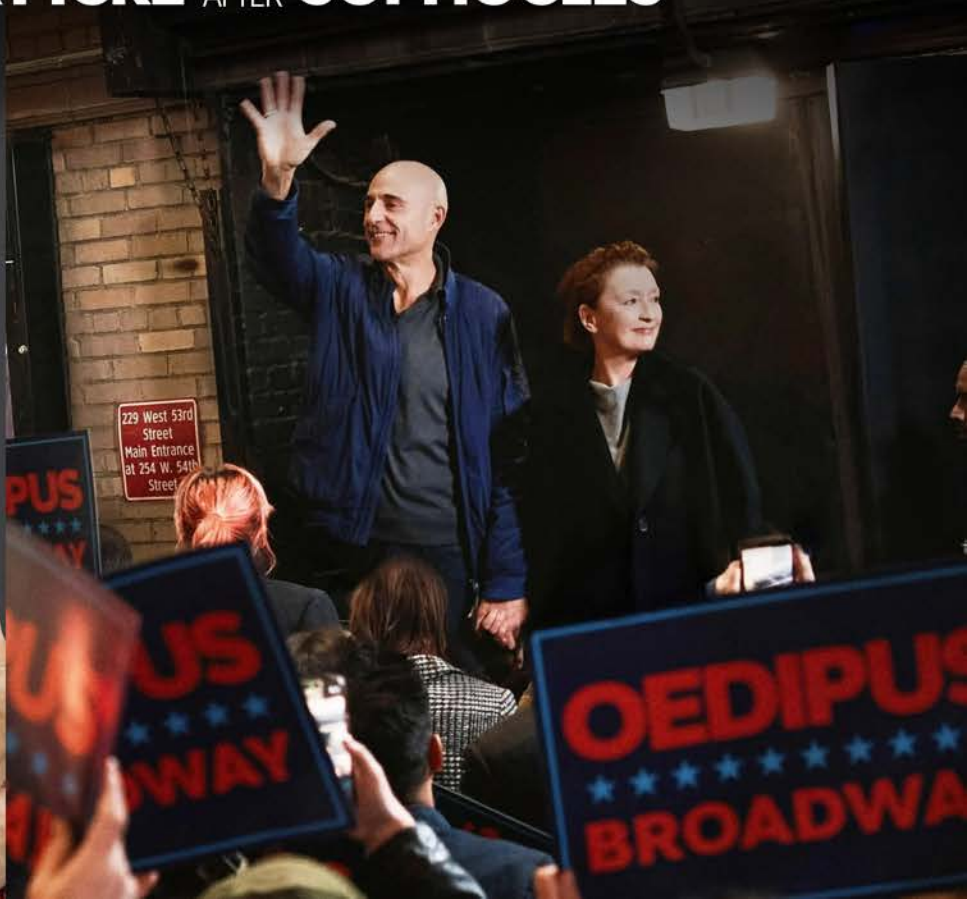




# OEDIPUS

CREATED BY **ROBERT ICKE** AFTER **SOPHOCLES**



### **A note on the text**

A forward slash ( / ) marks the point of interruption of overlapping dialogue.

A comma on a separate line ( , ) indicates a pause, a rest, a silence, an upbeat or a lift. Length and intensity are context dependent.

Square brackets [like this] indicate words that are part of the intention of the line but are *not* spoken aloud.

Two speakers followed by (*chorus*) indicates the two lines are to be spoken simultaneously.

The stage directions here are presented for ease of reading, not as a thorough account of the production decisions.

Future productions are welcome to make other decisions, and encouraged to adjust characters' ages and key dates (i.e. Laius' death, Oedipus' and Jocasta's wedding, and so on) to suit their needs; though the age gap between Oedipus and Jocasta should remain thirteen years.

When [TIME] appears, the characters should refer in real-time to the live 'election result' countdown clock. If not using such a clock, an approximate time until the result is due (e.g. 'twenty minutes') will be fine.

This text should be played without an interval.

*It begins before*

*in the headquarters of a major political campaign: phones ring, printers spool out documents, screens flash graphs and faces and the endless news cycles tumble onto each other, it's alive, full of action, full of posters of OEDIPUS' face, a 'days to go' digital counter shows that there are 15 days to go –*

*and then a curtain falls*

*Projected onto it, OEDIPUS on a screen, talking live to a huddle of reporters, the camera tight on his face, maybe microphones etc in shot. He's speaking impromptu, no notes:*

OEDIPUS

My children - my brothers and sisters – all of them. What will they inherit?

Perhaps the country needs a father after thirty years of coalition and compromise – we'll find out tonight.

This was a new movement, a tiny new movement, only three years ago. This didn't seem possible then – not least because I'm the candidate that people wanted and not the one the people in the suits told them they should want. (I'm wearing a suit, I know.) My point is: things change fast.

I think what everyone thinks. We're sick. The civic body is ill. And that - that isn't trees and chemicals in lakes – it's *us* – we're sick.

The water got poisoned – and we got used to the taste. And while we were sleeping, while we were staring into our palms, they deliberately dragged us backwards to a time when the rich were rich, and the poor were poor, backwards to when people who weren't like us deserved persecution, backwards until rumours and lies were the same thing as truth – and we've seen that in this campaign.

My opponent loves the idea this country isn't my country. He doesn't say I couldn't do the job – he says I'm not from here. My identity doesn't fit. It's nasty and it's stupid – and it's wrong. We're going to release my birth certificate later tonight but - what's underneath that idea that where we were born is of premium, unmatched importance? Do we really believe that deep down inside each of us there's one single self, a hard centre formed at the moment of birth, and destined never to change? Does a person's whole journey through time – does that mean nothing? We're going to release the birth certificate, and there an end.

And those who know the truth about my birth, and believe it, they might still say 'he came from peasant stock' (and I did), and 'he has no experience of political office' (and I don't!) 'and so his marriage must be political – he married her because she was married to Laius' – and yes, my wife was married to the previous holder of the office, you all knew her years before I did. But a marriage like ours isn't about politics.

Yes, it's been thirty-four years since Laius' death. A lot of words have been written about that gap, the lack of a leader since then, the need for one – or not (!) - and endless rumours and theories about how he died. So. It may be that later tonight, I'll stand before you as Laius' successor, the inheritor of his legacy. And if I am, I'll open the investigation into Laius' death and I will lead it myself, on public record.

*CREON comes to move OEDIPUS from the reporters.*

CREON                      Okay, thank you very much.

OEDIPUS                    *(to CREON)* One second  
*(to REPORTERS)* But do you hear that?

The ice is breaking. Something shifting ground. They tell me there's a storm coming tonight. That sounds about right.

I'll see you all in about two hours. Thanks.

*and the curtain rises*

*The same room, now decisively abandoned. Pizza boxes, water bottles, discarded T-shirts, half deflated balloons. It's not yet been a day but it has been left and left for the final time. It is halfway through being packed up. Throughout the evening, attendants pack more and more things into boxes, and carry them away, until by the end, the room stands white and empty.*

*A 'days to go' countdown clock, big red electronic numbers, is counting down in days, weeks, minutes and seconds, to the moment the election result will be decided. Now it shows only an hour and fifty minutes, and the time flows away.*

*MEROPE, an elderly, motherly woman, held-together, waits. She's wearing an outdoor coat. The interview we've just watched with OEDIPUS plays on a screen and she watches it, almost severely.*

*People moving stuff and moving stuff and moving stuff.*

*OEDIPUS enters, with CREON, who is genuinely irritated with him*

CREON                      It's like you don't even know you're doing it. You *can* ignore a question – you know, nothing bad happens if a question's left unanswered.

*OEDIPUS catches sight of MEROPE – stops -*

OEDIPUS                    Mum.  
  
You look beautiful.  
  
Hello.

MEROPE                    Hello

*There's tension here, between these two – is it sexual? We might wonder.*

OEDIPUS                    I didn't see you there.

MEROPE                    No

OEDIPUS I didn't / see you

MEROPE I know.

OEDIPUS I didn't know you were going to be here tonight –

MEROPE I didn't tell you.

,

OEDIPUS How is he?

MEROPE The same.

,

OEDIPUS I hadn't realised you were going to be here – I / didn't know

MEROPE I need some time with you alone.

*JOCASTA comes in, singing something –*

OEDIPUS Honey, my *mum* is here

JOCASTA Hello –

OEDIPUS look at this!

JOCASTA how long have you been here?

MEROPE An hour or so. This place is a tip.

JOCASTA Why clean, is what I always say - you can't prevent decay – [to O] - but the campaign is over and we have all earned a little celebration

OEDIPUS I'm - a bit *stunned* by the fact that my mother travelled all the way here to surprise me tonight, which must have been your [JOCASTA's] doing – a *little celebration* -

JOCASTA She –

MEROPE No, that isn't why I came. I didn't know.

,

*This is slightly awkward – some tension between MEROPE and JOCASTA.*

JOCASTA *Well* – tonight is a night for us *all* to celebrate –

MEROPE You know it's not his birthday.

JOCASTA I do know that, yes –

OEDIPUS Ladies -

CREON                    Sorry – it's a very busy night

MEROPE                I need to talk to him

ANTIGONE             Dada!

*O sees ANTIGONE, his daughter, clutching a book – early for the 'surprise' reveal.  
JOCASTA annoyed that the plan for the evening hasn't been adhered to.*

OEDIPUS              the scholar returns!

JOCASTA [*sarc*]      oh wonderful

OEDIPUS              Is the gang all here?

ANTIGONE             I'm here for the victory party

OEDIPUS              well you're two hours early

ANTIGONE             well I brought work

OEDIPUS              and what mystery of human nature are we unscrambling this evening?

ANTIGONE             The difference between a paradox and a riddle.

OEDIPUS              And they say academics have become irrelevant. What is it?

ANTIGONE             what?

OEDIPUS              The difference

ANTIGONE             One's got a solution - one's just something you have to live with?

OEDIPUS              Sounds like the choice on the ballot paper

JOCASTA                Oedipus

OEDIPUS              One has solutions. One you'd just have to live with.

JOCASTA                It's all behind us, campaign's over, polls are *closed*

MEROPE                I need to speak to him.

CREON                  Sorry. Not now. He has a meeting.

OEDIPUS              Cancel it.

CREON                  No.

JOCASTA                What is it?

CREON                  It's me.

OEDIPUS              Now? We can speak later

CREON                   After tonight, you have no later

OEDIPUS               One night off. One night off is all I ask

CREON (*to J*)           Could you please tell your husband / that

OEDIPUS (*to J*)       Could you please tell *your brother*

JOCASTA (*to O*)       Over-ruling, two against one, how long will it take?

CREON                   [Thank you] – really not very long

OEDIPUS               I'm guessing we still have security here tonight?

CREON                   No, because I have absolutely no idea how to do my job –

OEDIPUS               The tragedy is: you think that's a joke.

JOCASTA               It's a conversation, yes?

CREON                   yes

JOCASTA               Do it, have it, then we can relax –

*JOCASTA exits, as she does, kissing OEDIPUS -*

MEROPE               Oedipus, I need a few minutes with you. Alone.

OEDIPUS               Why?

MEROPE               If it were for public consumption, it wouldn't need to be alone.

OEDIPUS               OK. Well, hold fire – and later, we'll catch up. Corin, my friend, could you take my mother and look after her with the utmost care and attention?

*CORIN (elderly, kindly) is already on stage, managing the removers.*

CORIN                   It would be my pleasure

OEDIPUS               And before the evening is out, we will find a moment to talk.

MEROPE               Very good.

LICHAS               The third office is already cleared –

CORIN                   I'll bring you to it – this way

*MEROPE leaves with CORIN – OEDIPUS catches LICHAS, his personal aide.*

OEDIPUS               So. An unscheduled surprise?

LICHAS               It would be less surprising if we'd put it on the schedule.

OEDIPUS               You drew the shortest of short straws – being here tonight

LICHAS I wanted to be. Honestly.

*She follows them. OEDIPUS looks at CREON.*

OEDIPUS Now let me get ahead of you – and admit that I didn't say word for word what you / wanted me to say

CREON It's Captain Exceptional again, the super-human, saviour of the world -

OEDIPUS You can't just put words in my mouth

CREON That is literally what speechwriting is

OEDIPUS I will speak from myself. I will say what I want to say as I accept the position for which I have spent a year running. With help. Yes. But. it is me they are electing and me they will hear. I will speak from myself. All right?

CREON Most leaders would discuss strategy *with their teams* before announcing it to the world. And *this* is complex. But no plan. No discussion. The birth certificate – and god, re-opening Laius' death?

OEDIPUS If I say in public we're doing it, then we have to do it. It keeps him on his toes

CREON It should have been *discussed*. It's complex and, as usual, there's more involved than he realizes / when he

OEDIPUS I am so sick of it being a problem to this campaign that I am not dishonest –

CREON Your image, the way you are *seen*, is something we have to control

OEDIPUS Now? No. I am me. I am me. The campaign's done. It's over.

TEIRESIAS Oedipus

*A new voice. Both of them puzzled.*

OEDIPUS Who's this?

TEIRESIAS Oedipus – I know your voice.

*TEIRESIAS, blind, appears, somehow already in the room*

OEDIPUS (to C) Did you get me a stripper?

CREON I'm sorry, I think you've come to the wrong place

TEIRESIAS Oedipus, you can hear me – you are *here*

CREON How did you get in here?

TEIRESIAS The child brought me.

OEDIPUS Well, everyone's welcome.

CREON I do apologise: this is supposed to be a secure location, and you don't have permission to be / here

TEIRESIAS *Oedipus -*

LICHAS I'll get security

OEDIPUS Oh come on, look at him – if he manages to assassinate me against those odds, fair play to him.

*OEDIPUS, kind, leads him, sits him down*

Come. Can I have them get you a drink of / any sort?

TEIRESIAS No. I don't want to make you angry -

OEDIPUS I'm not angry – why would I be angry? But I'm afraid, my friend, I only have a few minutes, you've turned up on a pretty / busy night.

CREON I *know* him. He's one of them. The sect, the cult. The future-telling ones.

OEDIPUS The ones who thought I'd lose.

TEIRESIAS You will lose.

OEDIPUS Happy to have you here. Well, you wanted us to meet them and now here we are meeting them. All part of the surprise?

CREON People *listen* to them

OEDIPUS *Some* people listen to them

CREON some hundreds of thousands of people worldwide

TEIRESIAS *Oedipus -*

OEDIPUS (to C) Well I'm not seeking voters *worldwide* - and this is *late*: I mean, I'm up for going back through the fights you lost, but we're really facing the wrong way if we're doing this *once the polls have closed* -

CREON if we'd brought them on side, they have an *audience*

OEDIPUS Having an audience is easy. Hard part's having something to say.

(to T) Bad night for you if the polls tell the truth.

TEIRESIAS The polls mean nothing. It will be Creon.

,

OEDIPUS This is Oedipus. Creon's here too. But Creon isn't actually on the *ballot* for tonight's election

TEIRESIAS I made no prediction about tonight's / election

OEDIPUS You said it would / be Creon

TEIRESIAS but not tonight.

*OEDIPUS looks up.*

OEDIPUS I didn't catch your name

TEIRESIAS Oedipus –

*TEIRESIAS is reaching for OEDIPUS' hand*

We are human, you and I

nothing more. Nothing.

OEDIPUS Yes –

,

TEIRESIAS but a whole world lies under your feet. A whole universe, somewhere:  
*here, unseen*

and tonight it slips free –

OEDIPUS Yes (?)

TEIRESIAS I came to warn you. Not to help you. Powerless to help you: to see the  
disease in the cell is not to know the cure.

OEDIPUS [Enough]. If this is a joke, it's both funny and well-executed, but what  
we're going to do is this...

TEIRESIAS There is nothing to be done - it is over. Over all of it, some other, some  
*other* truth is coming, was always coming, it is all over

OEDIPUS What is all over? What disease?

TEIRESIAS It starts with Laius – you are right to look a second time –

OEDIPUS Laius' death, you mean?

TEIRESIAS It was not as we were told –

CREON Oedipus, could we speak for a / moment

OEDIPUS Let him speak. Please – go on.

TEIRESIAS I'm frightened.

I don't want to make you angry

OEDIPUS I'm not going to be angry – please. I'm listening. Go on. Continue.

TEIREISAS The sky is so huge, so frighteningly huge, so pitilessly blank, indifferent, and the wide flights of the birds - the life of the human being is a tiny track-mark on the earth, a helpless scratch – and what there is in store for you is *cruel*. Blood on the glass.

Time turns, sets a backward course, starts for the start with *speed*: the fragile moments drop like fruit, unravelling, reversing, unwound, back to the beginning. My speech is out of time.

OEDIPUS Sit down – sit *down*

TEIRESIAS you don't understand –but I can't help you. I cannot help you. It's over.

CREON Is something coming to us?

TEIRESIAS The answer to that question is always yes.

CREON Tonight?

TEIRESIAS To speak further will only make him angry.

OEDIPUS I'm not going to / be angry

TEIRESIAS He finds the answers. He hunts them to the end. To walk back through the details will not change a thing. Get me *out* – *get me out* – *get me out* -

OEDIPUS What happened to Laius? / What do you know?

CREON Oedipus, please -

TEIRESIAS To understand is to see it yourself

OEDIPUS my god, the enigmas -

TEIRESIAS These are not enigmas. That you fail to understand it does not make it an enigma. You will be forced to see who you are

OEDIPUS I know / who I am!

TEIRESIAS you do not know what you have done, you do not know who you *are*, and here now there is nothing to be done.

I've said too much. I want to *leave* –

OEDIPUS You realise that, once tonight is over, there will be other ways for me to persuade you to speak.

TEIRESIAS It will be Creon.

*OEDIPUS starts to get angry now.*

OEDIPUS My wife's brother *does not have his name on the ballot*. He literally *cannot* be *elected*. So whose idea was this? Surprise guest. Little confidence boost at the last moment, try and get inside my head. Was that it?

I am trying to *change things*. I am trying to move us forwards.

TEIRESIAS to break every boundary is to break *every* boundary. The one that holds havoc from control. The one holding human from animal.

OEDIPUS It must be hard, I understand that, to accept that there's no money now in new-age fear-mongering or fortune-teller cryptic crossword clues –

OEDIPUS Why did you come? Why come at all?

TEIRESIAS I came to / warn you

OEDIPUS You came because you want to psych me out – fear beats hope every time: blind in your soul as well as your eyes / it must be deeply humiliating to have to claim you can see the future

TEIRESIAS (chorus) Oedipus – I  
ANTIGONE (chorus) Dad

TEIRESIAS I came to warn you, Oedipus.

OEDIPUS Then WARN ME. Come on. Let's go. Pre-dict. Three things you've seen that *actually* come true -

TEIRESIAS Three [predictions]?

yes.

One. You find the truth of Laius' death – that you yourself are the killer you seek.

OEDIPUS Hilarious. And was I *sleeping* when I murdered Laius?

TEIRESIAS you're sleeping now.

Two. You bring the darkest shame on your parents – your father's killer - and your mother's lover.

OEDIPUS Say that again

TEIRESIAS I said you would / be angry

OEDIPUS Are you surprised? Are you surprised I'm angry, when my father is lying in a hospital bed – are you surprised I'm angry when you dishonour my mother, I give you my valuable time, I allow you to spout your nonsense and you have the audacity – are you *surprised* I'm angry?

TEIRESIAS I have never once experienced surprise.

OEDIPUS Let's see if we can help with that -

*OEDIPUS throws TEIRESIAS onto the floor.*

CREON (chorus) Oedipus

ANTIGONE (chorus) Dad – he can't defend himself

OEDIPUS He's a fraud. And the two of you have decided, for some poisonous reason – you [CREON] smuggled him in here *tonight*, for one thing –

CREON *no*

TEIRESIAS Three. You said three. The third is this:

It turns everything around, but itself stands still.

OEDIPUS 'It turns everything around, but itself stands still.'

And what the fuck is that supposed to mean?

TEIRESIAS When you can answer that question – for the first time you will know yourself.

,

OEDIPUS Get him out, call security – let's see if they can find out who he is.

CREON Lichas! Corin!

OEDIPUS Let's not waste any more time.

TEIRESIAS You see. And you wish / you were blind.

OEDIPUS stop talking.

Thank you.

(to CREON) I thought we'd put this in the past. The frustration at being second in command. I understood that. What I don't understand is –

*LICHAS comes in, OEDIPUS points at TEIRESIAS:*

Him. Out. [*straight back to CREON*]. I mean, it's as badly-kept a secret that you've got your own ambitions – but *that* was a joke - but you have been *on my side* with this stuff

TEIRESIAS I did not predict he would win the / election – he knew *nothing* of what I know –

OEDIPUS Goodbye –

TEIRESIAS Creon did not know

OEDIPUS *Goodbye.*

*LICHAS, with security, takes TEIRESIAS out*

CREON I am / on your side. I didn't *know*

OEDIPUS You want to attack me? Fine. But at least have the manners to cover it up. There's back-stabbing and there's back-stabbing but this is straightforwardly amateur hour -

ANTIGONE Dad –

CREON Oedipus – do you want to try and listen – you know, just to see what it feels like?

OEDIPUS 'It will be Creon', it makes no *sense* - it's not a strategy – though, presumably, you're already planning for next time around -

CREON No. That's not what I want.

OEDIPUS It's also not how it *works*. You're never going to be the chosen one – these things are done on *merit* now. Which is not an area in which you excel. Which is also not a secret.

ANTIGONE Dad, leave him alone

CREON You're insane. This is totally insane.

OEDIPUS You want to know something else that isn't a secret? Your mediocrity. Your middle-of-the-road, play-to-the-crowd, behind-the-curve, little-boy-anxious way of not-quite-dealing with the hard questions, the big issues and the burning fucking problems of the time.

ANTIGONE Stop it -

OEDIPUS And your fear. The fact that you don't *dare* until the moment's gone past. Your fundamental commitment to inaction. Too busy checking the rules. And (!) here we are – when do you try and sabotage me? When does the assassin look lively with the knife? On the night I've already won the election. By definition: too late.

,

I might not like you, but I do know you.

CREON Oedipus, I haven't done anything wrong. I didn't know he would be here. Or what he was going to say. I didn't ask him to say anything -

OEDIPUS And you've never had any ambition to win an election?

*CREON opens his mouth to say 'no', and falters – that split-second is all it needs –*

Exactly. *Exactly.*

CREON For fuck's sake, I wanted you to win.

OEDIPUS Past tense

CREON                    Why would I bother with the hours of work, the campaign, the lack of sleep, fighting you when you've got it wrong – *like now*, paying you the compliment of reacting to your paranoid, arrogant bullshit, why would I have bothered - writing for you, thinking endlessly about what you should say, about the right course of action, obsessing over images and photo ops after photo ops of sheets of paper with your fucking face on them and literally putting extra hours in your day by ensuring we fly with the sun - and all just to try and make sure that you win. Why would I bother? I want you to win. I always wanted you to win. He's not even listening to me.

OEDIPUS                My instinct is shouting you down, I'm afraid. And I trust my instincts more than I trust / you.

CREON                    So you're not going to listen to what has actually happened?

OEDIPUS                What has actually happened is this. You don't want me looking into the death of Laius, which -

*LICHAS enters, with a folded sheet of paper. The men fall silent.*

LICHAS                    Sorry - are we ready?

OEDIPUS                To me, please.

*LICHAS, had been heading to CREON, but now hands OEDIPUS the paper.*

OEDIPUS                Thanks.

*He reads it. It's election info, but it's not important yet -*

LICHAS                    Do you want the updates directly as they come in?

OEDIPUS                I do. Is he out of the building?

LICHAS                    Yes.

OEDIPUS                And the child?

LICHAS                    I didn't see a child, but

OEDIPUS                So now we have an unaccounted-for child in the building. Thank you.

*LICHAS leaves. A pause.*

CREON                    I had nothing to do with what he said. Nothing.

OEDIPUS                It's quite the story. I'm Laius' killer. The new one *murdered* the old one.

CREON                    Fine. You'll find out tomorrow.

OEDIPUS                About what?

CREON About Laius. And what you'll find out is the only thing I've done is try and protect you – which has been exactly the same, every single day, for the last three years of my life.

OEDIPUS So you think all this is thanks to you?

,

CREON You think you have nothing to thank me for?

OEDIPUS The occasional reminder of the rules aside –

CREON Yeah, because it's not like understanding the rules of this election has helped us in any way, it's not like the specific wording of the relevant laws has been *beneficial* to the ways we've found to get / round them

OEDIPUS After tonight, I won't be needing you.

CREON You won't [be needing me?] –

,

Oedipus, take some time to think

OEDIPUS I have. We're done. I'll tell your sister in the morning.

I will *not* be undermined from within.

CREON Right. Well, then there's nothing I can / say.

*But POLYNEICES has run at OEDIPUS from behind, and put hands over his eyes, as quickly the others move through the space, pulling trolleys, assembling tables –*

OEDIPUS I see nothing – the darkness, the darkness is –

interrupted by the noise of cutlery and whispering which suggests to me that somehow my wife has organised a – surprise meal -

*He's said this just as his eyes have been uncovered and the image is ready, everyone facing him – and no-one knows quite what to do. He's solved the surprise before it surprised him.*

Well – go on then!

ALL SURPRISE

*ANTIGONE takes a picture with a camera she has around her neck. And his sons ETEOCLES and POLYNEICES are also in front of him. Dinner is being laid, everyone helping, CORIN is serving food. LICHAS smiles.*

OEDIPUS My boys ARE here! I haven't seen you all for – what? – three weeks?

ETEOCLES Nine weeks, but it's fine –

JOCASTA You couldn't play along and be surprised -

OEDIPUS                   when you know, you know –  
JOCASTA                   You will be the death of me –  
OEDIPUS                   and where are the *dates*? no plus ones?  
POLYNEICES (*fast*)   no  
ETEOCLES                  tonight's not the night for meeting the parents, Dad  
OEDIPUS                   tonight might be your last chance, for at least five years –  
A NIGHT OFF!  
This is incredible

*JOCASTA catches CREON, on the quiet -*

JOCASTA                  What's wrong? I can tell from your face -  
CREON                    It's him [*OEDIPUS*]. I'll tell you later.  
OEDIPUS                  No, it's him and I'll tell you later -  
JOCASTA                  He's angry about the investigation  
OEDIPUS                  How do you know that?  
JOCASTA                  I was with him as you made your unannounced announcement -  
OEDIPUS                  Honestly, marry your brother -  
JOCASTA                  You have always been jealous of my relationship with my brother  
OEDIPUS                  That is not even a little bit / true  
JOCASTA                  And given that we are, what? A couple of hours away now –

*OEDIPUS knows that she can't see her watch without her glasses, which she isn't wearing – this between them is totally good-humoured, as POLYNEICES and ETEOCLES throw a ball to each other -*

OEDIPUS                  Will you just accept that you need glasses and wear / them  
JOCASTA                  - given that, before the sun has gone all the way down and come all the way up, you are going to be running the *country my brother lives in*, given that he will be paying his *taxes* to you, maybe you can, just for a change, Let It Go  
OEDIPUS                  For you [I would do] anything – but / there's - NO -

*POLYNEICES jumps for him, OEDIPUS wrestles him off – and then runs – wild, off around the set, chased by POLYNEICES and ETEOCLES, crashing into things – he's chased by his children, chaotic – this can take some time*

*Meantime - chairs are assembled, an assortment from the office (CORIN, JOCASTA, LICHAS, ANTIGONE have transferred the food to the table)*

*until full speed, OEDIPUS comes flying round a corner and nearly crashes into MEROPE – who stands at the door, genuinely surprised – and everyone celebrates the arrival of MEROPE with some sort of raucous family in-joke.*

(to MEROPE) Mother, you are fashionably late for the surprise –

MEROPE I wasn't informed there would *be* a surprise -

JOCASTA (to M) Help yourself to a seat -

OEDIPUS - I'm *happy* you're here

MEROPE - we still need to speak / Oedipus

OEDIPUS I know – the whole evening stretches ahead of us – there is *time time time time TIME* – I don't have to shake any hands or race in a guarded car to an overnight plane or rewrite a portion of another speech or learn the names of donors – I just have an evening and my mother and my *wife* and my sons and my daughter and

ETEOCLES - and absolute power.

OEDIPUS I don't have that yet, amigo – *but* I do have my favourite FOOD – is this mum's recipe?

JOCASTA [it's] my recipe

MEROPE Why are we having dinner *here*?

JOCASTA Your son was determined to spend tonight here

OEDIPUS I announced my candidacy here. All our best ideas happened here. It felt right that the old place got to see the final night, rather than some classical suite in a grand hotel -

MEROPE And where are all your staff?

OEDIPUS Preparing parties or measuring the walls above their desks or updating their resumes – [*w irony*] boys is this really what you two are wearing?

*ETEOCLES and POLYNEICES are not wearing suits.*

POLYNEICES Thanks

ETEOCLES We have suits but we are not going to put them on yet because we will only find some way of ruining them, because we always ruin everything

OEDIPUS I hear the voice of the mother

JOCASTA 'The mother'? You *are not* one of the children, I actually tell people, I have four children, two at 20 one at 23 and one at 52 –

ANTIGONE           And one that died.

,

JOCASTA           Yes – I don't know what you think you're doing –

ANTIGONE           It's called telling the truth –

JOCASTA           I know you know that that's private information, maybe you're trying to be morbid or just trying to upset / me, either way, you're achieving both – and tonight is the night for *neither*.

ANTIGONE           So because it died, we forget it? I'll sit in the other room

JOCASTA           You'll sit right there. Tonight is not your night.

*Everyone is basically seated by now at their places. This meal scene should proceed quickly and with overlaps and ad libs and feel like a real family, really sitting down for dinner -*

OEDIPUS           I have spent a year, a whole year, eating whatever local delicacy they put into my hand. I have eaten some things that go significantly beyond most people's definition of 'food'.

MEROPE           This room is huge -

CORIN           Even bigger before they put the walls in – all put in for the campaign – and they're being taken back out tonight. Not much of a dining room, I'm afraid -

OEDIPUS           It is improvised, thrown together, spontaneous, much like your only son, whom it has been convened to celebrate

*LICHAS has handed OEDIPUS a piece of paper with some news on it – as he reads it, everyone goes quiet.*

JOCASTA           What does it say?

*OEDIPUS hands her the paper.*

I have no idea where my glasses are – Corin - and there is no way I could

OEDIPUS           Early signs, looking good.

JOCASTA           Good.

Everyone, here we all are. Tonight. An evening off.

OEDIPUS           It sounds like a *lifetime*

JOCASTA           And tonight is really all about one man, one glorious, wonderful man, who I know – is one of the most important men in my life, in all of our

lives, and to my mind, one of the most important human beings in the world –

*...OEDIPUS – is the expectation...*

This will be Corin's final meal with us

*Attention swings round to CORIN – the family laugh, cheer, applaud*

MEROPE                    Tonight?

CORIN                      I'm afraid so. Putting the old boy out to pasture.

JOCASTA                   We begged him not to retire - begged him to stay

MEROPE                   After how many years' service?

CORIN                      Fifty-five

MEROPE                   And where are you from? Originally?

OEDIPUS                   Release your birth certificate, Corin, it's the only way -

ETEOCLES                   Corin, Nana is interviewing you for your next job

POLYNEICES              as her bitch

OEDIPUS                   Thank you, gentlemen

ETEOCLES                   That / wasn't me!

CORIN                      It's a village, tiny handful of houses, north of the wild-forest at the base of the mountain. Haven't lived there for years, but -

MEROPE                   That's very near where our home was, our first / cottage –

OEDIPUS                   yes

CORIN                      I didn't realise that! My parents lived up there -

MEROPE                   No longer?

CORIN                      No longer living anywhere

MEROPE                   I'm sorry.

CORIN                      Ah, they were old. I used to go back there whenever there was trouble, pay my respects. It's a peaceful part of the world. I was sorry to hear about your / husband

MEROPE                   Yes, he's sorry he's not able to be with us.

*Momentary awkwardness, ANTIGONE rescues it -*

ANTIGONE                   We're going to miss you, Corin

CORIN I've stayed too long, really, hanging on past the time I should have gone, but your mother said: see out the campaign – and I thought, what's one more year?

MEROPE Do you not have a wife?

CORIN I don't

ANTIGONE (to M) You interested?

OEDIPUS Not appropriate -

*But the look on MEROPE's face is enough to silence ANTIGONE: MEROPE is thinking of her husband. JOCASTA might secretly find this quite funny. CORIN smoothly picks up as if there hasn't been the interruption.*

CORIN And I used to say to this one [*Jocasta*], when she was a very young woman indeed, before she was married, before she had any of you [*children*], I said, I would do anything for you.

,

And I hope I have.

JOCASTA You have. You absolutely have.

*MEROPE slightly briskly cuts through this*

MEROPE And when do you officially resign?

CORIN I have already. This is borrowed time.

JOCASTA A final night, the last full stop on a very full chapter of our lives –

CORIN You'll do well from tomorrow to find time for a family meal.

OEDIPUS And doing well is what we do well – and though these two will be off on their voyages of learning, before the year is up, I will have it passed into *law* that they come back home, with boyfriends and girlfriends, and husbands and wives, and then grandchildren after that.

ETEOCLES Dad, sometimes, I forget that it's possible for you to be silent

OEDIPUS And how is the girl - name, name, name, I forget / her name

ETEOCLES (fast) She's fine

POLYNEICES She left him

OEDIPUS (chorus) Really?

MEROPE (chorus) Why?

ETEOCLES Fuck off

JOCASTA language

ETEOCLES seriously fuck off

JOCASTA It's not a particularly kind way to behave to your brother

POLYNEICES He didn't behave a particularly kind way to his girlfriend

ETEOCLES oh come / on

MEROPE What did he do?

JOCASTA (to M) Could / we leave it?

MEROPE I am a part of the / conversation

POLYNEICES He cheated on her.

,

JOCASTA Is that true?

ETEOCLES It is not anyone at this table's business, is it?, what I do in a private relationship, it's - People do things for a REASON

POLYNEICES 'and I will try my best to think of a reason for what I did'

JOCASTA Is it true?

OEDIPUS Now come on -

ANTIGONE (to J) Dad's cheated on you.

,

OEDIPUS What?

ANTIGONE Most men do. Women put up with it.

OEDIPUS I'm not most men

*This next section fast – until OEDIPUS' explanation*

JOCASTA He's your father, not your brother. For God's sake, speak to him with / some respect

OEDIPUS It's all right -

POLYNEICES Yeah, it's not like brothers merit respect

CREON You're not the only person who thinks *that*

OEDIPUS respect has to be earned

JOCASTA (*to A*) I don't understand what this latest childhood tantrum is about – I really / don't

ANTIGONE He's not god though, is he? he isn't actually the perfect / man

MEROPE I would never have permitted any child of mine to speak to her father in the way you have, young lady.

ANTIGONE I'm not sure / why that's relevant

OEDIPUS It's all right. I haven't, actually, Antigone. And – look, it's not that in twenty-three years of marriage, you're not tempted, or there aren't opportunities – but it is because your one person is worth so much more than that. We're all part animal, part angel, and the animal is tempted every time, but the pleasure is overcoming it, reaching for something purer and higher – and love is a knowledge / that

ETEOCLES Dad, if this is heading towards the story of how you two first met and how you were speaking in front of a tiny crowd, you'd tried to cancel the speech and then afterwards / she came up

POLYNEICES Mum talked to you and from the first / hello, you both just knew

ETEOCLES you both just knew - immediately the first moment, and Mum / bought you the first expensive champagne you'd ever had and you stayed up talking to each other

ANTIGONE brought the first proper champagne you'd ever tasted

E/P/A all night

JOCASTA Actually, it wasn't all talking –

*JOCASTA and OEDIPUS at this feel the urge to laugh – and push each other on –*

There was something of a rush to find a hotel room -

ANTIGONE Nobody wants to hear it

JOCASTA It's your origin story, darling –

ANTIGONE My *what?*

OEDIPUS You wouldn't be here if all we'd done that night is talk –

*The kids groan. ETEOCLES gestures 'we're eating!' –*

Oh come on – it's a natural thing!

MEROPE What it's not is an appropriate topic of conversation

JOCASTA Every animal does it.

MEROPE Animals do plenty of things we'd never allow.

JOCASTA                   Such as having sex?

MEROPE                   Such as killing each other and eating the corpses -

OEDIPUS                   Yes but why are we embarrassed about love? Because someone once decided, and blindly we follow, they decided the things we really want should be the things about which we feel shame. And love is the thing everyone wants – *everyone*.

*He looks around the table at each person.*

It's not embarrassing. It's the only thing that matters in the end, how much love? how much were you worth? - how much did you receive, and how much did you give, and how much did you risk for it, how bold were you, how brave? And when your person reaches out and takes your hand, the one you feel no shame about being naked with, at home inside their body like it is an extension of your own, when you and they embark on *creating life* together -

MEROPE                   Stop talking, Oedipus

OEDIPUS                   Come on, you have felt this too - you and granddad / - to lift up from yourselves a new person, with arms and toes and lungs, there was *nothing* and now there's a person

MEROPE                   You don't know that

MEROPE                   Stop talking Oedipus, it's not appropriate

OEDIPUS                   Love isn't appropriate; it isn't ruled by *manners*, I'm trying to say there is a colossal, chaotic kind of beauty to this one in a million chance / – that these

MEROPE                   This is not the time for a speech. Your father's on his deathbed and I'm not in the mood.

,

(to *ETEOCLES*)           It's a disappointing thing you've done.

ETEOCLES                I know. I didn't bring it up for public trial.

MEROPE                   Regardless. It's disappointing.

OEDIPUS (to *E*)        But *why* did you do it?

ETEOCLES                What is this, group / therapy?

MEROPE                   As if 'why' makes the slightest bit of difference.

OEDIPUS                   No, my young men will understand that they have *feelings* – I don't want strange, sullen creatures only interested in sports and alcohol and repressing rage. We don't raise men like that in this family.

MEROPE                   Like your father you mean?

JOCASTA                   What is going on with you two tonight?

,

OEDIPUS                   Nothing. There's nothing wrong. We're just all at high pressure. Aren't we, mum?

*MEROPE does not reply, continues eating*

ANTIGONE                 How is granddad?

*MEROPE does not reply.*

OEDIPUS                 He's the same.

POLYNEICES             Corin, do you have to hand in the gun?

CORIN                    God! Yes, I do, in fact I should have done it this morning but I forgot –

ETEOCLES                put your HANDS UP

*As CORIN pats his holster, panicky, he realises that ETEOCLES has stolen the gun from CORIN – MEROPE and JOCASTA audibly react –*

MEROPE (chorus)       Oh for crying out loud -

JOCASTA (chorus)      Corin, *please*, I don't like that thing at the table

OEDIPUS                It's perfectly / safe –

CORIN                   Please, everyone, there is no need to worry – it is really perfectly safe, it isn't *loaded* – (*he realises:*) oh, god, it *is* loaded – right, fine, I will put it *in / the safe*

JOCASTA                the safe and lock the door, *please*.

*CORIN goes off to get rid of the gun.*

MEROPE                 My *God*

POLYNEICES (to *M*)   It's hilarious: he has to carry it because he's officially mum's bodyguard but mum doesn't think she / needs a bodyguard so was happy for it to be Corin

JOCASTA                Nobody needs a whole story about it – / can we please put it away

POLYNEICES            I think we have forgotten that Eteocles *has cheated on his girlfriend* –

JOCASTA                No, we hadn't forgotten, I think we thought it might be kinder not to air the details of Eteocles' private life in public conversation

OEDIPUS                And in case you thought I hadn't picked up there was trouble from the way you [*Eteocles*] said no when I asked you if you were bringing anyone to the party tonight – though of course, you [*Polyneices*] also said no, but in a very speedy way indeed, as if there was nobody at all in your life, and you think you slipped that one past me, but nobody slips

anything past me, because I know that there is in fact a someone in your life – I don't have a name, granted, but I do know that the someone is another young *man*

which disappoints / me -

POLYNEICES why the fuck did you / tell him that?

ANTIGONE I didn't tell him / anything! I didn't

POLYNEICES you're a cunt. A fucking *Cunt*.

MEROPE (!) if I had called my sister that word, my mother would have skinned me / alive

POLYNEICES Nobody wants a history / lesson

OEDIPUS *Thank you* – I was going to say, that disappoints me in three ways: one, that any atom in your body was scared I would do anything other than love you and accept you, two that you thought this family might have any other reaction than delight – and three that you didn't bring him here to meet us tonight, while there's still time. And if there is a bit of you that thinks that anyone except you has a right to decide how you love – well [obviously that's not true].

[If] you find your person - whoever, whatever they are, you find them – and our only reply is our joy. Our *only* reply.

Polyneices, we drink to you.

*They drink to POLYNEICES. Then, a second toast.*

Corin, you have been like a father to my radiant wife since she was a radiant girl. We're sorry to lose you, but you'll be back to see us, I'm sure. Enjoy your retirement. Take some time. Our gratitude.

*The family drink to CORIN.*

I want to say something too about my father. He worked with his hands, with the trees and he made beautiful, simple things. It was a simple life – but / it

MEROPE 'was'

OEDIPUS what?

MEROPE 'WAS', as if he's already dead. He is still alive. He is still alive.

OEDIPUS What is wrong with you?

MEROPE You know. You know what's wrong.

*Microbeat of OEDIPUS' confusion*

It's all over.

OEDIPUS                   What?

MEROPE                   The first time I've come to see you *on my own*. Your famous emotional intelligence only extends so far – yes, you're about to step into a new life – but, you know what? So am I. So is every other person at this table.

OEDIPUS                   I know, Mum

MEROPE                   You do not know. You do NOT KNOW, and you have never known. And even if you're ashamed of your parents, they are *nonetheless your parents*. And you [JOCASTA] can try and exclude me from a family celebration, keep me on the wrong side of the secret, but you will not exclude me from my son.

*MEROPE leaves the table and the room.*

JOCASTA                   What's going on?

OEDIPUS                   I don't know.

JOCASTA                   that isn't like her. And you're on edge too.

*ANTIGONE taps a spoon to her glass.*

Oh god -

ANTIGONE                   I want to say something too.

Whatever anyone else does, tonight is an incredible achievement, dad. Whatever the result, it's been an amazing thing to watch, this campaign, it's the best thing I've ever been near. And when it goes the way we hope it will, I wanted to say, surprise us. Make brave things happen.

JOCASTA                   Is this your role to play?

ANTIGONE                   What?

JOCASTA                   Perhaps you might have thought 'it isn't quite right for me to make a toast to Dad, perhaps that's Mum's place, and that's something / she might have liked'

ANTIGONE                   Oh for God's sake, everything has to come back to fucking *you*

*ANTIGONE gets up and leaves the room.*

JOCASTA                   I can't say anything to her at the moment, I don't know where it comes from.

CREON                   Seeing as we're all getting up

*CREON gets up and makes for the door*

OEDIPUS Sit down. Sit *down*.

CREON Need more time to work out how this is my fault?

OEDIPUS You're a liar, and a nobody. And you've made your own bed.

*CREON loses his composure*

CREON Fuck you, Oedipus – you know what? – Fuck you.

CORIN (chorus) Come on, gentlemen, let's give them some space / come on

JOCASTA (chorus) What's going on?

*CORIN takes POLYNEICES and ETEOCLES out. It's just JOCASTA, OEDIPUS, CREON – whose conversation has continued unabated –*

OEDIPUS Your brother set a little trap for me this evening. Brings in some fortune teller, with a handful of predictions, top of the bill: that Creon will win tonight's election. Not difficult to find the underlying story *there* – but he's also been briefed to / deliver

CREON He won't / listen – none of this actually happened

JOCASTA Sorry, what did he say? What were the predictions?

OEDIPUS (*ongoing*) A riddle, something that turns everything round but stands still itself. That I killed your first husband. And that I am destined to murder my father and sleep with my mother.

*JOCASTA bursts out laughing.*

JOCASTA And *why* is that a problem? It's ridiculous – it is a *joke*, is what it is – and why would Creon / do that? Creon was worried because you announced the investigation idea -

OEDIPUS It isn't an idea. It is happening.

CREON Yes, but when you decided to announce it / without knowing it, you inserted yourself into a complex situation -

JOCASTA Creon  
JOCASTA *Creon*

CREON He's already won: the accident / all of it, is coming to him tomorrow anyway, there's no way he doesn't end up *knowing*

OEDIPUS No

JOCASTA But let's not open that up now - *tomorrow*

OEDIPUS The accident?

CREON                   The second he's in post, he has access to every piece of classified / information

JOCASTA                I know that – but it isn't / necessary *tonight*

OEDIPUS                Fuck you.

'

CREON                   What?

OEDIPUS (to C)        You know about the accident?

CREON                   yes

OEDIPUS                You've managed to dig that out. You really have planned your attack on me, haven't you?

(to J)                    You wouldn't have told him. Tell me you didn't -

JOCASTA                What?

CREON                   Oedipus / when you made that announcement

OEDIPUS                I have no idea how something that happened when I was – *eighteen* years old –

JOCASTA                Oedipus, what Creon is saying, or trying to say, is that the reason we're nervous about your investigation into the truth of Laius' death is that we both know the truth of Laius' death.

                              We both have, have had for years, the – / clearances, the permissions, thank you, that allow / us

CREON                   the permissions

OEDIPUS                It wasn't a heart attack

JOCASTA                No.

OEDIPUS                I should have been told

JOCASTA                We have just told you, boyo

OEDIPUS                *Before*

JOCASTA                We did tell you / before

OEDIPUS                Before I head out there and do a whole fucking thing about digging into what I think must be the groundless speculation about it being a cover-up, and what turns out to be the completely fucking true speculation about a cover-up which / actually took place

JOCASTA                You're not elected yet. And it was thirty years ago.

OEDIPUS                    It is going to *seem like I knew*.

Sorry. This isn't your / fault

JOCASTA                    It really isn't my fault. Nor is it his. [Creon]

*OEDIPUS looks behind him to check it's safe to speak.*

OEDIPUS                    How did they kill him?

JOCASTA                    No, they didn't kill him - / he

CREON                      It was an *accident*, that's what I was saying.

OEDIPUS                    What accident?!

JOCASTA                    Right. There is the accident Laius died in, and there is the accident that Oedipus had when he was a child. Different things.

CREON                      Oedipus, when was that?

OEDIPUS                    I was a child – eighteen?

CREON                      You never mentioned this.

OEDIPUS                    Not to you.

JOCASTA                    Let's not / get into that now

OEDIPUS                    Listen, I was in an accident on the roads when I was a child, and yes, I am lucky to be alive, and no, nobody was killed. And it says something about you that you think / it's something that needs -

JOCASTA                    Creon, could this be a problem?

CREON                      I don't know what 'this' is. When did Laius die?

JOCASTA                    thirty...four(?) years ago?

*They look at each other. That's a strange coincidence.*

OEDIPUS                    When I was eighteen.

,

Are you suggesting that the two accidents -

CREON                      Tell me what happened.

OEDIPUS                    Why?

JOCASTA (to O)           Stop being a child. Just tell him. You were out on the road, going too fast -

,

OEDIPUS I used to enjoy – when I was young – I loved driving at speed. I saw them, a speck ahead of me in the distance and I wanted to overtake – and so I clamped my foot down, and I soared after them, only, suddenly the other car was coming *towards* me. I don't know how it had happened, I was going the wrong way, had been going the wrong way for miles

CREON And then?

OEDIPUS It was head-on – and then nothing and I remember going under – thinking, this is dying.

Did they investigate Laius' death? At the time -

CREON Please – go on – you went under, and –

OEDIPUS And then I wake up and I see this man, is dragging me out of the car, I thought a doctor or something – and then he pulls me up so I'm looking into his face - and he says, get out of here. Forget you were ever here. Turn around and run and don't look back. Sun low in the sky behind him, [short hair, glasses<sup>1</sup>], I can't see his face, and I see the man lying on my windscreen, thrown clean through the glass, up out of the passenger seat. I thought he was dead.

Run away, the first man says again. And I did.

CREON And were you hurt?

OEDIPUS Bruised, that's all. None of the blood on me was mine –

CREON And you didn't think to say anything about this during the campaign? Did you tell anyone?

OEDIPUS I got home, I told my parents everything. We called hospitals, police, anywhere we could think of, and asked - any fatal accidents. Any accidents. *Anything*. Nothing. No deaths announced.

CREON And why do you think that is? But you haven't spoken to anyone since? Did your parents tell / anyone?

OEDIPUS Why would they do that?

CREON So you didn't try and cover it up?

OEDIPUS There was nothing to cover up - it was an *accident*

CREON Where did your accident happen?

OEDIPUS Where the road out of the city splits, it's a three-way - there are three roads that come together -

JOCASTA But that's not how Laius died.

---

<sup>1</sup> Should be updated to refer to the actor playing the DRIVER.

OEDIPUS                   It's not?

JOCASTA                   That's not how Laius died. He sat in the back of the car, not the front. Think about it. Just like you, he had his driver. And there were three people in the other car.

'

CREON                      Oh thank fuck for that. Are you sure?

JOCASTA                   He was my husband.

OEDIPUS                   But how do you know there were three men?

JOCASTA                   Laius' driver witnessed it. He was sworn to secrecy, but –

OEDIPUS                   Tell me the three men in the other car are still alive –

'

JOCASTA                   I don't know –

*JOCASTA looks at CREON. He doesn't know either.*

OEDIPUS                   If the man in the car I hit was Laius –

JOCASTA                   It wasn't

OEDIPUS                   If the man in the car I hit was Laius -

CREON                      Should I get the team back here? There might be something here we have to / handle

OEDIPUS                   No, let them be. Just the three of us. For now. If we need them later, then fine. But if [it was Laius] –

CREON                      I'll find him. Laius' driver. I don't think the two accidents *can* be the same

JOCASTA                   There were three people in the car that killed Laius!

CREON                      - but we should make sure. For your peace of mind, if nothing else.

OEDIPUS                   Yes. Thank you. And / not a word

CREON                      Don't worry. I'll go now.

*Exit CREON.*

JOCASTA                   My word not good enough?

OEDIPUS                   This is my whole life. If it turns out the two things are the same

JOCASTA                   That's absurd, Oedipus

OEDIPUS                   That man said I killed Laius.

JOCASTA                   which is impossible.

OEDIPUS                   We don't know that.

JOCASTA                   Laius was in the back seat. Your man was in the front. There were three people in the car that hit Laius. You're impressive, yes, but you're not three people.

OEDIPUS                   The coincidence doesn't worry you at all? Two accidents, similar accidents, the same *time*, and a prediction that I killed Laius.

JOCASTA                   There's only one thing I worry about

OEDIPUS                   What?

JOCASTA                   After you've sorted this out, how will we stop you doing the deed with my beloved mother-in-law?

OEDIPUS                   This isn't funny

JOCASTA                   It is quite funny

OEDIPUS                   This is my *whole fucking life*

JOCASTA                   No, this is your anxiety expressing itself on the night you become the most powerful man in the country, expressing itself in things which are frankly absurd, and being / so

OEDIPUS                   If that was true, I'd lose – everything

JOCASTA                   Including your sense of humour, apparently. Everyone's *tense* tonight. Except me.

                                  Look, every man has the fucking his mother dream at some point. It is par for the course.

OEDIPUS                   It wasn't a [dream] - I really don't understand why this amuses you so much.

JOCASTA                   Oh you have to laugh – don't you? – you have to laugh you have to laugh

*Enter LICHAS*

LICHAS                   I wanted to check if you needed anything?

JOCASTA                   Oh so many things

OEDIPUS                   Ignore her. It's the champagne

JOCASTA                   It depends what you're offering

OEDIPUS                   We're fine. Thank you. Any news?

LICHAS Crowds are there already. Despite the weather.

OEDIPUS Is it raining?

LICHAS Not yet. Any minute.

OEDIPUS Thanks.

*She goes.*

Embarrassment. You are an embarrassment.

JOCASTA Well. You have to release the pressure somehow. Big night.

*They look at each other, challenging. She gets up, unbuttons his shirt, or slips a hand onto his groin – and eventually they kiss, and then kiss hungrily.*

And let's not pretend you haven't thought about her. Tight little bud like that, young and nubile and available to bloom at a moment's notice -

OEDIPUS I have eyes only for you – and let's not pretend you don't know it

JOCASTA Wait –

*She produces a book of matches –*

,

OEDIPUS Are they?

JOCASTA The ones from the first hotel, yes they are. I'm going to light a candle. It's a moment to mark.

OEDIPUS I thought it was just for moments for 'us'?

JOCASTA If this isn't a moment for us, I don't know what is -

OEDIPUS You don't want to wait until I've formally / accepted?

JOCASTA No, I don't want to wait.

OEDIPUS I don't want to jinx it

*JOCASTA lights a candle – a moment while they look at it.*

How many are left?

JOCASTA Enough. Well, how many do we need, now? No more children to come. A thirtieth wedding anniversary. A fortieth. And one for you to light beside my dead body –

OEDIPUS *Don't* – you can't die – you can't die

JOCASTA Well *you* should never have married somebody so many thousands of years older than you

OEDIPUS Don't –

JOCASTA Seriously you should have thought about that

OEDIPUS Don't – don't – don't –

*He holds her, kisses her –*

I love you.

It's all to impress you, you know. All of it.

JOCASTA Well, supreme leader, so long as you remember that, when in [TIME] minutes or whatever, when you have an international portfolio of interests, that you have very specific responsibilities in negotiating my particular area of - shall we call it domestic policy? –

OEDIPUS Oh this particular area will remain at the top of the list – there is no-one before you -

JOCASTA And if the demands of sexy young attendants beating at the doors and and your sexy old mother in the very next room, and the sexy prophecies that let you have your wicked way without / taking any responsibility – that's it, actually, the lack of responsibility

*They start to have oral sex, him on her*

OEDIPUS You're not going to put me off – there's / no stopping me now

JOCASTA When was there ever any use trying to stop *you*, I wouldn't waste my time trying to stop [you] –

*But at that moment words fail her*

ohhh baby boy

*They continue. It should feel loving, not embarrassing.*

*And then the door opens – OEDIPUS gets up very fast – half caught –*

ANTIGONE (chorus) Dad?

OEDIPUS (chorus) hello, baby

*It's ANTIGONE, unaware. JOCASTA remains slightly hidden, setting herself right.*

ANTIGONE They want to come in and take the furniture out. Can they?

OEDIPUS Yeah, yes – in a minute –

ANTIGONE (off) in a minute

I remember Creon when we first came in here, all that time, where to put the walls up and choosing furniture and who sits where. Everything we put in, carried out wrapped in plastic.

OEDIPUS Yes. But a whole new beginning beyond this place.

ANTIGONE What he said to you, before, the predictions -

OEDIPUS Don't worry about it, sweetie.

ANTIGONE I thought you didn't want to involve those people; I thought you didn't believe in any of that.

OEDIPUS I don't -

ANTIGONE So why was he here?

OEDIPUS Because your uncle trusts people too much - but, look, clearly, he's not well -

ANTIGONE It made me feel sick. You sent him out and he cried - Dad, he / cried

OEDIPUS He's a joke.

ANTIGONE Dad, what if he's seen something true?

*JOCASTA appears, re-dressed.*

JOCASTA Why are we so obsessed with staring backwards into the abyss?

*ANTIGONE ignores JOCASTA, speaks to OEDIPUS.*

ANTIGONE They looked him up. He's called Teiresias. He's been right before.

OEDIPUS And he's been wrong. Like all of us.

ANTIGONE But Dad -

JOCASTA Oh stop it. You're not a child any more.

ANTIGONE I hate the way you say that.

JOCASTA Hate it as much as you like, you're not [a child].

ANTIGONE You mean, you're not a mother any more. Or you don't want to be. That's actually what you mean.

JOCASTA when you're old enough to vote, my work is *done*.

*Enter LICHAS*

LICHAS I'm sorry to interrupt but your mother was asking / whether it might be possible

*Enter MEROPE, shortly behind*

MEROPE            Your mother was asking when you were planning on delivering on your promise of some actual time / with you

OEDIPUS           Later. Not right now. Not right now – I'm sorry, I'm just busy with something.

JOCASTA           We'll need to go. Won't we?

*OEDIPUS works out what this code means.*

OEDIPUS           Yes. We're actually late for head, head of state, an important call of – conference call, through there, could get a little heated – ten minutes

JOCASTA           twenty / minutes

OEDIPUS           twenty minutes

*He takes JOCASTA's hand*

but when we're back, my time is yours –

*They leave. When out of the line of fire, perhaps we see them laughing. They're really great together.*

MEROPE           Children find themselves so mysterious. But a mother knows.

ANTIGONE           He seems on edge.

MEROPE           It's the waiting. He's neither one thing nor the other now, until the country gives its verdict, and no matter how hard he pushes, it will come at its own pace.

ANTIGONE           Yeah.

*CORIN re-enters with the removal men.*

CORIN            Now?

ANTIGONE           sorry, yeah

I keep thinking, when he steps into that new position, I keep thinking about what all of *us* become. From tomorrow morning, that's the headline on my obituary: 'Daughter of Oedipus'. I mean, when he chose to run, he chose that for all of us.

MEROPE           He breathes a lot of oxygen. Always has. But you have his determination. You haven't touched your book all night.

ANTIGONE           It's been pretty busy -

MEROPE           The reason you brought it isn't to read it. It's to remind him that there's things he doesn't know. Which tells me, you'll be fine.

ANTIGONE I'm really glad you're here. I feel... nervous. I think. You should come more often. He really isn't ashamed of you, you / know

MEROPE I know he isn't.

,

ANTIGONE How's grandad?

MEROPE When we were eating, they were trying to call but there's not an answer now.

ANTIGONE I'm sure it's nothing –

MEROPE Only one thing it can be, in the end.

,

ANTIGONE Are you afraid?

MEROPE He's stubborn. If there's a way, provided he wants to, that man will survive anything.

ANTIGONE His father's son. No, his... son's father. I don't know.

,

MEROPE The wind's up.

I'm sorry if I snapped at you at the table. What you said about your parents' marriage.

ANTIGONE It's alright (?)

MEROPE Your grandfather had a woman.

*This is unexpected.*

ANTIGONE Before you?

MEROPE At the same time.

I know. Why didn't I leave? But what you don't understand yet is what love can do to you. How deep its roots go down. How completely it smashes the walls.

ANTIGONE But didn't it make you sad?

MEROPE It made me - disillusioned. Two people can live inside an illusion. Add a third - and the curtain comes down. And the idea of starting again, what could be worse? Painting over your memories with new ones.

And I still loved him.

You'll find out.

ANTIGONE I don't know. I can't imagine what comes next.

MEROPE None of us ever know. It only ever catches up with you afterwards. By my age, from the other side, you know a little more – who you are, what it was for, where you went wrong – and your very best people step out of the picture, never to come back. I think, once you know, that means it's ending. Knowledge in advance is the gift of the gods.

ANTIGONE I don't believe in gods, I don't think

*CORIN comes in with a team: they take some of the furniture.*

MEROPE Makes no difference whether you believe in them or not. Just because you don't see it, doesn't mean it isn't happening. Your generation think the world began when you did.

ANTIGONE Yours think it should end when you do.

*MEROPE smiles at her granddaughter. CREON comes in, flustered.*

CREON Sorry – is Oedipus in here?

MEROPE Are you worried he might be invisible?

CREON There's someone here to see him.

MEROPE Join the queue.

CREON It's important.

MEROPE He isn't here. (!)

CREON (to CORIN) I need him – actually both of them –

MEROPE I should call again [about my husband].

CREON Where ARE they?

CORIN I don't know – I don't know where they are

CREON Can you *find* them?

CORIN I can try my best.

*Exit CORIN. CREON sits down.*

MEROPE He's in love with your mother, that man.

ANTIGONE Corin? Do you think?

MEROPE You look, you see. It's in his eyes.

*Exit MEROPE. It's now just CREON and ANTIGONE.*

ANTIGONE           Bad night?

CREON               Not great, to be honest.

                          I mean, the result is great, obviously

*She smiles.*

                          You know how it is.

ANTIGONE           Yup.

                          Do you think things really are going to change?

CREON               Big question. Do you?

ANTIGONE           I'd love to hope that they will. I think if I look at it all, and knowing what Dad's like with everything, then yes. But I don't *feel* it.

                          I don't know. Maybe you don't [feel it].

                          What I do know is that I don't feel like doing that [her book].

                          Maybe the thing that stops you setting out on a particular road is that you might get nearly to the end and then find some tiny, seemingly-irrelevant thing that in reality punctures everything you've done and empties it of all its meaning. Like if I knew why I was doing that, if I knew where it would lead me, I might never start doing it.

*CREON picks the book up.*

CREON               'What has four legs in the morning, two in the afternoon and three by night-fall?'

                          It's us, isn't it - crawling, walking, walking stick?

ANTIGONE           But what does it mean? 'A single day's events can make you old?' Or – 'people change'? Or 'you don't learn to walk, you only hold the skill for a brief time and then it slips away'? Or 'humans are animals'? And surely some old people end up on their hands and knees again –

                          It's pretending to be this tidy, neat example and actually it's just a window onto how everything is open chaos. Uncontainable. It's like opening the door on a room you're supposed to tidy and finding that the walls are on fire.

CREON               I'd say it's 'everyone bows to the laws in the end'.

ANTIGONE           But that's what you believe already, no? You've just seen yourself in it.

CREON               Maybe. But maybe there's a certain way things should be. Have to be.

ANTIGONE           In which case, do whatever you like. Have a *party*. Take your clothes off. You can't avoid where it's going, it was always going there,

everyone ends up dead, so may as well have the wildest available journey.

CREON                    Maybe that's the solution the riddle yields to. Everyone ends up dead.

ANTIGONE                Maybe it doesn't ever yield to a single solution.

Why choose one?

CREON                    Nature of life, I guess. And elections. Keeps things simple.

I like what you're wearing.

*The tension between CREON and ANTIGONE is charged.*

*OEDIPUS and JOCASTA come through -*

ANTIGONE                What is it? Is it the result?

CREON                    Exit polls.

ANTIGONE                And?

JOCASTA                Landslide.

CREON                    Where did you go?

JOCASTA                He wasn't feeling well. He's feeling better.

CREON                    I found our man. I'll bring him through.

*CREON gets the driver. As he comes in, he's really astonished to be in a room with OEDIPUS and JOCASTA.*

JOCASTA                Antigone, can we have the room, please?

*OEDIPUS focusses his attention.*

CREON                    Sit there.

We need to ask you some questions, in confidence. I'm afraid we can't tell you why, we're not going to tell you why, but we need you to be absolutely honest. Everything you remember.

JOCASTA                The night my first husband died, you were driving the car. Yes?

DRIVER                    Yes. Please, I swore / I would -

JOCASTA                It's all right. I know what you swore, you're safe. *I'm* asking you. We need you to tell us what happened, what *really* happened, not the story we put out, who sat where, whatever you can remember -

DRIVER                    It was an off-the-record trip. It was summer, early evening. We were going to a hotel, big place out beyond the limits of the city, he was late

and he was beside me, kept rapping his hand on the dashboard, impatient.

JOCASTA                   beside you?

DRIVER                    Your husband was in the front seat next to me.

                                  ,

CREON                     Why would he be in the front seat?

DRIVER                    He wanted to smoke and the windows don't come down in the back – same as now, they're bulletproof, fixed solid. For safety, in case someone were to / try

JOCASTA                   Yes

DRIVER                    I told him it was against the protocol for him to sit in the front with me. But he was angry I'd even said anything, climbing into the front seat, turning the music off. Sitting there, right next to me, no seatbelt, smoking cigarette after cigarette, swearing, spitting bits of tobacco out of the window, it was late summer, he was in a tremendous hurry - and we were coming along the outskirts of the city, where the three roads meet -

OEDIPUS                 It's the same thing

JOCASTA (fast)         Go on. Go on.

DRIVER                    The other car came out of nowhere, just where the three roads meet, flashed at us fast, horn screaming and I stamped on the brake, but too late – they were going like lightning, hit us so hard the back wheels came up off the ground.

                                  They're such quiet roads, normally,

                                  I wasn't watching, I didn't / see

OEDIPUS                 *It's the same thing.*

JOCASTA                   Three people. Three people.

CREON                     Would you recognise any of the people in the other car?

DRIVER                    What?

CREON                     The car that crashed into yours. There were three people / in it

DRIVER                    No

                                  ,

*He senses this atmosphere, unsure why it's been created.*

Just one. The crash hurled Laius through the windscreen, headfirst at the other car. He's half-slumped on the bonnet, broken neck, dead on impact. Kid saw that, was in shock, he just – he wasn't hurt, he ran for it. And the rest you know.

CREON                    You're sure there weren't three / people

DRIVER                    There were three of us *at the scene*. Well. Two of us, and – [a body]. Well, it was just me, really, the kid fled

OEDIPUS                    So didn't you arrest him? Were there no doctors?

DRIVER                    The protocol was not to call the police. Laius' trip was – unofficial: it was off-schedule, you know –

JOCASTA                    Yes. Thank you. But what did you do?

DRIVER                    I made an evaluation myself that Laius was already dead. I made a phone call and I was told not to do anything, to wait.

                                  It's not my place to reveal secrets.

OEDIPUS                    Clearly.

DRIVER                    I'm paid to drive the car. I trusted they had good reasons for what they said. It's not my place.

OEDIPUS                    It is all of our place to seek the truth in the face of lies

DRIVER                    In this instance, sir, it wasn't my confidence to break. Any more than if you gave me instructions now. We all serve one agenda. Then, that belonged to Laius. Now it belongs to you.

OEDIPUS                    Not yet it doesn't.

                                  How long do I have?

CREON                    [time] minutes –

OEDIPUS                    I think you can go now

DRIVER                    Have I done something wrong?

JOCASTA                    Have you told anyone this story?

DRIVER                    No

JOCASTA                    Your wife?

DRIVER                    I'm not married

CREON                    Would you recognise him? The driver of the other car?

DRIVER                   He was a boy. It was nearly thirty-five years ago. He'd be a grown man now.

JOCASTA                 Thank you for your time. You've been helpful. Don't worry about this, all right?

CREON                    I'll show you out

OEDIPUS                 No – Lichas

*The DRIVER leaves, shown out by LICHAS.*

,  
I need a cigarette

JOCASTA                 Not in / here

OEDIPUS                 Get that man back here. Teiresias. He was right. It's the same - I need to –

JOCASTA                 [you need to] *what?*

OEDIPUS                 *I don't know.* Find him. Get him back. I mean it, we need to get to the bottom of what is happening here.

JOCASTA                 Well, we know where your mother is if you want to get on with step two.

OEDIPUS                 Don't. Don't.

JOCASTA                 And I don't know about killing your dad, but that's at least six hours' drive from here, and you don't have that sort of time.

OEDIPUS                 I killed Laius. That prophecy was *true*.

JOCASTA                 In an *accident*.

CREON                    *Thirty-five years ago.*

OEDIPUS                 I killed your husband. The coincidence doesn't / unsettle you?

JOCASTA                 No. No. And no.  
  
You cannot seriously expect me to believe - *you* cannot seriously believe, someone as intelligent and capable and informed as you, that these prophecies have somehow got this right

CREON                    Three years of work, a hell of a campaign, we're finally getting somewhere where something can be *done*, and your honesty fetish is going to pull everything apart because some crazed [man] – you cannot be so fucking *naïve* -

OEDIPUS                 I asked you to go and get Teiresias. Can you please go and get Teiresias?

CREON exits.

JOCASTA                   What's wrong with you?

OEDIPUS                   I destroyed a human life. I took a human life. That's not a small [thing],  
I took a human life, I killed Laius.

JOCASTA                   Again, that was an / *accident* and not a murder

OEDIPUS                   YOU HEARD THE STORY, I WAS DRIVING THE WRONG WAY

JOCASTA                   And it is thirty years *gone*. There really is no need to raise your voice

OEDIPUS                   So if it isn't prophetic - then HOW DID TEIRESIAS KNOW? – that is  
what is worrying me / if you need to -

JOCASTA                   I'm saying: he must have known that anyway. It's not impossible, is it?  
There was a cover-up about Laius, *yes?* that means *people, paperwork,*  
your *name* is somewhere, somewhere *confidential*, tomorrow morning  
you'll have clearance to see all the information – we'll follow the trail /  
Teiresias took

OEDIPUS                   I'll have to admit it. The cover-up, Laius' death –

JOCASTA                   Why?

OEDIPUS                   What do you mean *why* – because *that is what happened*.

JOCASTA                   So what?

OEDIPUS                   So I *took* a *life*. People have a right to know the truth

JOCASTA                   No. Wrong. That is not a truth that anyone needs to know. Laius is gone.  
*You* are what we need: you are on the cusp of changing the whole story.  
Tonight is the beginning of the million glorious things that *you* are *going*  
*to do* – and however you choose to deal with the past, you don't need  
to do it *tonight* -

OEDIPUS                   Lies have consequences.

JOCASTA                   This isn't a campaign stop, boyo, and you know as well as I do that we  
*live* under blankets feathered with lies, the lot of us, everyone,  
everyone, ev-ery-one *lies: politics, government, schools, the facts of the*  
*world we live in*. Bank-notes and bank-loans and half the country's  
wedding vows - it all turns on lies.

,

OEDIPUS                   I killed a human being.

JOCASTA                   But nobody knows except us.

OEDIPUS                   And then there's *that*: why would they cover it up?

JOCASTA                   It was thirty four years ago. An old man died / leave it alone

OEDIPUS But why did they cover it up?

JOCASTA He was old. He was seventy. And old men die.

OEDIPUS But *why would they cover it up?* Why not just say there'd been an / accident?

JOCASTA Is it *important?*

OEDIPUS Yes – I – I don't understand what difference it would make?

JOCASTA With a heart attack there was no possibility of blame. No next development. Heart attack? Act of god. The desire was, from everyone, myself included, to seal it tight and drop it to the bottom of the ocean.

Now can we please – *please* – / move on?

OEDIPUS What do you mean 'it'?

JOCASTA He wasn't a good man.

OEDIPUS I know.

JOCASTA You don't. You *don't*.

But let's leave this.

*It has started to rain.*

OEDIPUS You can't say that, and then expect –  
,  
It isn't easy, you do know it isn't [easy]

JOCASTA My first marriage is not your problem

*OEDIPUS adopts a newscaster voice*

OEDIPUS 'It is a remarkable situation, after years of coalition and compromise, that the likely victor of tonight's election was married to the wife of the previous holder of the office: one wonders about political continuity, but that really is a step beyond.'

JOCASTA I will tell you, Oedipus, but please, not tonight.

OEDIPUS Jocasta – even if you say it quickly, so I can understand, / that's

JOCASTA The baby we had. Laius and me, I mean.

OEDIPUS The one that died.

JOCASTA Yes.

Oedipus, I don't want to talk about this now –

I don't want to *talk about it*.

OEDIPUS So why not tell the *truth* and there'd be nothing to talk about?

JOCASTA Oedipus, not telling you isn't lying -

OEDIPUS Not for nothing, but I didn't want to have to deal with all of this either

*JOCASTA suddenly throws some of the plates off the table*

*and they smash. Or something. But whatever happens here, it's a huge reaction and OEDIPUS realises as we do that this is more serious for her than it's seemed so far. They're both shocked by it.*

JOCASTA I'm not a liar.

I don't lie.

I'm not trying to cover [anything up], but it isn't something I ever wanted to, I mean, I knew one day I would talk to you, but then, why –

*She tries to get herself together.*

This way you have of getting things out of me. All right.

I'm not sure this will ever have occurred to you, but for me to – for me to have gotten pregnant by him, given –

*Something in her is resisting this. OEDIPUS has already moved to comfort her.*

You know what the marriage was like at the end, separate beds, and so on, and you know he was seventy years old when he – when you – when that accident happened. (I don't know what's wrong with me, I can hardly speak).

that baby was born – what? - twenty years before his death, which means, when that baby was conceived, he was in his fifties, and I was

OEDIPUS Fourteen

*He's solved it automatically, but it's only as JOCASTA speaks that he realises:*

JOCASTA - thirteen

,

And if you think medical science hasn't come a distance, try giving birth twice on either side of twenty-nine years.

OEDIPUS thirteen

JOCASTA Unlucky for some

OEDIPUS But you didn't marry him until -

JOCASTA The marriage was later.

OEDIPUS I thought the baby came *after* the marriage –

JOCASTA I never said that.

OEDIPUS Thirteen. And no-one knew?

JOCASTA People are good at not knowing. The instinct to look any other direction than the dark. Then, because of him, there were reasons not to know.

OEDIPUS Thirteen

JOCASTA And why would a thirteen year old have sex with an old man? Father issues. But actually? it's not knowing that there's such a thing as *another choice*, the feeling that you have only one possible track –

OEDIPUS Was it born dead?

JOCASTA No.

That would have been a kind of mercy.

I didn't want to sleep with him. I didn't choose [to] - I don't know if I was the only young girl to receive that – treatment at his hands, but I think now it's highly unlikely. I was too young to know what was being said, and too young to know how to say no, and – well, even when we were married, we slept in separate beds as soon as I was – no longer a child. His face during [sex], furious, mouth-open, smiling –

OEDIPUS Wait. Laius – Laius

JOCASTA Laius liked them young. I can't have been the only one, I mean, I *wasn't*, the only one -

Of course once I'd realized I was expecting, (I had no idea what was happening to my body), he said he was in love with me and, who knows, perhaps he thought he was - and the marriage, later, of course, once I was old enough to be married, but now I wonder whether my father – who was high-up enough to cause problems for them, too high-up to simply disappear – whether he didn't have something to do with Laius' sudden desire to get married - but my father wasn't exactly a drink of water either, you never met him, but take my word for it, my life seems to be populated by men impulsively determined to get their own way.

OEDIPUS So your father had blackmailed him?

JOCASTA He said he loved me. I don't know. Laius was terrified of being exposed. But, it doesn't matter now.

It really doesn't matter.

I was three things: a child myself, the mother of a child, and the lover of a powerful man. I thought I loved him.

I remember I felt like my body had betrayed me. Swelling up. Skin going translucent, sort of *purple*. *Stay the same*, I thought. But three months, six months – [*she gestures 'bigger and bigger'*]

So. The night they told me Laius was dead and they suggest we say a heart attack [being the cause], I didn't ask the questions about the, *scale* of what they were trying to hide, about the journey he was taking when he died, because I didn't want to know the answer. An off-the-schedule trip to a hotel: I didn't want to know who else was going through what I went through. How many of me there was. What other children were - I didn't want to wade back through it, the misery and the secrecy, which makes me a coward, but sometimes cowardice is exactly the price of survival -

OEDIPUS

I love you

JOCASTA

I know that.

His heart. His *heart*. It's quite the irony that *that* was the story.

So. The rest of it.

The baby was born. But when the thirteen-year old who would eventually become his wife became pregnant, way underage, our great leader was very – determined that nobody was going to find out, so I was not allowed to set foot in a hospital, my parents weren't allowed to – there weren't the resources then anyway, and with half a team and meagre equipment and this atmosphere where you could taste the secrecy and shame like bleach in the air – it was an ugly, brutal birth, fluorescent light and forceps and – my body was thin and hard from the anxiety, it was – they damaged my baby, his legs, as they got him out, but it didn't matter because they already knew – they already knew it was going to be - taken away –

My baby was the evidence of who Laius really was.

For Laius to do that, to protect his own [reputation] – them prising my hands off this tiny person, vulnerable and bleeding and screaming, they lifted him up and his little toes trailing mucus, all bloodshot, and *they took him away* – to do that to a mother is a *crime*. Yes, he was an unhappy man, people do things for a reason, unconsciously, trying to try and justify the things he did but – but - but but that rancid man was a dirty animal and a criminal and when he became a dark-blue plastic bag heavy with fat and old meat, I did not cry a single tear for him.

Not like I cried for that boy. I looked at that screaming face in those tiny few minutes I knew him, and he was already so much more to me than my husband, my husband who took me to a dark bed when I was young enough to be his child myself.

OEDIPUS

How could you not have told me this?

*This comes from deep inside JOCASTA:*

JOCASTA            Oh but WHY? what is the utility of living in the past? Why turn the thing on purpose to look back - at days stretched so full with fear and misery that even the memory is overwhelming? That was a thousand years ago: *this* is my life. I got to here, I made it *here*. I have a husband, a kind husband, who loves me and whom I love, I have three happy, healthy, well-adjusted children, I have written *books* and done some good – and now there is the possibility that I can help to change the world, in however small a – I'm saying, I got here in the end, so why focus on the beginning? Who does that help? I don't want to turn it over and over, I don't want to die before it does.

OEDIPUS            And you didn't ask what happened to the child – you / didn't want to know?

JOCASTA            I didn't want to know. Because sometimes we don't, Oedipus, sometimes we don't want to know – we don't ask how sick we are because we know that the answer is *bad*, in exactly the same way you don't ask when the point's going to come that we'll have to flick the switch on your father's machine because, you know what, there is no other possible outcome.

It was horrible. However that child died, it was a lonely death.

*CREON enters.*

CREON              It's Teiresias –

OEDIPUS            I'll be one minute

CREON              He isn't here: won't come back.

OEDIPUS            He won't / come back?

CREON              The message said - 'no return visits'.

,

*LICHAS enters.*

LICHAS              Polyneices is outside.

OEDIPUS            Give us a *minute*.

*CREON exits.*

Didn't you talk to a doctor - to / anyone?

JOCASTA            I never understood how talking about something makes it hurt any less.

OEDIPUS            You could have said something to me.

JOCASTA I think I thought, if I opened my mouth, that whole life would fall out of it and never go back in again. And those things do not get to be in my life now. I'm fine, on the whole. That man's shadow is no longer pressed against the doorframe when I sleep.

,

So yes, you killed Laius, if that's how you want to put it. That's one side. Turn it over, and you did the world a favour. Mark it up as your greatest achievement. So far.

OEDIPUS I didn't know

JOCASTA And still, you did it.

*CORIN re-enters.*

CORIN Sorry – can we take some things?

OEDIPUS One minute -

JOCASTA No, come in. Come on in. I'm going to have a minute. Take a walk.

*She leaves.*

*More furniture is taken away. POLYNEICES comes in.*

*It's raining.*

POLYNEICES It's nothing major. Wanted to say thanks.

OEDIPUS For what?

POLYNEICES Before. What you said – at dinner. About me.

*OEDIPUS looks up at him.*

OEDIPUS Nothing to thank me for there.

POLYNEICES How are you feeling?

OEDIPUS Ah, you know. Fine.

POLYNEICES Strange, waiting for the verdict. The result, I mean.

OEDIPUS It is.

,

POLYNEICES Is mum - ?

*OEDIPUS' thoughts are elsewhere.*

,

OEDIPUS                    Sorry. Is mum - ?

POLYNEICES                Do you think mum feels the same as you about – me having a boyfriend?

OEDIPUS                    I'm sure she does. Ask her –

POLYNEICES                No, I – I don't know. It felt like perhaps she didn't approve. She was surprised, I think

OEDIPUS                    I think she might have known for longer than you have. Was that at school?

POLYNEICES                I don't think I dared know. Children are cruel.

OEDIPUS                    Everyone's cruel. Children are the only ones who are honest about it. But the world will be different now, the culture will change.

                                     Mothers are complicated. Mine's in a strange old mood tonight as well.

POLYNEICES                Because of grandad? Do you think – do you think she's ready for him to – for it to end?

OEDIPUS                    People don't have endings. Stories end. People are still screaming 'but I'm not ready, it wasn't finished, I can do better, I –'

*He snaps his fingers (or something) – as if the voice is abruptly silenced. As if it's the end. As if the lights snap out.*

POLYNEICES                Yeah.

OEDIPUS                    You start in the dark. You breathe your way out. You're cut loose from your mother's body and then you wait - until your own body lets you go. And buried at your centre, like the stone in a cherry, a clock winding onward to the end, back to the dark of the very beginning

                                     And what do we do in between?

POLYNEICES                I – I don't know.

                                     ,

OEDIPUS                    We try to make things better.

                                     ,

                                     What you've told us tonight – does he make you happy?

POLYNEICES                Yes

OEDIPUS                    And have you told the truth about yourself?

POLYNEICES                Yes.

OEDIPUS                    That's all you can ever do. You tell the truth.

*POLYNEICES doesn't know it, but OEDIPUS has made a decision – or rather, reminded himself of a decision he made for himself a long time ago.*

POLYNEICES        Do you want a drink or something? I might go out, slip through the crowds and find a drink.

OEDIPUS            I'm all right. You go.

POLYNEICES        The waiting is ... making me nervous, I think.

OEDIPUS            Yes.

Yes it does.

POLYNEICES        You're nervous, aren't you? It's not like you.

You can't lose, you know.

*POLYNEICES goes out. CREON comes in.*

CREON                What do you want to do about the Laius situation?

OEDIPUS            Well, my investigation took less time than I thought.

CREON                Yes.

OEDIPUS            And now that I understand the reasons for the cover-up –

CREON                Yes.

OEDIPUS            We'll tell the truth. About who he was. And about what I did.

I don't know how or when, but we will.

CREON                We can talk about this tomorrow. Take some advice, talk to Jocasta and / work out –

OEDIPUS            I'm going to tell the truth

*JOCASTA comes back in, no knocking -*

JOCASTA            This place is full of people. I only went round in a circle because I managed to forget *this*, and it's a sea of rain out there now -

*She's left her bag but as she gets it, she's left the door open and MEROPE enters the room. OEDIPUS clocks her, misreads her expression as anger.*

OEDIPUS            Mother, I am sorry / I know, I said ten minutes, I said twenty / minutes but there are three million things I'm trying to resolve before / I -

MEROPE             Oedipus

Oedipus

Oedipus, he's dead. Your dad.

OEDIPUS What?

,

When?

MEROPE Just now. Just a few minutes ago.

OEDIPUS Was it because of me? I mean, he didn't – it wasn't the shock of / the

MEROPE (*smiles*) No, sweetheart, just the cancer. Just the horrid cancer. And he was an old man – and it's one small tip of the scales at his age, and

,

OEDIPUS I –

I'm so sorry, mum

MEROPE I'm all right.

I only wish I could have said goodbye – it was so sudden, he was himself, two weeks ago he was mid-conversation and then he wasn't conscious - no wink, no squeeze of the hand, no –

*She can't continue.*

JOCASTA We'll give the two of you a moment -

OEDIPUS No, darling, you're / family too –

MEROPE [*to J*] Yes, do.

OEDIPUS Mum, you have / to understand

MEROPE I still need to talk to you, Oedipus, I didn't come all the way here for the celebrations, I need a few minutes of your time. I wanted to tell you before he -

It's important.

*MEROPE looks like she wants JOCASTA to leave*

JOCASTA It's all right, I honestly don't mind / at all

OEDIPUS I do mind. And however important it is, does it really absolutely need to be *tonight* –

I'm sorry.

,

God, my dad.

[to CREON] Well, I can't kill him now.

*He's struck that this is an inappropriate thing to say –*

If I am totally honest, if I am one hundred percent honest, I don't know if this feeling is relief or if they're –

JOCASTA Sweetheart, your dad just died.

OEDIPUS It puts things in perspective.

Are you sure that this can't wait?

MEROPE Quite sure

*JOCASTA again makes to leave.*

JOCASTA Well, your iron will certainly come from someone.

OEDIPUS No, you're my wife - and my mother, well, is going to need to learn to respect that fact. You two were inseparable at the beginning. I don't know what's happened - sit down.

Mother, can I get you a drink?

JOCASTA I'll have one.

*MEROPE tenses up and then –*

MEROPE All right.

*OEDIPUS goes to find drinks, with CREON's aid – CREON then leaves. The room is now more or less empty.*

Where has everything gone?

JOCASTA Time's up on this place. Campaign's over.

MEROPE And everything has to go tonight?

JOCASTA Not our decision.

MEROPE Are you looking forward to resuming your official role?

JOCASTA No. Yes – it'll be a different thing, this time, as a mother. My memories are all ashtrays, smoke in my eyes, hanging thick over the lamps.

*LICHAS enters, hands him a piece of paper, he glances at it, hands it back. The figures are getting more and more encouraging.*

OEDIPUS We're going to make some history tonight, I think. Thanks.

*LICHAS goes.*

The floor is yours.

MEROPE Oedipus, I'm sorry to do this to you tonight – I don't know if we should have told you this years ago, or when you first spoke about your political ambitions, but then you made that announcement tonight, and I wanted to be with you tonight for the result, anyway – and, well, it's something your father felt very strongly about, but / he

OEDIPUS Is this to do with the – the crossroads?

When I was eighteen?

MEROPE No, it's – why would it [be]? No. Oedipus, listen, we – that is, I -

I need you to put the whole birth certificate issue to one side.

You need to leave it.

*This is not in any way what OEDIPUS was expecting.*

OEDIPUS Why?

MEROPE Because what happens next will be ugly, and you don't know enough to protect yourself.

,

OEDIPUS Mum, with respect, I don't need political advice / and I understand [you're worried]

MEROPE It isn't political. It's because it isn't real.

,

OEDIPUS What do you mean it isn't real – my birth certificate isn't [real]?

MEROPE No.

OEDIPUS So, you've read something, or you've heard / something and

*The pressure means that MEROPE is sharp when she's interrupted -*

MEROPE No. Oedipus. Please [listen].

We couldn't have children, your father and I. There weren't the options available in those days. We couldn't have them. And I thought about it and I asked your grandmother and I asked my friends, and being adopted myself, I did not want you to feel what I had felt, I wanted my child to have the thing I hadn't had. Which was silly.

OEDIPUS Which is natural

JOCASTA Are you saying / he's adopted

MEROPE *Let me finish, girl, just LET ME FINISH MY SENTENCE. This is about him, not about you. A / wife is not, a wife is not... / You married him: you aren't his flesh and blood.*

OEDIPUS Mum  
OEDIPUS *Mum*

*JOCASTA stands up and leaves the room.*

MEROPE Oedipus. Sit down. You're an only child because -

Oh god help me. We couldn't have them. We tried. I was so desperate for a family, for a baby, and it didn't *work*.

The reason you're an only child is we couldn't. We couldn't have them. And I loved your father, and so what do you do? Say goodbye? Start again as a new person, when you've already used up so much time. I was nearly thirty. I couldn't. But it was lonely. To accept: just us two, from now on, all the way to the finish line.

Until one afternoon your father's through the front door hours early, work clothes still on, speechless – and he takes me by the hand and we walk out of the house and he won't let me lock the door – and we're nearly running, it's a cold day, the light's going, and we're under the trees, you remember, and then suddenly he says, 'there' –

and lying naked on a strange bag, in a clearing a good way into the woods, we've come a good way, lying there, looking up at us, is a tiny, baby. Not yet a month old. A bandage holding his feet tight together, he's – a little grubby but he's not crying. Clear [green] eyes, lazy little smile. Soft head on the hard ground. Can't be more than a week old.

A gift from God. You were our gift from God.

,

OEDIPUS And so you kept me? You didn't hand me in.

MEROPE No. We were terrified for years that someone would claim you. Every knock on the door. No-one did. We thought you must have been a traveller's child, an abandoned / child -

OEDIPUS And – am I?

MEROPE I - don't know.

*OEDIPUS leaves the room.*

*MEROPE alone.*

*JOCASTA comes back in.*

JOCASTA Where is he?

*OEDIPUS comes back with a lit cigarette.*

OEDIPUS            He's here.

,

*OEDIPUS smokes. There's a long silence.*

*Perhaps JOCASTA gets up and opens a window.*

OEDIPUS            How can you falsify a person's birth certificate?

MEROPE            It's a piece of paper, Oedipus - it is a piece of paper.

,

OEDIPUS            Yes.

,

You have been my mother for my entire life. What you are telling me is that you started in the role a week later than I'd thought. That's the only thing that's changed. And for that, I forgive you.

Now what can we get you?

MEROPE            Some sleep.

OEDIPUS            All right.

*Enter LICHAS*

Come -

*OEDIPUS hugs MEROPE, who is suddenly tearful. And then he takes JOCASTA's hand, holds it. He puts JOCASTA's hand in MEROPE's.*

I'm going to need the two of you even more after tonight. And I do need the two of you. We'll talk more tomorrow.

MEROPE            Wake me up for the result.

OEDIPUS            It's all right.

MEROPE            Wake me up for the result.

*MEROPE leaves, with LICHAS. Just OEDIPUS and JOCASTA.*

OEDIPUS            Where are the kids?

JOCASTA            I don't know –

Is this about to become public knowledge?

OEDIPUS [Yes. No.] I don't know.

*OEDIPUS looks behind him. Nearly all of the furniture, posters, etc. have gone.*

God, they've emptied this place while we've been in here. It looks like it looked at the very beginning.

It doesn't make a difference. It doesn't make the slightest bit of difference. That woman has loved me, fed me, taught me to *read* – and they had nothing, those two, that fucking – it took him six months before he'd let me pay for his treatment – the two of them had nothing and no desire to have anything other than family, and they –

JOCASTA I know

OEDIPUS She loved me more than the woman who bore me.

JOCASTA How long have we got [til the result]?

CORIN I'm sorry to interrupt, but we really do need to think about -

JOCASTA Yes, Corin, thank you

OEDIPUS There'll be a way forward. A way to tell the truth.

JOCASTA You were adopted?

OEDIPUS Found. Abandoned.

JOCASTA But – who are your parents?

OEDIPUS I don't know. She doesn't know. I don't know who I am.

I'm not going to give that speech until I know who the man giving it is. I want to be able to stand before them and tell the truth.

And I will.

JOCASTA You don't need to go any further with this tonight. I am begging you. I am begging you to leave this and stop. It has been an unusual night, we've spoken about / difficult things

OEDIPUS They could still be alive. My parents. My parents could still be alive. You of all people must - why would a woman deliberately abandon a child?

JOCASTA *Please just leave this, just for tonight – try and be present, live in what you've achieved, nothing has changed there – there's – what? A handful of seconds left now, before you're told / you've won*

OEDIPUS I have to find out who I am.

JOCASTA Not right now you don't

OEDIPUS I have to know -

JOCASTA            You know – you *know* who you are. I know who you are. It doesn't make a difference, you said yourself – it's two names on a piece of paper – these people handed you over as soon as you were *born*. You know the people who love you – and who you love

OEDIPUS            What's wrong with you? Worried you married into worthless stock?

JOCASTA            No – Oedipus, I'm asking you to / stop

OEDIPUS            Well, look, it won't be *you* – even if I was born to beggars, born to *nothing*, born to *no one*, it still won't be on *you*.

JOCASTA            Please. Stop.

OEDIPUS            - but I am going to *know*. I won't stop until I know. I have to be more than a nameless baby lying naked in the middle of a wood –

JOCASTA            A wood?

OEDIPUS            The forest, the wild-forest. Near my parents' cottage

JOCASTA            *That's* where they found you?

OEDIPUS            Yes – why does this / *matter*

JOCASTA            Shut up – stop – stop stop stop – just wait one second – ONE SECOND

,  
*She looks at him. She might almost be sick.*

You haven't seen it yet, have you? It *all* adds up.

Oh god help me, it all adds up.

OEDIPUS            what all adds up? What?

*To say this is to cross a boundary, and she knows that.*

JOCASTA            after after the birth, they took the baby, my baby I mean, and Corin was the last one to leave, he was a young man then, but Laius trusted him, I knew he'd be the one to have to [be responsible] and I knew how he looked at me, and I *begged* him, I said – *anything* rather than – just give the child a *chance* – but I beg you, don't let them murder it – let *nature* choose, I knew he wouldn't let my baby die -

leave it in the woods, I said

,  
*JOCASTA looks at OEDIPUS as if for the first time. He looks up, back at her.*

*There is a long pause. The countdown clock hits 00:00:00.*

POLYNEICES (off) MUM? DAD? DAD – DAD – DAD

*POLYNEICES finds his parents.*

HE'S HERE!

*ANTIGONE, ETEOCLES and POLYNEICES come hurtling into the room, highly excited. CREON isn't far behind. ANTIGONE is taking charge of this.*

ANTIGONE OK, wait – I want before and after -

*ANTIGONE takes a photograph of OEDIPUS and JOCASTA.*

all on three

one – two – three

A/P/E YOU'VE WON YOU'VE WON YOU'VE WON YOU'VE WON

*The kids jump onto OEDIPUS and he roars –*

*he screams from the very depths of himself –*

*he throws them to the floor*

*everyone is totally stunned.*

,

JOCASTA Go. Just go.

*CREON and the kids leave. As everyone goes out – and races along corridors – there's a lot of checking clothes, hair, and things. CORIN and LICHAS bring in a clothes rail on which OEDIPUS' suit and JOCASTA's dress hang. They then leave.*

*OEDIPUS and JOCASTA slowly, automatically, change. Silence.*

OEDIPUS I'm thinking hard to find a way in which we might be wrong.

JOCASTA And can you?

,

What have you lost?

*OEDIPUS is feeling in his pockets –*

OEDIPUS The tie. I put it in there, safe, and they've taken it out –

CORIN It'll be through in the back – they've stacked everything in there until / it can be -

OEDIPUS I'll go, don't worry -

*He goes to get it. CORIN has found JOCASTA's glasses.*

CORIN                   End of an era.

JOCASTA                I'm sorry?

Yes. For you as well, Corin

I think sometimes you think I haven't noticed, or that – I don't know, that I don't realise, what you've -

*CORIN kisses JOCASTA on the back of the neck. It's one of the biggest moments of his whole life.*

,

*OEDIPUS comes back in with the tie, he hasn't over-heard.*

CORIN                   I'll leave you two together for the final moments. Go well, Oedipus.

*CORIN goes.*

*OEDIPUS is putting on the tie, in the mirror.*

It looks strange the other way [around]

*He stops short. He puts his hands on the mirror.*

It turns everything around but it stands still.

*A mirror – turns everything around, but it -*

*He laughs. The third riddle is solved. But the thought is sad.*

Did I only stand still?

,

I only wanted to *know*, to to move things forward, and to leave a mark

JOCASTA                And you did. You do.

*They look at each other.*

OEDIPUS               I'm sorry

JOCASTA                For what?

OEDIPUS               I feel I've - disappointed you, somehow

JOCASTA                Oh no – oh no, no, I am *so proud* of you

Tonight. But every night before tonight too, every minute.

I want you to know in this moment that, through it all, *you* were loved.  
Not what you did. Not the mark you left. You. I love – you, for you –

It was all you, always *you* -

*OEDIPUS' eyes might be full of tears.*

You'll survive anything, I think –

*They kiss and then they really, really kiss.*

*It's two people completely in love, and they know that they're saying goodbye. They roll onto each other, her heels kick off, they're reckless, they might have sex, they push each other's clothes up as if to take them off – and then JOCASTA breaks it off – stands up – says, almost to herself -*

JOCASTA            I can't lose you twice

*and she leaves the room –*

*and the stage, almost empty now, starts to feel like a dream*

OEDIPUS            Mum?

*MEROPE, in her outdoor coat again. Just like the start.*

I didn't wake you up –

Mum, I'm frightened –

MEROPE            It was a struggle to get here.

A struggle to be here.

What can it be but a struggle to leave –  
and step out to begin something new

*MEROPE leaves and then there's a bang, so loud it makes our teeth hurt. We see JOCASTA in another room. She's shot herself, lies motionless. Blood runs from JOCASTA's wound. She's dead. OEDIPUS sees this.*

*OEDIPUS picks up something sharp – JOCASTA's heel – he is oddly calm, now.*

*The noise of the crowds, OED-I-PUS, stamp-stamp-stamp, louder and louder.*

*OEDIPUS pulls down the skin below his eye, and precisely positions the point of the heel at the eyeball. With his other hand, he prepares to hit it hard –*

*The crowd stamp and cheer and stamp -*

*and the curtain from the beginning suddenly falls and we are plunged into total darkness, surrounded by the noise of the crowds, ecstatic, deafening, relentless, for ten or twelve seconds -*

*and then, the curtain rises on a new scene, the same space -*

*but completely empty. Sparkling, white, new. It's two years earlier.*

*OEDIPUS and JOCASTA are there, in different clothes, coats on. They seem happy. She has a beautiful orange scarf tied across her eyes as a blindfold, she's being led in through a door we haven't seen used by OEDIPUS – he's saying 'step backward, step backward, here, stand here' -*

OEDIPUS                    And turn around and – three, two,

*He takes the blindfold off. JOCASTA takes in the space.*

This is it.

I wanted you to be the first to see it. It's a lease, wouldn't be permanent, and there's a process we have to go through, but I wanted you to / sign off before –

*JOCASTA puts her hand over OEDIPUS' mouth.*

JOCASTA                    Stop talking, Oedipus.

*She walks out into the space. Spins around.*

,

I love it.

OEDIPUS                    Yeah?

JOCASTA                    Yeah.

This is the place. I love it. Already.

It feels like home.

*As OEDIPUS runs to JOCASTA, before he gets to her –*

*The play ends.*