Oedipus “I left because I didn’t want to marry my mother” scene (1 M, 1 W, 1 E)

Oedipus (E-DUH-PUSS) Iocasta (Jo-cast-uh)

Creon (CREE-ON)

(A reverent silence, while Iocasta lays the wreath at the altar and sets fire to the incense. Enter a shepherd from Corinth)

Corinthian. Might I inquire of you where I may find The royal palace of King Oedipus? Or better, where himself is to be found?

Chorus. There is the palace; himself, Sir, is within, But here his wife and mother of his children.

Corinthian. Ever may happiness attend on her, and hers, the wedded wife of such a man.

Iocasta. May you enjoy the same; your gentle words deserve no less.—Now, Sir, declare your purpose; with what request, what message have you come?

Corinthian. With good news for your husband and his house.

Iocasta. What news is this? And who has sent you here?

Corinthian. I come from Corinth, and the news I bring Will give you joy, though joy be crossed with grief.

Iocasta. What is this, with its two-fold influence?

Corinthian. The common talk in Corinth is that they will call on Oedipus to be their king.

Iocasta. What? Does old Polybus no longer reign?

Corinthian. Not now, for Death has laid him in his grave.

Iocasta. Go quickly to your master, girl; give him the news. — You oracles, where are you now? This is the man whom Oedipus so long has shunned, fearing to kill him; now he's dead, and killed by Fortune, not by Oedipus.

(Enter Oedipus)

Oedipus. My dear Iocasta, tell me, my dear wife, why have you sent to fetch me from the palace?

Iocasta. Listen to him, and as you hear, reflect what has become of all those oracles.

Oedipus. Who is this man? — What has he to tell me?

Iocasta. He is from Corinth, and he brings you news about your father. Polybus is dead.

Oedipus. What say you, sir? Tell me the news yourself.

Corinthian. If you would have me first report on this, I tell you; death has carried him away.

Oedipus. By treachery? Or did sickness come to him?

Corinthian. A small mischance will lay an old man low.

Oedipus. Poor Polybus! He died then, of a sickness?

Corinthian. That, and the measure of his many years.

Oedipus. Ah me! Why then, Iocasta, should a man regard the Pythian house of oracles,

Or screaming birds, on whose authority I was to slay my father? But he is dead; The earth has covered him; and here am I, My sword undrawn unless perchance my loss has killed him; so might I be called his slayer.

But for those oracles about my father, Those he has taken with him to the grave wherein he lies, and they are come to nothing.

Iocasta. Did I not say long since it would be so?

Oedipus. You did; but I was led astray by fear.

Iocasta. So none of this deserves another thought.

Oedipus. Yet how can I not fear my mother's bed?

Iocasta. Why should we fear, seeing that man is ruled by chance, and there is room for no clear forethought? No; live at random, live as best one can. So do not fear this marriage with your mother; many a man has suffered this before — But only in his dreams. Whoever thinks the least of this, he lives most comfortably.

Oedipus. Your every word I do accept, if she that bore me did not live; but as she does — Despite your wisdom, how can I but tremble?

Iocasta. Yet there is comfort in your father's death.

Oedipus. Great comfort, but still fear of her who lives.

Corinthian. And who is this who makes you so afraid?

Oedipus. Merope, my man, the wife of Polybus.

Corinthian. And what in her gives cause of fear in you?

Oedipus. There was an awful warning from the gods.

Corinthian. Can it be told, or must it be kept secret?

Oedipus. No secret. Once Apollo said that I Was doomed to lie with my own

mother, and Defile my own hands with my father's blood. Wherefore has Corinth

been, these many years, My home no more. My fortunes have been fair. — But it is good to see a parent's face.

Corinthian. It was for fear of this you fled the city?

Oedipus. This, and the shedding of my father's blood.

Corinthian. Why then, my lord, since I am come in friendship, I'll rid you here and now of that misgiving.

Oedipus. Be sure, your recompense would be in keeping.

Corinthian. It was the chief cause of my coming here that your return might bring me some advantage.

Oedipus. Back to my parents I will never go.

Corinthian. My son, it is clear, you know not what you do....

Oedipus. Not know? What is this? Tell me what you mean.

Corinthian. If for this reason you avoid your home.

Oedipus. Fearing Apollo's oracle may come true.

Corinthian. And you incur pollution from your parents?

Oedipus. That is the thought that makes me live in terror.

Corinthian. I tell you then, this fear of yours is idle.

Oedipus. How? Am I not their child, and they my parents?

Corinthian. Because there's none of Polybus in you.

Oedipus. How can you say so? Was he not my father?

Corinthian. I am your father just as much as he!

Oedipus. A stranger equal to the father? How?

Corinthian. Neither did he beget you, nor did I.

Oedipus. Then for what reason did he call me son?

Corinthian. He had you as a gift —from my own hands.

Oedipus. And showed such love to me? Me, not his own?

Corinthian. Yes; his own childlessness so worked on him.

Oedipus. You, when you gave me: had you bought, or found me?

Corinthian. I found you in the woods upon Cithaeron.

Oedipus. Why were you travelling in that neighbourhood?

Corinthian. I tended flocks of sheep upon the mountain.

Oedipus. You were a shepherd, then, wandering for hire?

Corinthian. I was, my son; but that day, your preserver.

Oedipus. How so? What ailed me when you took me up?

Corinthian. For that, your ankles might give evidence.

Oedipus. Alas! why speak of this, my life-long trouble?

Corinthian. I loosed the fetters clamped upon your feet.

Oedipus. A pretty gift to carry from the cradle!

Corinthian. It was for this they named you Oedipus.

Oedipus. Who did, my father or my mother? Tell me.

Corinthian. I cannot; he knows more, from whom I had you.

Oedipus. It was another, not yourself, that found me?

Corinthian. Yes, you were given me by another

shepherd.

Oedipus. Who? Do you know him? Can you name the man?

Corinthian. They said that he belonged to Laius.

Oedipus. What—him who once was ruler here in Thebes?

Corinthian. Yes, he it was for whom this man was shepherd.

Oedipus. And is he still alive, that I can see him? The man he speaks of: do you think, Iocasta,

He is the one I have already summoned?

Iocasta. What matters who he is? Pay no regard .— The tale is idle; it is best forgotten.

Oedipus. It cannot be that I should have this clue and then not find the secret of my birth.

Iocasta. In God's name stop, if you have any thought for your own life! My ruin is enough.

Oedipus. Be not dismayed; nothing can prove you base. Not though I find my mother thrice a slave.

Iocasta. O, I beseech you, do not! Seek no more!

Oedipus. You cannot move me. I will know the truth.

Iocasta. I know that what I say is for the best.

Oedipus. This 'best' of yours! I have no patience with it.

Iocasta. O may you never learn what man you are!

Oedipus. Go, someone, bring the herdsman here to me, and leave her to enjoy her pride of birth.

Iocasta. O man of doom! For by no other name can I address you now or evermore.

(Exit Iocasta)