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**Oedipus Again**

**By**

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*a tragicomedy on the Oedipus cycle*

**Characters**

Jocasta ..... Queen, in her 40s  
Laius ..... King, in his 60s  
Oedipus ..... King, in his 60s wearing sunglasses  
Eustace ..... a servant, in his 40s

**Place**

The Afterworld. Not quite Hades or Hell. Sterile, open environment that has some aspects of a train station. There is an area that functions as a bed chamber, with ornamental bed and night table. There is smoke or mist present and often the smoke clears completely.

**Scene One**

JOCASTA, in suggestive nightgown, looks under her bed for the cat. LAIUS, in more formal sleepwear, performs a ritual with candles and raw eggs

LAIUS

Mystery simple, destiny enslaved  
 Expectant son, from womb to cold grave  
 (Cracks an egg into a dish)  
 Cryptic Oracle, in yolk and egg white  
 Guide my trembling hand between day and night  
 (He examines the remains in the dish)  
 One thousand and one times  
 The omen never changes  
 And yet, I must do this  
 Out of eternal love  
 And filial obligation.  
 The son one cannot know  
 Is no stranger to us now  
 And the silent Gods  
 Have conspired so artfully  
 Can watch from a distance  
 The anvil of my mortal pain.  
 (Silence)  
 Jocasta. Again. Come and look.

JOCASTA

(Partially hidden by the bed)  
 Here Selene. Please. Come, come, come.

LAIUS

But there is a spot of blood.

JOCASTA

(Inattentive to Laius)  
 Kitten. Please.

LAIUS

A spot of blood means that things are imminent. Do you not hear me? Do you not even care?

(He begins to get dressed in formal attire)

JOCASTA

A spot of blood is a reminder of when we only had flesh and bones, darling.

LAIUS

A spot of blood means we are moments away.

JOCASTA

I cannot imagine that we will have more intrusions. It is unthinkable. Where is Selene, darling? I cannot afford to lose her to darkness.

LAIUS

Up a tree?

JOCASTA

How few trees there are.

LAIUS

Then it should be easy to find her.

JOCASTA

You don't like Selene.

LAIUS

I don't like animals. Canines. Felines. Bird like creatures. Reptiles.

JOCASTA

Selene is a ball of fur. You once loved a crested lark in the palace.

LAIUS

I don't remember.

JOCASTA

Small, brown, with a stripe on her back when she was young. I think we both are unsettled about great changes.

LAIUS

We ought to get dressed.

JOCASTA

Yes. We get dressed and nothing happens. If we don't get dressed, logic would surprise us.

LAIUS

We get dressed because we have no privacy.

JOCASTA

You act as though the city of Thebe was at your shoulder. We have all the comforts of a secure bed chamber, darling.

LAIUS

With Eustace coming and going?

JOCASTA

He's just a servant. Your servant. My servant. What has he not seen in his life with us?  
What have we not shared with him?

LAIUS

It's terrible that he has to be here.

JOCASTA

Our perverse sanctuary?

LAIUS

Our purgatory if you will.

JOCASTA

It is his purgatory as well. This incomplete Death leaves no deed, no legacy, no morality.

LAIUS

Must you wait for the gods to decree that mortification is our reformation?

JOCASTA

Must you wait for the gods to decree that mortification is your own invention?

LAIUS

Are you free of shame?

JOCASTA

No.

LAIUS

Should I believe you?

JOCASTA

Yes.

LAIUS

You agreed to dress formally.

JOCASTA

Will Oedipus accept your arrangements?

LAIUS

Yes.

(Long pause)

Because they emanate from my heart.

JOCASTA

And you'll tell him that. From your heart.

LAIUS

Yes.

JOCASTA

As that will sound like the manifestation of love.

LAIUS

Taunting me?

JOCASTA

Why must we wear formal clothes? The heat only climbs.

LAIUS

Oedipus will be in horrible shock. Unbearable fear and trembling.

JOCASTA

And his sight?

LAIUS

Logic determines that he will remain blind.

JOCASTA

Your mortal wounds vanished, Laius. My wounds vanished. Where is the logic?

LAIUS

Sightless, he will prevail.

JOCASTA

You promised not to be harsh.

LAIUS

I promise.

JOCASTA

Here for nearly forty years, Laius, you're the family's greatest martyr.

LAIUS

Painfully so.

JOCASTA

I've tried to compensate.

LAIUS

Yes.

JOCASTA

You love me still.

LAIUS

Forever until I lose all consciousness.

JOCASTA

I love you, Laius. Until I lose all consciousness.

LAIUS

What we learn from the gods, the gods make sport of us.

JOCASTA

I'm not laughing at such sport.

LAIUS

Eustace is late. He has to polish my boots. My stained sword. My torn cape.

JOCASTA

He is a boy. Eustace is utterly childlike. He cannot be corrected.

LAIUS

He attends to you with greater fidelity.

JOCASTA

Because I am needy, Laius. And you are a King.

LAIUS

And you are a magnificent Queen. There is no distinction.

JOCASTA

Eustace is fearful of your deep, low voice.

LAIUS

How do you know?

JOCASTA

He's told me.

LAIUS

Tell him this cannot continue. Fearing me makes him fail.

JOCASTA

Fails you by polishing the wrong boots?

LAIUS

Don't make light of this.

JOCASTA

Laius, what's really troubling you?

LAIUS

Nothing.

JOCASTA

Out with it.

LAIUS

Words trick my tongue, Jocasta. But I can say this straight. Do you favor me?

JOCASTA

Laius, I am your wife eternal.

LAIUS

Do you favor me?

JOCASTA

Oedipus is our son.

LAIUS

He is your son and you love him powerfully.

JOCASTA

Words do trick your tongue.

LAIUS

His body.

JOCASTA

What about his body?

LAIUS

You know his body.

JOCASTA

I know your body, Laius. Why force yourself to compete?

LAIUS

Absurd.

JOCASTA

Absurd.

LAIUS

My shirt still carries a minor stain. All these years.

(Pause)

Why don't you respect the Oracles?

JOCASTA

I do respect the Oracles. Your foolish literal mind misinterprets the Prophecies.

LAIUS

The Prophecies are not metaphors

JOCASTA

Metaphors, similes, hyperboles.

LAIUS

Literary constructs.

JOCASTA

Your foolish Oracles don't like my kitten.

LAIUS

Cats have an undue influence on you. They evoke your primitive side.

JOCASTA

What did you do to my tiny Selene?

LAIUS

Eustace took the kitten away?

JOCASTA

What did you order him to do?

LAIUS

He took her for a walk.

JOCASTA

Selene is not a creature you tie to a leash.

LAIUS

Eustace carries her in a majestic tram. He says she likes the scenery.

JOCASTA

You playing with fire, darling.

LAIUS

Your pet is in no danger. I asked Eustace to keep away until after we welcome our son. The cat is a distraction.

JOCASTA

She's just a kitten, not the Sphinx.

LAIUS

In my dreams, Selene transforms into the Sphinx.

JOCASTA

Then force yourself to dream about something else.

LAIUS

Whenever I lie in bed, the damn beast pounces on me.

JOCASTA

Selene is flirtatious. Clearly, she has a fondness for your belly.

LAIUS

And my loins.

JOCASTA

Well, if you say so, darling.

LAIUS

Was it Hera or Ares who sent the Sphinx from her Aethiopian homeland to Thebes where she tortured innocent people with her ridiculous riddle?

JOCASTA

My guess is Hera.

LAIUS

Why?

JOCASTA

Because she was jealous of Zeus' many lovers.

LAIUS

Eustace thought it was Ares.

JOCASTA

Because he's the God of War?

LAIUS

Because Ares had a dangerous affair with Aphrodite . . .

JOCASTA

Who was married to Hephaestus.

LAIUS

Yes.

JOCASTA

I think the Sphinx is related to the feminine will.

LAIUS

How much do you love me?

JOCASTA

More than the precise measurements of all the stars in the sky.

LAIUS

You belong to me only?

JOCASTA

(Coming in close with a passionate kiss, and nearly losing her upper garments)  
I am forever yours to behold.

(Laius is enjoying the touch of her undraped body, but is also fighting impulse to drape her with his free hand)

Take me.

LAIUS

Later.

JOCASTA

Now.

LAIUS

Are you insatiable?

JOCASTA

You are a lion of raw beauty.

(Another long, passionate kiss)

I'll get ready.

(Holds up a beautiful gown that was hanging near the bed)

How will I look in this?

LAIUS

Magnificent. But he won't see.

JOCASTA

He can feel the garment.

LAIUS

Yes, he can feel the garment.

JOCASTA

Laius, that poor soul's wretchedness over twenty years.

LAIUS

And how long was I shunned in this hell? Double his sentence, if not more?

JOCASTA

We are not in Hades.

LAIUS

We inhabit a bleak prison of penance. Tiresias hinted as much.

JOCASTA

Tiresias was often wrong. He imbibed hallucinogens from herbs and squeezed the buttocks of my handmaidens. An awful body odor too, not my favorite soothsayer.

(Getting dressed seductively)

Laius, why did you go to the egg lady?

LAIUS

What?

JOCASTA

The egg wrench.

LAIUS

You mean the Sorceress of the Orb? Phanes from Crete?

JOCASTA

You are so naïve.

LAIUS

Few knew the enigma of the Orphic Egg like Phanes. A hermaphrodite to be accurate, Jocasta.

JOCASTA

Maybe it was just the sequence gown.

LAIUS

Phanes presented a basket of goose eggs which found its way to Hades. You doubt the Orphic Egg is the cosmic egg – the ethereal, ineffable silver Orb. The personification of everlasting light. The Primordial Being hatched from the shining Cosmic Egg begot the universe.

JOCASTA

Pray tell, why did you go to Phanes?

LAIUS

Tiresias had his limitations.

JOCASTA

Regarding?

LAIUS

Our problem before Oedipus.

JOCASTA

Our problem?

LAIUS

Our physical problems, Jocasta.

JOCASTA

You were always aroused. Phanes was an idiot, a charlatan, and a horrid dresser.

LAIUS

Why did Tiresias fear her?

JOCASTA

I don't know. I don't care. Phanes is a vulgar joke.

LAIUS

Our destiny is not.

JOCASTA

I argue that it is. Patricide. Incest. Manipulated like marionettes. A grotesque prank from Olympus.

LAIUS

You never said this before.

JOCASTA

From our realm here Laius, the Gods' obscenities has penetrated my very soul.

LAIUS

We cannot blaspheme.

JOCASTA

We are colossal and yet insignificant to such Supremacy.

(She comes in again with a kiss on the mouth)

I prefer you to Oedipus. Please accept that truth

LAIUS

I do. So I ask that you let me welcome him without you.

JOCASTA

As you wish.

LAIUS

It may be the thinking of the Gods that when we acknowledge our actions unflinchingly, we will be released from this relentless punishment. It starts and ends with Oedipus.

JOCASTA

Agreed.

LAIUS

In our loving embrace.

JOCASTA

Yes.

LAIUS

His death will put him equal to us. His redemption will cleanse us. Our redemption will cleanse him. Do you hear someone?

JOCASTA

It's Eustace.

(EUSTACE enters slowly with a fuel lantern)

EUSTACE

Excuse me, King Laius. I am late.

JOCASTA

Selene?

EUSTACE

Is up a tree. Quite safe. I will need a rope ladder, dear Queen.

JOCASTA

Is there a rope ladder?

EUSTACE

Yes. I made one with great deliberation.

LAIUS

He did. He is a wonderful artisan, Jocasta.

JOCASTA

Why did you let her climb a tree?

EUSTACE

There is a strange bird in our environment. A beautiful white bird. A dove? Very ethereal. Perhaps a harbinger of your son's arrival?

LAIUS

Undoubtedly so.

(Pause. Points to the ground)

My boots, Laius. You were to polish them to perfection.

EUSTACE

There are two pairs of boots.

LAIUS

Please take both.

EUSTACE

Of course, sir. With honor.

(He finds the two pairs of boots by the bed and hoists them to his chest)

Flat or with a high sheen?

LAIUS

High sheen, Eustace.

EUSTACE

Immediately.  
(He exits)

JOCASTA

Darling, give me back my kitten and I'll do what you ask.

LAIUS

Your allegiance - your moral anchor - ought to come from our union and not a four legged hostage.

JOCASTA

You have my allegiance.

LAIUS

Fully, my love?

JOCASTA

We argue by degree. Not be anything greater.

LAIUS

A Queen learns to accommodate her King.

JOCASTA

Should I pretend there isn't dissonance between marriage and impulses for freedom?

LAIUS

No pretense is required.

JOCASTA

Laius . . .

LAIUS

We all have profound impulses for freedom.

JOCASTA

Do you, darling? In truth?

LAIUS

I had an impulse to flee our wedding, Jocasta. An impulse to jump a cliff when I was a boy. Impulses to slay the Sphinx. So yes, in truth.

JOCASTA

We are similar.

LAIUS

Yes. Yes. Yes.  
(Pause)  
Am I overbearing?

JOCASTA

Is Aphrodite erotic?  
(Amused)  
Why in the name of Zeus do you always ask that?

LAIUS

Because you think it. I remember our wedding night and the flow of wine. The African musicians dancing with you. The bawdy songs. I remember when we retired to our bedchamber you entered without a stitch of clothing.

JOCASTA

And you refused every sexual gesture.

LAIUS

Lest we risk an early pregnancy. We had to thwart each prophesy.

JOCASTA

With animal sacrifice?

LAIUS

The sharpest prophesies suggested no lovemaking on our wedding night.

JOCASTA

Still, the night was so warm and enchanting that we decided to sleep out on the beach.

LAIUS

Which meant harnessing the horses.

JOCASTA

They were a gorgeous team of stallions. The largest horses ever.

LAIUS

We never speak of that night.

JOCASTA

We never speak about many things from our first year.

LAIUS

We think of our first night, because our son is moments away.

JOCASTA

Yes.

LAIUS

And we will be tender to the boy.

JOCASTA

Yes.

(Pause)

And forgiveness is the reason the Gods give us life.

LAIUS

Yes.

(Eustace returns with the King's polished boots)

It is time, Jocasta.

(smiling warmly to Eustace)

Kind thanks Eustace. You give me assurances for impossible occasions.

EUSTACE

Of course, my King. Two pairs of polished boots.

LAIUS

It is time. Thank you.

(Takes brown pair of boots)

EUSTACE

Time?

LAIUS

We go to meet Oedipus.

EUSTACE

Yes, my King.

JOCASTA

Selene?

LAIUS

Eustace, give the black boots to the Queen.

JOCASTA

Laius?

LAIUS

The kitten is inside one of the boots. A favorite sleeping place. Speak to my sudden

tenderness, my beloved Queen.

(He taps Eustace lightly on the shoulder)

Come Eustace. We go to meet the man who defeated the monstrous Sphinx.

End of Scene

### Scene Two

Aspects of the atmosphere are present in this new location. Absent is the bed and night stand. There are steps or a ramp in the distance suggestion the gateway arrival. Laius is slowly pacing and he now has a walking staff. Eustace is seated on a simple bench without a back rest. Eustace carries a tray with a two small bowls. One bowl is empty, the other bowl has a few eggs for divination. Eustace inspects each egg with great deliberation.

EUSTACE

My King, they all seem to be intact.

LAIUS

(Not looking at Eustace)

Good.

EUSTACE

We are moments away.

LAIUS

Yes.

EUSTACE

Would you like me recite the invocation, sir?

LAIUS

Yes. But you cannot falter. Nor can you misspeak one single word.

EUSTACE

Mystery simple, destiny enslaved  
 Expectant King, from womb to cold grave  
 (Cracks an egg into a dish)  
 Cryptic Oracle, in yolk and egg white  
 Guide the trembling hand between day and night  
 (examines the remains in the dish)  
 One thousand and one times  
 The omen never changes  
 And yet, we must do this  
 Out of eternal love  
 And filial obligation.  
 The son one cannot know  
 Is no stranger to us now  
 And the silent Gods  
 That have conspired so artfully

Can watch from a distance  
The farce of our mortal pain.

LAIUS

How is the yolk?

EUSTACE

Round and yellow.

LAIUS

No blood?

EUSTACE

No blood.

LAIUS

A waste of an egg.

EUSTACE

A sacred ritual, Sire.

LAIUS

Determination is an act of faith.

EUSTACE

Faith is an act of determination.

LAIUS

There is a burning question on your brow.

EUSTACE

You read my thoughts powerfully.

LAIUS

What is your question?

EUSTACE

I shall never forget the encounter at the bridge and crossroads. It was hard raining terror.  
The North wind slapped our horses cruelly.

LAIUS

The Oracle did not include your death.

EUSTACE

I slipped in the mud trying to protect you and died by the swift sword of Oedipus.

LAIUS

It was a gratuitous death, Eustace. His vile insults and words of rage were aimed at me. I mocked him. He drew his weapon to slay me. I was overpowered after you fell. I am responsible for your death and I owe you more than my life.

EUSTACE

A suggestion sir.

LAIUS

Yes?

EUSTACE

Not to sound insolent.

LAIUS

Please. .

EUSTACE

My King, I should like to say that if I were you . . .

LAIUS

If you were me . . .

EUSTACE

If I were you, as absurd as it seems, I would pretend that Oedipus King of Thebes was not my son.

LAIUS

So decades ago I should have pretended that when meeting him?

EUSTACE

Yes, and all the more for the occasion in front of us.

LAIUS

Lie to him?

EUSTACE

Not lie, not deceive, not connive. Avoid definitions and terms. If I were you I would be oblivious to the claims of Oedipus. Neither avoid him, nor befriend him. Neither extoll him, nor denigrate him.

LAIUS

But married to Jocasta.

EUSTACE

You.

LAIUS

Yes. The Queen and I. How not to state that, Eustace?

EUSTACE

Let him infer everything basic and sacred. Spiritual things are as apparent as the Monarch butterfly in Spring.

LAIUS

Is the shattering of finely crafted glass a spiritual thing?

EUSTACE

I hear no glass shattering, my King. I hear a stunning silence. And it frightens me.

LAIUS

Sound reasoning. You and I ought to switch roles. And you can try out these subtle ideas of lunacy.

EUSTACE

You jest at my expense, sir.

LAIUS

Never would I jest in such a naked mood as now, Eustace. I honor you as a loyal friend and servant.

(Lights shift to signal the arrival)

When you know that Jocasta is coming to see Oedipus, ring the bell lightly eight times.

(a low vibration is heard and the lights continue to shift to indicate Oedipus)

EUSTACE

I must leave you now, my King. May the Gods be with you.

(Eustace exits in the direction opposite of the ramp or stairway. Smoke and fog.

Oedipus, in black sunglasses, totters out with a staff in hand.)

OEDIPUS

So . . . this is the fathomless void. In my lechery, I apprehend my lost soul . . . almost the innocent boy without sleep.

(Pause)

I know you are there.

LAIUS

I am here. Yes, Oedipus.

OEDIPUS

The voice in my head or from a distance?

LAIUS

From a distance twenty paces away.

OEDIPUS

May I address you as the judge of Hades?

LAIUS

I am not your judge, Oedipus.

OEDIPUS

Are you the torturer of Hades?

LAIUS

I am not your torturer, Oedipus.

OEDIPUS

I have prepared a defense, in any case.

LAIUS

Stop.

OEDIPUS

Can you see?

LAIUS

Yes.

OEDIPUS

I presume you are dead.

LAIUS

Yes.

OEDIPUS

You are here to meet me.

LAIUS

Yes. Welcome poor soul.

OEDIPUS

And I should accept?

LAIUS

Yes.

OEDIPUS

Tell me what you know about my life.

LAIUS

That you have suffered for sins beyond human capacity.

OEDIPUS

Prove yourself.

LAIUS

The Sphinx.

OEDIPUS

Would have spared me heinous memory if I not solved the endless riddle.

LAIUS

You saved Thebes.

LAIUS/OEDIPUS

From the Sphinx.

LAIUS

Thebes' greatest terror. Until the plague.

OEDIPUS

As the assassin of Laius, I brought the plague.

LAIUS

He wasn't dressed to look like King Laius. You were fooled.

OEDIPUS

I saved the city only to pollute the city.

LAIUS

Yes. A paradox, my son.

OEDIPUS

Tiresias used to call me his son.

LAIUS

An affectation.

OEDIPUS

A fight at the bridge. A thunderstorm. Double murder. Children from incest.

LAIUS

Silence.

OEDIPUS

Every word.

LAIUS

You are not charged to inscribe your tomb. Does tragedy exist in the hollow of the universe? Even if the Gods abandon us, we sense the dazzling vault of stars hidden from view. From this horizon, Oedipus, there is only pity.

OEDIPUS

Who in their right mind would pity me?

LAIUS

Thy parents true. Jocasta and Laius are close by.

OEDIPUS

Impossible.

LAIUS

Close enough to walk in your direction.

OEDIPUS

I cannot let them see me.

LAIUS

You cannot out-manuever fate. This too is a decree.

OEDIPUS

The Oracle failed to mention . . .

LAIUS

Again. Oedipus again.

OEDIPUS

Again. Why?

LAIUS

Perhaps King Laius, the father you have feared for so long, will now shower you with compassion.

OEDIPUS

Compassion?

LAIUS

Forgiveness.

OEDIPUS

Incomprehensible.

LAIUS

Remember the King's servant?

OEDIPUS

Yes.

LAIUS

You stole his life too.

OEDIPUS

That is part of my searing pain.

LAIUS

The servant has compassion for you.

OEDIPUS

The young driver of the King's chariot.

LAIUS

Eustace.

OEDIPUS

And you . . . must be . . . the King's servant . . . Eustace . . .

LAIUS

It might as well be true.

OEDIPUS

Did the King send you?

LAIUS

Yes.

OEDIPUS

To see if I am dangerous?

LAIUS

Dangerous only to yourself.

OEDIPUS

Please. To Laius, my beloved father, let him know that my misery burrows to the very marrow of the Earth. He should shun me, I am his supplicant.

LAIUS

Your father was manipulated by fate as wickedly as you were.

OEDIPUS

We must own each sin.

LAIUS

His misery mirrors your misery.

OEDIPUS

It is not for me to say.

LAIUS

The King hesitated off and on to sleep with the Queen lest they produce a son, The Queen convinced Laius to accept conjugal relation under an amulet which was to guarantee the birth of a girl. The King was drunk and Jocasta was exceedingly persuasive. After Jocasta went into labor, Laius snatched you from the nurse's arm. He abandoned you on Mount Cithaeron. All of which proved the Delphic Oracle correct, although you and King Laius were pawns of the cruelest machinations from the Gods.

OEDIPUS

I am speechless.

LAIUS

It is understandable that Queen Jocasta sought leeway around the punishing Oracle. Understandable that King Laius was forced to bring you to Corinth. Laius knew a shepherd would save the life.

OEDIPUS

Yet how could King Laius know that the shepherd would offer me to King Polybus of Corinth?

LAIUS

King Laius had faith. This proved correct. King Polybus raised you as his natural son.

OEDIPUS

I didn't resemble Polybus. Still I swore never to raise a sword to any man older than myself. I had more responsibility than the King and the Queen to thwart the Oracle. I should have discouraged bedding any woman twice my age. My crimes are in my

carelessness.

LAIUS

Carelessness in the royal family. You are not alone.

OEDIPUS

I was aiming to kill any offender. I remember the moment. Two men slaughtered.

LAIUS

Two men. Yes, my poor son. You were the hero having slain the despicable Sphinx, awarded the Queen's hand in marriage, and a Kingdom. You thought you were from Polybus's loins and didn't realize how Jocasta masked her age so well. Not with make-up but with her incomparable exercise routines. You had assumed she was younger.

OEDIPUS

That is true.

LAIUS

However she knew your age. This was undeniable.

OEDIPUS

Are you inferring that the Queen was cavalier?

LAIUS

Not cavalier, but vain.

OEDIPUS

Vain?

LAIUS

All women are vain. It is a law of nature such as gravity and the bitterness of winter.

OEDIPUS

And King Laius and Queen Jocasta now?

LAIUS

They wish to see you.

OEDIPUS

With invective?

LAIUS

With love.

OEDIPUS

What are you not telling me?

LAIUS

Do you think I withhold?

OEDIPUS

Yes.

LAIUS

The King and Queen believe that a healing can occur once you form a ritualist triangle in the sand.

OEDIPUS

In the sand?

LAIUS

Yes, dear Oedipus.

OEDIPUS

A triangle?

LAIUS

An expression of geometry.

OEDIPUS

What will this accomplish?

LAIUS

Forgiveness and purging of incomprehensible shame. You three were not together save for the time of your birth. In ritual, you might be free of this horrid chamber of Hades to transcend what has become eternal punishment.

OEDIPUS

You are eloquent for a chariot driver.

LAIUS

I am well read. And the King is my tutor.

OEDIPUS

Your tutor?

LAIUS

In languages - most foreign.  
 In turns of a phrase - for wit.  
 In divination - with bird eggs.

OEDIPUS

Divination?

LAIUS

Cracking the shell. Eyeing the yolk. Something Tiresias could not perform.

OEDIPUS

Do you blame Tiresias?

LAIUS

Not at all. The King has expressed that we see the protective mask of life when we find our reflection. The ritual of the triangle in the sand, would grant you, Laius and Jocasta an occasion to dispense with the mask.

OEDIPUS

Without sight?

LAIUS

You have orbs in your sockets. Zeus will provide the miracle.

OEDIPUS

Astonishing.

(Light chiming bells are heard in the distance)

LAIUS

There are miracles, in this landscape without sun or moon.

OEDIPUS

Bells?

LAIUS

Yes. She's coming.

OEDIPUS

The Queen?

(Pause)

Answer me Eustace.

LAIUS

Yes, the Queen comes early. Predictable but not ideal.

OEDIPUS

And King Laius?

LAIUS  
Yes.

OEDIPUS  
Is he approaching?

LAIUS  
Laius loves you, dear Oedipus. Do you not feel his presence?

OEDIPUS  
I do.

LAIUS  
Hades cannot last. We rise to a better sphere.  
(Jocasta enters slowly, realizing something is not quite right)

OEDIPUS  
Who is here?

LAIUS  
The Queen is here.

OEDIPUS  
Jocasta . . .

LAIUS  
She will walk toward you, dear Oedipus.  
(Jocasta steps quietly toward Oedipus)

OEDIPUS  
I cannot stand on these two club feet.  
(He lowers himself carefully to his knees)

JOCASTA  
You are so loved, dear son.

OEDIPUS  
I am wretched and stained.

JOCASTA  
But your father told you we can be cleansed.

OEDIPUS  
Not my father, but Eustace.

JOCASTA

(Glancing at Laius)  
Your father, not Eustace.

(Silence)  
You have aged greatly in the desert over twenty years. Laius is standing five paces from you.

(She steps closer, steps behind him, and runs her fingers through Oedipus' hair)  
Say something, Laius.

OEDIPUS

Father . . .

LAIUS

(Stepping closer, caresses Oedipus by the side of his arm)  
I am profoundly terrified over the pain I have caused you. My heart is broken. I am a shell.

OEDIPUS

(Realizing Laius has revealed his identity)  
Father . . .

LAIUS

We have defiled one another like no other family.

JOCASTA

Where is the sand?

LAIUS

Over there.

OEDIPUS

My sons are my brothers. My daughter is my sister. My mother and I . . .

LAIUS

We have little time left. Over there is terrace of sand.

OEDIPUS

What will happen when my children die?

LAIUS

Will they come here?

OEDIPUS

Yes?

LAIUS

I don't know.

OEDIPUS

And who will be their mother?

LAIUS

Will they need a mother at their age?

OEDIPUS

They will suffer great punishment.

(Eustace enters with eggs)

LAIUS

Soon the Gods will be fair. Your children will be spared.

OEDIPUS

Who now enters?

LAIUS

Eustace.

OEDIPUS

And why is he here?

LAIUS

I don't really know. Eustace was not detailed in the Delphic Oracle.

OEDIPUS

Collateral damage.

LAIUS

A disagreeable expression, Oedipus. He is a loyal member of our family.

OEDIPUS

To Eustace. The genuine Eustace. I extend my humiliation and I offer apologies for the horrors I have caused you.

(Eustace bows quietly)

LAIUS

He is lowering his head to you, dear Oedipus.

OEDIPUS

I deprived you of having a family. Of experiencing old age. Speak Eustace. I must hear your voice.

EUSTACE

I too love you like a son.

LAIUS

He speaks with sincerity.

EUSTACE

King Oedipus. You destroyed the Sphinx. You did the miraculous. She asked what crawls in the morning, what walks on two legs in noon, and what moves slowly on three legs in the evening.

JOCASTA

Only you knew the answer.

LAIUS

You said "Man".

EUSTACE

He crawls as a baby, walks on two feet as an adult, and requires a cane in old age.

OEDIPUS

I killed the dreaded Sphinx without a blade.

LAIUS

We need to finish the ritual.

JOCASTA

Yes.

OEDIPUS

Yes.

EUSTACE

I will leave you to your privacy as it must be.

JOCASTA

Laius?

LAIUS

What?

JOCASTA

Can I not have one minute alone?

LAIUS

With Oedipus?

JOCASTA

I need to have this time with him.

LAIUS

It is not wise.

JOCASTA

Please, my darling.

LAIUS

No.

JOCASTA

I beg you.

(Long silence)

Please Laius.

LAIUS

Do you know what we are risking?

JOCASTA

Yes. But a fleeting moment is not a risk.

LAIUS

Still?

JOCASTA

Please my love.

(Laius signals to Eustace and they leave Jocasta alone with Oedipus)

I knew when I met you, that you were not the son of Polybus. You knew this too.

OEDIPUS

Say no more.

JOCASTA

I sensed that you were my flesh.

OEDIPUS

Stop.

JOCASTA

I craved you. That there was a reason the Oracle was this maniacally. I fight myself over the truth. I tricked Laius. Tricked you. Tricked myself.

OEDIPUS

Why tell me this?

JOCASTA

The ritual may not work.

OEDIPUS

But if it works?

JOCASTA

We will sleep eternally in peace.

OEDIPUS

And if the ritual fails?

JOCASTA

I prefer you to Laius. The Gods know this.

OEDIPUS

You are forbidden to say such things.

JOCASTA

Nothing is forbidden, my darling. We confront our truest face.

End of Scene.

**Scene Three**  
(Moments later)

LAIUS

Jocasta is taking too long.

EUSTACE

Yes, you're right.

LAIUS

Either you or I should intervene.

EUSTACE

I will do it.

LAIUS

The ritual is a meditation for three. The Queen is introducing incompatible ideas to Oedipus. This could be ruinous.

EUSTACE

King Laius, why did you acquiesce? Why give her a private audience with Oedipus?

LAIUS

It was the only way forward. Otherwise she would not be willing to walk onto the sand.

EUSTACE

You know the Queen quite well.

LAIUS

I do.

(Pause)

She will put her thin arms around his neck. She will place her cheek next to his. She will say delicate things in a whisper and she will shed a fountain of tears to drench him. This I do know.

(Pause)

She will tell him that after the brief walk onto the sand, we will stand still. Equal distances like Euclid's triangle. She will describe the two overlapping circles formed in the sand. Inscribed inside the overlapping arcs is the equilateral triangle. Two Kings, One Queen equidistant. And then we perish to sleep eternally. All at once. Cleansed. At peace. This she will describe as she remembers her suicide on earth.

EUSTACE

If that is what will happen at least the Queen is being true.

LAIUS

But Jocasta doesn't yearn for this sleep. And then the ritual shall fail.

EUSTACE

King Laius, you must trust her intentions.

LAIUS

I know.

EUSTACE

As she trusts yours.

LAIUS

Yes.

EUSTACE

And yet you withhold.

LAIUS

I do.

(Pause)

Jocasta has sympathy for the Sphinx, believing the Sphinx was nocturnal. Jocasta imagines the Sphinx with a hidden benevolent profile. She suspects that the Sphinx coached Oedipus to solve the riddle.

(Pause)

Jocasta is like the crashing ocean wave. She comes to shore and leaves. She accepts what we must do, but then she disavows it in her next breath.

EUSTACE

I trust that the Queen will partake in the ritual and that you all will prevail.

LAIUS

I hope you are correct. And I realize that we then leave you to an uncertain fate.

EUSTACE

Yes, my King.

LAIUS

You may linger here for eternity.

EUSTACE

Yes.

LAIUS

In abject solitude.

EUSTACE

There is the kitten.

LAIUS

The kitten. Yes.

EUSTACE

I can write poetry.

LAIUS

Poetry. Yes.

EUSTACE

Or perhaps I too will be given a peaceful sleep.

LAIUS

Anything is possible, Eustace.

EUSTACE

I see the Queen.

(Jocasta enters alone)

LAIUS

Jocasta?

JOCASTA

I came alone.

LAIUS

Oedipus?

JOCASTA

Is resting.

LAIUS

Are we set?

JOCASTA

I need to speak with you, my darling.

LAIUS

Speak.

JOCASTA

Alone.

(Laius throws a gentle look at Eustace. Eustace exits)  
Thank you.

LAIUS

What did you say to our son?

JOCASTA

Only expressions of love and sorrow.

LAIUS

Yes. Of course.

JOCASTA

Before we proceed to the cleansing . . .

LAIUS

Don't say it.

JOCASTA

You don't know, Laius.

LAIUS

Nor do I care.

JOCASTA

Please darling. I have to . . .

(silence)

Please. I haven't said this to Oedipus and to no one. On our wedding night and the many months that followed, you and I . . .

LAIUS

You and I . . .

JOCASTA

Did not consummate fully.

LAIUS

What are you saying?

JOCASTA

We were intimate. But yet . . .

LAIUS

It isn't amusing, Jocasta . . .

JOCASTA

You always pulled away.

LAIUS

Pulled away?

(Pause)

A riddle?

JOCASTA

Not a riddle, darling. You are not the father of our son.

LAIUS

Not the father of Oedipus?

JOCASTA

No, Laius.

LAIUS

You were unfaithful?

JOCASTA

Yes. You need to know before we walk onto the sand.

LAIUS

If I am not the father, who was?

JOCASTA

You must know.

LAIUS

I don't know.

JOCASTA

You do know. The Oracle was not inaccurate. Oedipus did kill his father.

(Long silence. Eustace enters quietly. Laius throws a sharp look at his servant)

I love you, Laius. Please accept my failings and forgive me. Forgive us. I so wanted children in my life. All the forces of nature took over my judgment.

(Laius is stunned beyond belief. Eustace steps toward him)

End of Scene

**SCENE FOUR**

Laius, Jocasta and Oedipus enter the sand – from separate corners of the triangle. They only take a few steps to find their respective marks. The blue light which fills the space is coming down from overhead and there are three large lit candles in the center of the triangle inscribed in the sand. A bell is heard. Silence. The bell repeats several times. After the last chime, all three kneel to a comfortable resting position. They extend hands out as a gesture of touching each other despite the space which separates them. Laius and Jocasta close their eyes in unison. Oedipus removes his dark eyeglasses. There is the sound of another bell. All three open their eyes together. They drop their hands to the side. Perhaps the sound of wind is heard. Sand is now falling softly overhead as though they occupied an hour glass. The light overhead intensifies and then begins to dim. There is no sight of Eustace. They speak in a whisper)

LAIUS

Our sanctification.

JOCASTA

Our sanctification.

OEDIPUS

Our sanctification.

LAIUS

And our sorrow.

JOCASTA/OEDIPUS

And our sorrow.

(Two possible endings. ONE: We see a silhouette or a projection of the kitten walking not quite in a straight line and finally jumping from a high surface downward or a low surface upward. Blackout and the three candles are extinguished. TWO: We go to blackout. Lights eventually come back up and Laius, Jocasta and Oedipus are gone. We then see the silhouette of the kitten. Final blackout)

End of Play



