

THE REX FAMILY: JOCASTA AND OEDIPUS

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by Sandra de Helen and Kate Kasten

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THE REX FAMILY: JOCASTA AND OEDIPUS

We dedicate this play to all unhappy families. For as Tolstoy said "All happy families are alike; every unhappy family is unhappy in its own way." The Rex Family was happy until it wasn't.

- Sandra de Helen and Kate Kasten

THE REX FAMILY: JOCASTA AND OEDIPUS

CAST: 11 Men, 10 Women

WOMEN OF THEBES:

JOCASTA the Queen:	Organized, keeps people on track, can be imperious, is attached to a breakfast tray
CALLIOPE:	Airy-fairy, is attached to an artist's tray
EPISIOTOME:	Gloomy like Eeyore, is attached to a medicine tray
HELEN:	Peace-loving people pleaser, is attached to a cosmetics sampler tray
PISTOPHONE:	Generally pissed off, is attached to a waitress tray
TRACHEOTOME:	A bit of a drama queen, gave up smoking, is attached to an ash tray
MEDIOCRITE:	Not really with it, is attached to an empty tray
THE SPHINX:	Half woman, half lion, cruel
THE GODDESS:	Literally a slug (human-sized), philosophical
TIRESIAS:	Blind prophet; androgynous, wise, sarcastic

MEN OF THEBES:

OEDIPUS	The King, a big baby
CREON	Jocasta's brother, stern, bossy
ARISTOTLE	Philosophical
DICTYS	Always hungry
TOMOLUS	Left-brained
SCORPIOS	Arrested unfairly for unnatural act
SPHINX'S 3VICTIMS	Hapless, terrified but trying not to show it
APOLLO	A god, macho and insecure
PRIEST OF APOLLO	Unctuous
TIME:	Approximately 429 BCE
PLACE:	Thebes, Greece

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ACT 1 SCENE I

Stage is bare of scenery except for a large flaming sun suspended high in the air. It is a soft-sculpture—sun-bright colored, cushiony, sensuous. Stage is dark as play begins. There is the sound of a whistle, then marching, with shouted instructions, as of a drill team. As lights come up full, we see ten people on stage in drill team formation. The men wear red togas, the women wear green. Tiresias wears a multi-colored cloak. Those in green have trays of various kinds attached to their left hands. They are holding these trays high in the air, out of the way. Those in red look as if they dressed in the dark—shoes on the wrong feet, clothes awry, hair messy, etc. All the actors are wearing white drill team boots with tassels. The leader, Jocasta, in green, wears a drum major hat, wears a whistle around her neck and carries a baton. She blows her whistle again and the women stop. The men continue to march haphazardly.

JOCASTA. *(She bears a breakfast tray, daintily arranged with linen napkin, a flower in a delicate vase, etc.)* Stop! Tomolus! How did you get behind Dictys? You started in front. Ari! This way! Oedipus! *(She shuffles men around. To the women.)* These men are hopeless now! *(To the men.)* Precision! The whole point of a drill team is precision!

TRACHEOTOME. *(She bears an ash tray, a big garish one as if made in occupational therapy.)* Jocasta, the other point of a drill team is symmetry. How can we have symmetry with these trays on our hands? *(Other women nod in agreement. They lower their trays and move together. The men, still marching, wander around the stage, each going off by himself.)*

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EPISIOTOME. *(She bears a medicine tray containing little cups of different colors and multi-colored substances in each cup.)* We might as well forget the Aphrodite and Adonis festival this year.

JOCASTA. I've coached the Theban Drill team to victory at every festival for the past three years, Episiotome. I will not give up now.

HELEN. *(She bears a cosmetics sampler tray and speaks sympathetically.)* I know it's a great disappointment to you, Jocasta, but perhaps we need to be just a teeny bit realistic.

TRACHEOTOME. What have we done to deserve these trays, Helen? There's no precedent for it. It's a *sui generis* case.

PISTOPHONE. Generous! Nothing generous about it. It's cruel and vindictive.

TRACHEOTOME. *Sui generis.* It's *Sui. Sui*, Pistophone.

PISTOPHONE. You're speaking Latin.

CALLIOPE. Pig Latin.

EPISIOTOME. Well, Calliope, it's all Greek to me.

PISTOPHONE. It just means unique. But everything's Greek to you, Tracheotome. You're a Misopotamian.

TRACHEOTOME. Not Mis! Mes! Mesopotamian. Mes.

HELEN. That's a bit harsh.

EPISIOTOME. It is mes.

TRACHEOTOME. See?!

PISTOPHONE. Well, she can say it because she is one. But that doesn't give you the right, does it Jocasta?

JOCASTA. Focus! Focus! *(The men are beginning to drift off stage in various directions, some into the audience.)* Hey, nab those men before they get lost. *(The women go and collar the men and bring them back center.)* Look at them. It's pitiful. *(Takes one of the men's hands, pushes men into a huddle. Talks to them as if they didn't understand English.)* Guys, we're going to take a little break now, do you understand? I want you to walk over to that grove of olive trees and sit down while we talk. Okay? *(They nod vaguely.)* Oedipus will lead the way.

OEDIPUS. *(Looking up, confused.)* Say, is it Ed ipus? O dipus? EE dipus? It's my own name and I can never remember.

TOMOLUS. EE dipus.

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DICTYS. Tomolus, it's Edipus, right Aristotle?

ARISTOTLE. I think it's Odipus.

OEDIPUS. Boy, you say it enough, it kind of loses its meaning. Edipus Odipus Eedipus *(to Jocasta.)* What does it mean anyway?

JOCASTA. It means big puffed up feet.

OEDIPUS. *(Looks down at his feet.)* Well, now that makes sense.

HELEN. *(Holding out a length of string.)* Here, Oedipus, you hold the end of the string. You're the leader because you're king.

OEDIPUS. I'm king! All right!

HELEN. *(Taking each man's hand and giving him a part of the string to hold.)* Tomolus, Dictys, Ari, you all just follow him. *(Women all watch as they drift out. Helen calls after them.)* And mind you, don't take off your chlamyses!! Here, Oedipus, your chlamys is falling off.

OEDIPUS. What's a chlamys?

HELEN. Your short tunic.

OEDIPUS. Oh, that's what it's called?

HELEN. You'll catch your death. Here, let me fasten it for you. *(His tunic is falling off his shoulder. He continues to drift away.)* Wait, wait, wait. *(She grabs him and pins it at his right shoulder, then gives him a gentle push in the direction of the other men. Women shake their heads.)*

CALLIOPE. They've lost all logic.

TRACHEOTOME. What do you mean lost it?

CALLIOPE. Well, lost it more?

EPISIOTOME. You mean like "let's go to war to end wars?" More than that?

TRACHEOTOME. You mean like, for sport, let's wrap our knuckles with hard leather straps and hit each other in the face until one of us passes out? More than that?

CALLIOPE. Well...

PISTOPHONE. Like bleeding sick people to make them well?

HELEN. Calliope just means that before, they used logic of a kind.

PISTOPHONE. Masculine logic.

JOCASTA. And now they have no logic.

PISTOPHONE. A vast improvement.

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JOCASTA. Of course it is. And strangely, they're only confused when they're wearing their chlamyses.

CALLIOPE. Kudos to you for figuring that one out, Tracheotome.

TRACHEOTOME. It wasn't that hard when that one guy narrowed his eyes and said, "there's something wrong here."

HELEN. The guy without the tunic.

CALLIOPE. We've got to keep their confusion going on indefinitely.

HELEN. It's much to our favor.

JOCASTA. Yes, we'll have to keep an eagle eye on their state of dress. Keep them in the chlamys 24/7.

CALLIOPE. Even in bed or in the bath?

HELEN. Just tell them the chlamys makes them look sexy. Especially when it's wet.

TRACHEOTOME. The weather is getting warmer, they're going to complain about being too hot.

HELEN. Tell them the chlamys makes them look hot.

PISTOPHONE. It's these damn trays that are the problem.

CALLIOPE. What has Thebes done to deserve this plague?

JOCASTA. Women stuck with trays, men utterly unable to carry a thought to its conclusion.

PISTOPHONE. We'll never get rid of these trays.

TRACHEOTOME. Even without trays, our lives weren't a whole lot better. Remember what it was like?

SCENE 2

Lights dim as women remove trays, attach Velcro strips to their stomachs. Then men come bounding in. They have on baseball caps, are carrying oversized baseball bats and a big bag full of cloth baby dolls in fetal positions. Men spring into action, warming up as if for a big game. The women roll in a large baby play pen. The men see the women and shout "play ball!" Women brace themselves as men begin to bat and pitch the babies to them. Women attach the babies to Velcro strips on their stomachs. As a new baby is thrown to them, they tear off the old one, releasing it from its fetal position, and toss it into the play pen. During this

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sequence, the women are silent and grim, the men loud and boisterous. They keep up a constant, meaningless patter.

MEN. Batter up! Put her in there! Burn that baby home! Good eye! Let's get two! Fire it in there! Make a pitch to ya! Be ready to steal! Get off the bag! Hustle it up! Come on, run! Batter can't hit! Pitcher can't pitch! Pitcher's got a rubber arm! Swing! Throw it to the glove! Be ready for the double play! Bunt! Cover home! Play's on first! Leave that base when the pitcher throws the ball! Way to watch 'em! All the way in! Keep your shoulder up! Swing level! You got her now! Don't waste 'er! Burn it right by 'er! Just a good solid hit! You're the one! Way out! Call it! Slide!

(After the scene has been established, lights dim and men freeze. Women remove their babies and attach their trays. They push play pen offstage.)

HELEN. Constant motherhood. That was the big thing.

CALLIOPE. Yeah, you were in your element, Helen.

HELEN. Well, I do like children, but there are limits.

TRACHEOTOME. I miss the days when we were—

WOMEN. —between kings!

PISTOPHONE. Right after Laios croaked off—

EPISIOTOME. And before Oedipus blew into town.

HELEN. I wish we could go back. *(Sun suddenly disappears off stage left, and from stage right, suspended high in the air, there appears a soft-sculpture moon and stars—fat and glittery—which move across to left as sun appears on the right. Meanwhile, the baseball/baby scene is moving offstage backwards in slow motion. All the women leave stage left, but Jocasta and Helen appear again stage right without trays, carrying flowers and a broom. Lights come up full and sun is back in original position. Helen starts to sweep off a rectangular area on the floor marked by a headstone with the inscription “King Laios, RIP” and Jocasta begins to arrange flowers around the rectangle. The two are careful to respect the boundaries of the rectangle on the floor. They step around and over it.)*

HELEN. *(Standing, gesturing at Laios's tomb.)* Why is Laios already buried when they haven't done the eulogy yet?

JOCASTA. Oh, you know Laios. He was afraid some souvenir hunter would cut off his ears ... Wow! I haven't been here since I was a kid.

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HELEN. Nice echo.

JOCASTA. No kidding.

(They whoop, clap, stamp their feet, whistle, tap dance. People backstage in unison echo them. They ignore the boundaries of Laios's grave and actually dance on it. CREON enters suddenly. The women jump back and immediately resume their original occupations.)

CREON. Have you finished?

JOCASTA. *(Open mouthed.)* —the work! *(Nods enthusiastically.)* Yes! Yes! All done.

HELEN. *(Nervously.)* Look, Creon, don't these flowers look nice?

CREON. *(Ignoring them.)* The funeral procession is at the entrance.

Arrange yourselves. (Jocasta and Helen get up hastily and go to stand in position. Jocasta stands next to Creon upstage of the grave and a little to the right, facing others. The sound of chanting is heard as PRIEST OF APOLLO in long red tunic and black and white clerical collar and mask enters with incense and scrolls, leading funeral procession. He goes to stand between Creon and Jocasta, as others take places with Helen. One of the followers carries a small stool and places it for the priest to stand on so that he is raised a little above the others. He hands out scrolls to everyone.)

PRIEST. *(In the manner of a pompous Protestant minister. He reads from scroll.)* "Friends, Thebans, urban dwellers. We have come here today to praise King Laios, not to bury him." *(Aside.)* As you can see, he is already interred. "It was our mighty leader's wish that he not be laid in state. He preferred that we remember him as he was: Lively, compassionate, politically astute, and extremely ... " Creon, what is this word? I never could read Laios's handwriting.

CREON. Humble.

PRIEST. "And extremely humble. Laios will, no doubt, be remembered as the King of Thebes, regardless of the number of his successors, for Laios put Thebes on the map. Laios will ever be remembered for the innovating spirit which led him to construct the King Laios Children's Orthopedic Hospital, even though he, himself, never personally crippled a child. In fact, King Laios could be found on his garden bench, a child on each knee.

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He often said that children were an inspiration to him because they were so full of gusto ..."

CROWD. (*Reading from scrolls.*) "And as we all go round only once in life, we gotta grab all the gusto we can get ..."

PRIEST. "And he would have us remember his words and emulate his life. As he was a great humanitarian ..."

CROWD. "So can we all be."

PRIEST. "As he was a great shuffleboard player ..."

CROWD. "So can we be."

PRIEST. "Laios realized we cannot all be kings, as the choice of our parents is not left to us ..."

CROWD. "But to the stork."

PRIEST. "And once we're born, it's too late to change. But he would have us remember the four 'h's' ..."

CROWD. "Humility, humor, huckleberries and honey."

PRIEST. "Huckleberries and honey were the mainstay of Laios's diet and he believed they would make him immortal." (*Aside.*) Which they no doubt would have, had he not been struck down in his prime. "But King Laios laughed at his mistakes ..."

CROWD. "And would have us do the same." (*A sound like a howl, which could be interpreted as wailing, comes from Jocasta. Priest pauses for a moment and then continues, raising his voice.*) Although we mourn his untimely death today with great lamentation, the weeping will soon pass away ..."

CROWD. "As does the rain."

PRIEST. "And give way to joyous laughter. ..."

CROWD. "As the rain gives way to the sun."

(*On these last lines, their voices are getting quieter, until you can only hear mumbling. Meanwhile, Tracheotome has led Jocasta through the crowd and brought her down center facing audience, as if Jocasta had broken down and needed care.*)

TRACHEOTOME. (*Jocasta is laughing uncontrollably.*) Jocasta, quit laughing. You're going to get in such trouble!

JOCASTA. (*Choking with laughter*) I was just laughing at Laios's mistakes. As he would have wished! (*They laugh together.*)

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TRACHEOTOME. Now stop!

(They are still laughing when Creon breaks through the crowd and comes to stand beside them.)

CREON. I can see you're already suffering from being without a consort, Jocasta. It won't be for long. The Council of Thebes has promised you to the first man who can answer the riddle of the Sphinx.

(They freeze as the upright tomb opens inward, like cupboard doors, and the Sphinx is pushed through it to center stage. The sides of the tomb then become the sides of the Sphinx. The Sphinx is a creature with paws of a lion, face and breasts of a woman, eagle's wings, serpent's tail. There are large foam rubber moveable lips and slits where eyelids would be with two human hands protruding to move up and down as eyelashes. As the SPHINX is pushed on, all walk offstage. Creon and the three men, on their way to answer the riddle, re-enter, left of Sphinx. Creon is leading the men on, giving them last minute instructions.)

SPHINX. *(Two people are behind the Sphinx, operating the mouth and eyelashes, and speaking for it.)* Well, if it isn't Creon. Brought me some hors d'oeuvres, have you?

CREON. *(To men.)* Now men, you know what to do—

MAN. But Creon, the Sphinx has licked 128 men!

CREON. So, the odds are in your favor. *(Gestures toward the Sphinx with his arm extended. She snaps at his hand. He snatches it back.)*

SPHINX. Ho ho! Don't worry, Creon. I wouldn't bite the hand that feeds me! *(Creon restores his dignity by brusquely pushing the men forward.)*

Oh, my! How nice. Come here, young men. *(In unison they take one cautious step forward. Sphinx chuckles.)* Don't be afraid. I wouldn't eat a wise man. You know what? I'm in the habit of rewarding wise men and making them king. Now, if you don't mind, I'd like to put your wisdom to a little test. *(Chuckles.)* It's only a riddle. I eat the ones who can't guess it, but that let's all of you out, I'm sure. *(Men droop. Back off a step.)* Now then, come a little closer, dearies, and I'll tell you the riddle. *(Men take one step up to Sphinx.)* Here it is. Ready? There is a creature. It's two-footed and also four-footed and also three-footed. It has one voice. And when it goes on most feet, it goes most slowly. What is it? *(A giant hour-glass is produced—held up by an arm that comes through the mouth. Men in*

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unison mime thinking hard: they slap their foreheads, say "hmmm," stroke imaginary beards, put hands on hips and scratch heads, etc. Suddenly the hour glass is raised.) Time's up! (Men throw their hands in front of their faces to protect themselves. Sphinx opens down the middle and hands reach out, pulling men inside. Sphinx closes again. Lips are moving in chewing motion. An arm, miming a big tongue, sweeps over mouth as if licking lips.) Mmm. Good.

(Oedipus is heard at the back of the theatre. He strides through the audience and up to the stage, singing loudly "Oedipus, Oedipus" to the tune of "Jingle Bells." Oedipus is dressed in red like other men, but he has conspicuous, exaggeratedly long, thick eyelashes.)

OEDIPUS. *(Singing.)*

Oedipus, Oedipus

I'm the glorious king

World-renowned and beautiful

You may kiss my ring.

(Creon is looking off, shading his eyes against the sun, trying to figure out who this stranger is. Oedipus walks toward him and reaches out his hand.)

OEDIPUS. Hi there. I'm Oedipus, from Corinth— *(Sphinx's tail snaps down like a whip to keep Oedipus from crossing into the city and shaking hands with Creon. Both Creon and Oedipus jump back. Oedipus approaches Sphinx cautiously.)* Here, kitty. Here, kitty. *(He puts out his hand to pat her on the head and she snaps at it. He jumps back. To Creon.)* Is this your cat?

SPHINX. *(To Creon.)* Is this a friend of yours? *(To Oedipus, with false friendliness.)* Any friend of Creon's is a friend of mine.

OEDIPUS. Why thanks. I appreciate that. I'm Oedipus from—holds hand out again and Sphinx snaps at it. *(Oedipus jumps back.)*

CREON. *(Abruptly, to Oedipus.)* Are you any good at riddles?

OEDIPUS. Well, I don't like to boast, but—

CREON. Why did the Corinthian throw the butter out the window?

OEDIPUS. To see a butterfly. *(Angrily.)* I despise Corinthian jokes. They're in very bad taste.

SPHINX. *(Interrupting.)* Creon, don't insult this person's intelligence. *(To Oedipus.)* I've got one for you. What creature is two-footed, three-footed,

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and also four-footed, has one voice, and goes most slowly when it goes on most feet?

(Hour-glass appears again, but Oedipus doesn't notice and is not conscious of being timed or that this is important. Time has almost run out when he guesses the riddle.)

OEDIPUS. *(Thinking.)* Gee, that's a hard one. *(Takes gum out of his mouth and puts it behind his ear in order to think better. Has a flash of recognition. He has read this riddle somewhere. Reaches into pocket and pulls out bubble gum wrappers.)* Oh, I know that one. Was it Double Bubble— *(Reaches in other pocket and pulls out more wrappers.)* "Why did the chicken cross the—" No, that's not it. "How many Corinthians— *(Shakes head indignantly and throws that wrapper on ground. Finds gum not unwrapped yet. Unwraps it and pops it in his mouth as he reads the wrapper.)* All right! Here it is! " ... blah blah blah four footed ... three footed ... one voice ... most slowly ... yadayada ... " *(Turns wrapper upside down to read the answer.)* It's a person! *(Reading.)* A baby crawls on all fours, an old person with a cane walks on three, and when a baby crawls it goes slowest." Say, that's a good one! *(Sphinx mouth droops, eyes shut.)* Now, I've got one for ya.

CREON. Hah! *(Steps forward, pushing Oedipus out of the way.)* I demand that you spit those men out! *(Sphinx opens eyes partway, sneers, opens mouth and lethargically spits out arms, legs, etc. Oedipus blows a bubble with his gum as he stares, fascinated.)*

OEDIPUS. Say, that's some case of indigestion.

SCENE 3

Oedipus and Creon freeze as lighting changes. Jocasta and Tracheotome enter and cross to other side of stage, talking. The light follows them. They are dressed as in opening scene. They stand stage right.

TRACHEOTOME. And the next thing we knew, you were married off to Oedipus. The men lost their wits and we got these trays.

(Creon and Oedipus exit up center and Sphinx is pushed off stage as Pistophone enters.)

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JOCASTA. Where is Oedipus?

PISTOPHONE. Where are those men from the drill team?

HELEN. *(Entering from left with men in tow, still holding onto their string.)* Just follow the leader, gentlemen.

JOCASTA. Helen, have you seen Oedipus lately?

HELEN. Yes, I have had that privilege.

SCENE 4

Oedipus enters behind Helen, talking to himself.

OEDIPUS. Ordinarily, I'd be the one to save the day, but since I'm ... Then it has to be ... Because it couldn't ... *(To others.)* Don't you agree?

JOCASTA. Whatever.

OEDIPUS. So my plan is ... And as soon as ... Then everything will be ... *(To others.)* So. Let's go!

WOMEN. Where?

OEDIPUS. *(Surprised that they didn't get the gist.)* To consult Apollo!

DICTYS. Why?

OEDIPUS. Ummm ... Just because?

DICTYS. Oh. Okay.

ARISTOTLE. *(Handing string to Oedipus.)* You be the leader.

OEDIPUS. *(Pleased.)* Gee, thanks! *(He takes the string, makes gesture for men to follow, starts downstage toward audience, humming, "Oedipus, Oedipus." Women watch men skeptically, hop down off stage to guide men back upstage center, to the Apollo figure, which has been wheeled out on stage from behind. Women stand to right of statue, here and there adjusting the men's tunics, men to the left.*

APOLLO is a large cut-out of a Greek god statue with a big hole where his crotch is. The penis—a person in red unitard—hangs limply out of the hole from its waist. On either side of it are hooks holding crutches. Attached to the left crutch is a megaphone with a large "A" on it. Oedipus steps forward, takes crutches from their hooks and gives them to the penis, who hoists itself up on them. The penis should be completely horizontal on the crutches, at right angle to the cut-out. Oedipus falls flat on his face before

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the statue. The men are at attention. Women are standing off casually to the side suppressing laughter.)

APOLLO: *(Speaking by way of the penis, who leans nonchalantly, with chin in hand, elbows bent, on crutches.)* Oedipus, you may rise. *(Oedipus rises on one knee.)* This is Apollo speaking. I know what's troubling you. A plague has wreaked havoc on your city. Your people can endure it no longer. What is the cause of the plague? How can you save your people? That's it in a nutshell.

OEDIPUS. Oh. Is there a plague?

APOLLO. Yes.

OEDIPUS. Oh wise Oracle of Apollo, you have hit the nail on the head. Or else you're completely off the mark. Does anyone know?

APOLLO. *(Smugly.)* I am not called infallible for nothing. *(Apollo picks up megaphone and speaks in oratorical style.)* What is the cause of this terrible misfortune that plagues your land? *(Puts megaphone down.)* Well, I'll tell you. A king has been murdered. *(Men gasp in unison.)* King Laios, who ruled before Oedipus. *(Men gasp again.)* Find his murderer, who lives among you. See that he is punished unmercifully, and the plague will be lifted.

OEDIPUS. *(Stands up, importantly.)* As ruler of Thebes, I pledge to find and punish the the the what?

APOLLO. Murderer and mother diddler.

OEDIPUS. Oh ... yeah. Murderer and ... uh ... what you said... *(Low voice, to Apollo.)* But sir, how will I find this villain? It's been a long time since ... Who was killed? Or was it yesterday?

WOMEN. A long time.

APOLLO. *(Into megaphone.)* Be not fainthearted! Shoulder your responsibility like a man. You must come through for the team. Show 'em what you're made of. Meet your enemies without flinching and when they ask if you're ready to surrender, you tell 'em—

MEN. Nuts!!

APOLLO. *(Lowering megaphone)* The god Apollo has spoken. *(Penis lowers and goes limp. Oedipus puts crutches back on hooks, then turns to men.)*

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OEDIPUS. Men, there's an enemy in our midst. A m— ... mmm Methodist. (*Women shake their heads.*) ... a millionaire!

WOMEN. (*Prompting.*) Murr—

OEDIPUS. A murmurer.

WOMEN. (*Shaking their heads.*) d—

OEDIPUS. (*As if he knew it all along and was only testing them.*)

Murderer! He's a slick operator, so he won't be easy to run down. (*Apollo penis is wriggling back and forth, trying to rise without crutches. Can't do it.*)

APOLLO. Oedipus!

OEDIPUS. (*Runs over and gives crutches.*) What, sir?

APOLLO. (*Getting up on crutches.*) I forgot to give you a little clue.

OEDIPUS. Oh goody. (*Sternly to Aristotle.*) Write this down.

ARISTOTLE. (*Searching fruitlessly for pen. Ignores order.*) In addition to murder, this villain has performed an act that offends mankind to the very marrow of his bones. You must find the unspeakable doer of this unspeakable deed.

MEN. What act is this, wise Oracle?

APOLLO. (*Looks slowly and accusingly at each of them. Lifts megaphone to mouth and speaks into it.*) An unnatural act!! (*Men gasp and look at each other suspiciously.*)

SCENE 5

Lights on stage change as sun moves across sky to stage left. Moon and stars follow it across the sky and they disappear as sun appears once again stage right. It is the next morning. Tomolus, Dictys, and Oedipus are on stage. They are studying a flip chart which was placed down stage during time lapse as Apollo statue was removed.

TOMOLUS. (*With a pointer, indicating red line on graph.*) Now, Chief, as you can see, there tends to be more unnatural acts performed in the evening after the sun sets, than there are here in the early hours of the day such as five or six a.m.

OEDIPUS. I see. I see. So what?

THE REX FAMILY: JOCASTA AND OEDIPUS

TOMOLUS. We're briefing you on the facts as we know them, Sir, in order to find the despicable unnatural act doer.

DICTYS. Oh, I've got one! Just the other day I saw this man holding a door for a woman—

OEDIPUS. (*Meaningfully.*) Hmm. A couple of carpenters.

DICTYS. No, no, no. They were going through the door. And he tried to make her go first.

OEDIPUS. Against her will?

DICTYS. Well, sort of. And he was carrying twenty-five kilos of olive oil and had to hold the door open with his foot.

OEDIPUS. That was unnatural.

TOMOLUS. That was me.

OEDIPUS. Why were you doing that? Was that logical?

TOMOLUS. Um... No? (*Troubled pause.*)

OEDIPUS. Did we decide which acts are the most unnatural?

DICTYS. Did we have lunch?

TOMOLUS. No. Let's get back to business. Sir, do you mind if I call you Rex? I hate being so formal all the time.

OEDIPUS. You may refer to me as Rex when you're speaking in the third person, but if you speak to me directly, I prefer that you refer to me by my full name.

TOMOLUS. Oedipus Rex?

OEDIPUS. What?

DICTYS. You can call me Dick.

TOMOLUS. And you can both call me Tom.

OEDIPUS. Okay, Tom, Dick. Shouldn't there be an Ari?

DICTYS. Aristotle doesn't like to be called Ari, Sir.

OEDIPUS. That's unnatural. Have him arrested.

TOMOLUS. But Sir, Ari is our arresting officer. You can't have the man arrest himself!

DICTYS. That's unnatural.

OEDIPUS. Are you calling me unnatural?

DICTYS. Oh no, Sir. Not to your face.

TOMOLUS. If you'll face this way, Sir, here, see the chart? We are on the verge of solving this dilemma, I'm sure of it.

THE REX FAMILY: JOCASTA AND OEDIPUS

OEDIPUS. What dilemma?

TOMOLUS. I forget.

OEDIPUS. You idiot!

TOMOLUS. Hey, that hurts my feelings!

OEDIPUS, DICTYS. What? How come?

TOMOLUS. I don't know, it just does.

DICTYS. I wish Aristotle would hurry and show up. I'm hungry.

ARISTOTLE. *(Entering with a struggling man, SCORPIOS.)* Chief, I've found the unnatural act doer.

OEDIPUS. Unnatural act doer, what do you have to say for yourself?

SCORPIOS. King Oedipus! My name is Scorprios, and I have been arrested unfairly.

TOMOLUS. What unnatural act is he guilty of?

ARISTOTLE. When I came upon him, he was sitting on the steps eating ice cream!

OEDIPUS. I see. But Aristotle, we all eat ice cream.

DICTYS. I could go for a big dish right now.

TOMOLUS. Perhaps it was the kind of ice cream that brought about the arrest.

ARISTOTLE. No, it was the way he was eating it.

(Dictys, Tomolus and Oedipus look at each other ominously.)

OEDIPUS. Wasn't he using a spoon?

ARISTOTLE. That's just the point. He was using a spoon to stir it! He kept stirring it and stirring it, round and round, turning it all to soup. I thought I would lose my mind.

OEDIPUS. *(Warily.)* I see.

SCORPIOS. I like it stirred up. The texture's better that way.

ARISTOTLE. There! He admits it!

OEDIPUS. Tom, Dick, Ari, we've got the wrong man.

TOMOLUS. But Oedipus, we all agree that stirring ice cream is an unnatural act in the extreme.

OEDIPUS. NO, that's where you're mistaken. We don't all agree. It happens that I myself always stir my ice cream.

TOM, DICK, ARI. Uh oh.

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SCORPIOS. (*Jubilantly.*) I'm free! I can go back to Sparta. (*Sternly.*) You'll be hearing from my lawyer.

OEDIPUS. You're not from around here are you?

SCORPIOS. God no.

OEDIPUS. I thought not. That explains why your thinking seems to be ...

TOM, DICK, ARI. Normal.

SCORPIOS. By the way, why are all the Theban girls holding trays?

TOM, DICK, ARI. It's not just the girls, it's the women too.

SCORPIOS. Huh?

OEDIPUS. Perhaps you could help us solve a very tricky problem.

SCORPIOS. What?

OEDIPUS. We're looking for someone who has ... done something

ARISTOTLE. Something ... uh ... un ... intentional?

TOMOLUS. No. Something un ... uh ... im ... material?

DICTYS. I thought it was un ... nerving?

OEDIPUS. Something bad.

SCORPIOS. Oh yeah. I heard that rumor. It's spread up and down the Aegean. Some dastardly deed or other. But then, that's Thebans for you. No offense.

OEDIPUS. None taken.

SCORPIOS. Have you checked the records at the recorder of deeds office?

OEDIPUS. This is no ordinary deed.

TOMOLUS. As you can see, we've mapped out the times most unnatural acts are performed.

OEDIPUS. But that's as far as we got.

SCORPIOS. Maybe you should get a prophet to help you.

TOM, DICK, ARI. Good idea!

SCORPIOS. How about the 200-year-old blind prophet Tiresias?

OEDIPUS. Find him at once, before he croaks off.

SCORPIOS. You may want to get the Priest of Apollo to find him. He is in a more deified realm ... more compos mentis than you guys. I'll invoke him for you.

OEDIPUS. Who are you, anyway?

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SCORPIOS. I am an emissary from the Council of Sparta. I've come to ask Thebes to contribute arms to the Macedonians.

OEDIPUS. The who?

TOM, DICK, ARI. Macedonians.

OEDIPUS. What about them?

SCORPIOS. We want Sparta and Thebes to go halves, giving the Macedonians spears, short swords, javelins, and horses.

OEDIPUS. Is that a good idea?

TOM, DICK, ARI. Maybe not?

SCORPIOS. It's a friendly gesture, to keep them from attacking us.

OEDIPUS. Are they planning to attack us?

SCORPIOS. Not as such. But you can never be too careful, especially with our campaign against Athens going on. So what about it?

OEDIPUS. About...?

SCORPIOS. Can we count on those arms?

OEDIPUS. Ridiculous. I count on my fingers.

TOM, DICK, ARI. Me too.

OEDIPUS. But I will give it serious thought.

SCORPIOS. Thank you. I'll go now and invoke the priest of Apollo.

OEDIPUS. Thank you.

SCORPIOS. Don't mention it. And don't forget about those arms, Your Majesty. *(He exits.)*

OEDIPUS. *(To men.)* He called me "Your Majesty."

TOM, DICK, ARI. And so you are sir.

OEDIPUS. Now what was it that guy wanted?

TOM, DICK, ARI. Arms?

OEDIPUS. If I'm not mistaken, he already has two. I refuse his request outright. Write that down, Tomolus. *(Tomolus searches fruitlessly for a writing utensil.)*

DICTYS. Say, I think I'll go out for something to eat. I feel like lamb. Anyone else want anything? Gyros?

OEDIPUS. Now, now, no need to flatter, we're all heroes, you too. Come on, come on, let's go.

(The four men wander off stage as lights focus on the sun, which moves across the sky and stops center. TIRESIAS comes on from left. Her hair is

THE REX FAMILY: JOCASTA AND OEDIPUS

white. She is dressed in a multi-colored cloak, and walks with a cane. She walks slowly to center. Priest of Apollo, dressed as he was at Laios's funeral, enters from right and approaches Tiresias.)

PRIEST. (Unctuous, ministerial voice) Excuse me, Madam. Have you seen a very, very old blind prophet go by here?

TIRESIAS. No.

(Priest looks confused. He looks closely at Tiresias. Waves hand in front of Tiresias's face. Tiresias continues on her way. Priest thinks a minute.)

PRIEST. *(Looking off in opposite direction of Tiresias.) (Calls.)*

Tiresias!

(Tiresias turns.)

TIRESIAS. What? *(Priest sees her reaction, does a puzzled take. Looks her over.)* Who are you?

PRIEST. *(Unctuous voice.)* I am the priest of Apollo.

(Walks slowly around Tiresias in a circle, examining her.) How old are you?

TIRESIAS. Two hundred. Not that it's any of your business.

PRIEST. And you are blind, are you not?

TIRESIAS. What's it to you?

PRIEST. But you're a ... woman.

TIRESIAS. Yes, I'd swear to it. How about you?

PRIEST. You must be an imposter. Tiresias is a man. He has always been a man. He always will be a man. *(Priest stalks off.)*

(Pistophone enters.)

TIRESIAS. *(To Pistophone.)* Who's there?

PISTOPHONE. I'm Pistophone.

TIRESIAS. I'm Tiresias.

PISTOPHONE. The prophet?! Whoa! Glad to meet you. I'm from Thebes—

TIRESIAS. *(Reaches out to take her hand with heavily loaded waitress tray.)* My goodness! *(Feels tray over to find out what it is.)* Why are you carrying this heavy tray?

PISTOPHONE. The women of Thebes have all been afflicted with these stinking trays. We don't know why but it seems to have something to do with Oedipus, the king.

THE REX FAMILY: JOCASTA AND OEDIPUS

TIRESIAS. How interesting. Perhaps we'd better go talk to the man.

PISTOPHONE. Well, we can try ... *(As Pistophone helps Tiresias make her way off right, the sun slowly moves left until it stops a few feet from the end. As soon as Pistophone and Tiresias are off, Aristotle, Tomolus, Dictys and Oedipus come on from left and begin pacing aimlessly back and forth. Pistophone and Tiresias immediately re-enter from right.)*

PISTOPHONE. Here is Tiresias, the prophet you've been waiting for.

OEDIPUS. Aha! Aha! I've got it now, wait, don't tell me. Yes! I sent for Tiresias the seer, that old man who always seems to know just what is going on. What's going on, Tiresias?

TIRESIAS. That's just what I came to tell you.

OEDIPUS. Aren't you a woman? Tiresias isn't a woman. At least I don't think he is—

ARISTOTLE. Wait a minute, Oedipus. Is this really a woman? *(To Tiresias.)* You don't seem to have a tray attached to you anywhere, so perhaps you are Tiresias who is a man, dressed as a woman.

TIRESIAS. I used to be a man, but I'm a woman now ... *(To Jocasta.)* Is Jocasta here? I came to give advice about the Theban plague.

DICTYS. How did it happen?

TIRESIAS. Well—

TOMOLUS. Is it true that all women's rest rooms have couches? That sure would be nice.

ARISTOTLE. Can you feel your womb?

TIRESIAS. A womb is not a requirement, you know.

OEDIPUS. *(Enthusiastically.)* Do your nipples feel different?

TIRESIAS. Again, none of your business. I came to give you the benefit of my second sight. The situation is this: Oedipus, you are the villain you're looking for.

OEDIPUS. Huh?

TIRESIAS. *(Taking Oedipus's arm, talking very distinctly into his face. She punctuates each word by emphatically poking Oedipus in the chest.)* You killed your father, married your mother, and Apollo has sent a plague to make you see the error of your ways.

OEDIPUS. *(Nodding enthusiastically, as if waiting for a punch line.)* Mmm hmm?

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TIRESIAS. You are going to have to punish yourself severely in order to lift this plague.

OEDIPUS. How are you going to do that?

TIRESIAS. Well, you have to decide what's fitting. Now, is all that clear? Do you want me to repeat it?

OEDIPUS. (*Happily.*) Clear as a bell.

TIRESIAS. Good. Where is that young woman? (*Pistophone steps forward.*) You know, changing from a man into a woman is very interesting. My feelings are different from what I would have expected. For instance, I'm still attracted to women. What does that mean?

PISTOPHONE. Oh, that's normal.

TIRESIAS. How about taking me where there are a lot of other women? I feel like talking with people who might be interested in my experiences— Oh! But I don't have a tray! Do you think I could maybe stop off and buy one? Let me try yours on for size.

PISTOPHONE. They don't come off.

TIRESIAS. Hmm. I wonder why I didn't get one when I got changed? Is it because of the cane? Or am I not a whole woman?

PISTOPHONE. No, no. It means you're not a *Theban* woman.

TIRESIAS. (*As they exit.*) Well, that's a relief.

OEDIPUS. Did she say I have to think up a punishment for her? What did she say again?

ARISTOTLE. Where am I?

DICTYS. Let's go get some dinner. I could eat another gyro.

TOMOLUS. Ew. I could eat another hero.

ARISTOTLE. What are you, a cannibal?

OEDIPUS. You go on ahead. I have to think. (*Tom, Dick, Ari, Pistophone, Tiresias exit.*) Now, let me go back. Okay, I was looking for someone who does unnatural acts. And I sent for Tiresias the seer to—

JOCASTA. (*Entering in a hurry.*) Rex, did you take my keys to the chariot? I have to get down to the grove in five minutes—

OEDIPUS. (*Talking to himself.*) Does this have anything to do with stirring ice cream?

JOCASTA. No, it's because I have to go to a meeting.

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OEDIPUS. Stop! (*Trying to remember.*) Tiresias said ... (*Repeats Tiresias word for word, poking himself in the chest, as if re-creating the scene.*)

"You killed your father and married your mother and Apollo has sent a plague to make you see the error of your ways." (*He is suddenly horror-stricken.*) But how could that be? (*Clutches Jocasta.*)

JOCASTA. Oh, Oedipus, that was just a prophecy. Prophecies don't mean anything. We had a prophecy like that once. It was predicted that our son would kill his father and sleep with his mother, but it never happened. Laios took him out on a mountainside when the child was only three days old and left him to die with his feet pinned together.

OEDIPUS and JOCASTA. (*Disgusted take to the audience.*) Eww!

JOCASTA. Oh, Laios was a doll! I could tell you stories about Laios and his prophecies. Once we went to the Athena temple for marital counselling and the oracle predicted that in 2500 years the psychology of a whole culture would be based on the sex life of the King of Thebes!

OEDIPUS and JOCASTA. Ha! Ha! Ha!

OEDIPUS. Well, I had a prophecy that I would kill my father, King Polybus of Corinth, but I left Corinth long ago to keep it from happening. And (*pause.*) you know, I think I heard he died last month.

JOCASTA. Well, of course, you were adopted, so that doesn't count.

OEDIPUS. Adopted?

JOCASTA. Oh. I thought you knew.

OEDIPUS. What do you mean, adopted? That's a rumor. Some drunkard at a banquet made that up. My mom and dad said so.

JOCASTA. Well, I don't think so, because before I got pregnant with little Laios, Jr., we thought one of us was sterile and Laios sent away for a sperm count to the famous Court Chiropractor of Corinth and she accidentally sent the results of King Polybus's sperm count and that man was as sterile as a Karoo.

OEDIPUS. What's a Karoo?

JOCASTA. Look it up. The point is, Rex, prophecies don't always come true. Laios, for instance, was killed, not by his own son, but by robbers at Phokis where three roads meet.

OEDIPUS. I vaguely remember killing someone at Phokis where three roads meet.

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JOCASTA. Robbers.

OEDIPUS. Robbers what?

JOCASTA. Robbers killed Laios, but it could have been robber.

OEDIPUS. What?!

JOCASTA. *(Sees his stricken face. Hastens to reassure him.)* I mean probably it was robbers.

OEDIPUS. Could you hold on a minute? My old foot wounds are aching. *(Sits down and takes off sandals and socks. Rubs feet.)* Ahh. That's better. *(To Jocasta.)* Now, what?

JOCASTA. Oedipus, I've never seen you take your socks off before.

OEDIPUS. I hate these ugly scars.

JOCASTA. Where? Why Oedipus Rex, you can hardly see them. Little tiny scars. It just looks like somebody pinned your feet together. *(She does a take. Oedipus is still preoccupied with his problem. Doesn't make the connection.)*

OEDIPUS. I feel so confused. I know Tiresias gave me important clues to clear up the whole thing, but I can't seem to concentrate. *(Oedipus starts to cry. The more he cries, the more it is like the cry of a new-born infant: wah wah wah. Then he stops abruptly, wipes his eyes and heaves a big sigh.)* Ahh. I haven't cried like that since I was a baby.

JOCASTA. *(Wiping his face with her toga.)* Rex, why don't you try to get your mind off your problems. Go take a little nap and everything will be okay.

OEDIPUS. I hope so. I feel a sick dread as if I were on the verge of some terrible revelation. One more clue and all the hideous facts will fall into place.

JOCASTA. Toddle off to bed, Dear, and I'll set myself to working on the problem. *(Oedipus flings himself against her, hanging on, hugging her tightly.)*

OEDIPUS. Jocasta, a mother couldn't be more comforting.

END OF ACT 1

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