

## Oedipus: Part I—Scene 2 (lines 855–958)

JOCASTA:

855 He will come;  
but, Oedipus, I think I'm worthy too  
to know what it is that disquiets you.

OEDIPUS:

It shall not be kept from you, since my mind  
has gone so far with its forebodings. Whom  
860 should I confide in rather than you, who is there  
of more importance to me who have passed  
through such a fortune?  
Polybus was my father, king of Corinth,<sup>s1</sup>  
and Merope, the Dorian,<sup>s2</sup> my mother.  
865 I was held greatest of the citizens  
in Corinth till a curious chance befell me  
as I shall tell you—curious, indeed,  
but hardly worth the store I set upon it.  
There was a dinner and at it a man,  
870 a drunken man, accused me in his drink  
of being bastard. I was furious

but held my temper under for that day.  
Next day I went and taxed<sup>s3</sup> my parents with it;  
they took the insult very ill from him,  
875 the drunken fellow who had uttered it.  
So I was comforted for their part, but  
still this thing rankled<sup>s4</sup> always, for the story  
crept about widely. And I went at last  
to Pytho, though my parents did not know.  
880 But Phoebus sent me home again unhonored  
in what I came to learn, but he foretold  
other and desperate horrors to befall me,  
that I was fated to lie with my mother,  
and show to daylight an accursed breed  
885 which men would not endure, and I was doomed  
to be murderer of the father that begot me.  
When I heard this I fled, and in the days  
that followed I would measure from the stars  
the whereabouts of Corinth—yes, I fled  
890 to somewhere where I should not see fulfilled  
the infamies<sup>s5</sup> told in that dreadful oracle.  
And as I journeyed I came to the place  
where, as you say, this king met with his death.

Jocasta, I will tell you the whole truth.

- 895 When I was near the branching of the crossroads,  
going on foot, I was encountered by  
a herald and a carriage with a man in it,  
just as you tell me. He that led the way  
and the old man himself wanted to thrust me  
900 out of the road by force. I became angry  
and struck the coachman who was pushing me.  
When the old man saw this he watched his moment,  
and as I passed he struck me from his carriage,  
full on the head with his two pointed goad.<sup>ss</sup>  
905 But he was paid in full and presently  
my stick had struck him backwards from the car  
and he rolled out of it. And then I killed them  
all. If it happened there was any tie  
of kinship twixt this man and Laius,  
910 who is then now more miserable than I,  
what man on earth so hated by the Gods,  
since neither citizen nor foreigner  
may welcome me at home or even greet me,  
but drive me out of doors? And it is I,  
910 I and no other have so cursed myself.  
And I pollute the bed of him I killed  
by the hands that killed him. Was I not born evil?

And I pollute the bed of him I killed  
by the hands that killed him. Was I not born evil?  
Am I not utterly unclean? I had to fly  
and in my banishment not even see  
920 my kindred nor set foot in my own country,  
or otherwise my fate was to be yoked  
in marriage with my mother and kill my father,  
Polybus who begot me and had reared me.  
Would not one rightly judge and say that on me  
925 these things were sent by some [malignant](#) God?  
O no, no, no—O holy majesty  
of God on high, may I not see that day!  
May I be gone out of men's sight before  
I see the deadly taint of this disaster  
come upon me.

CHORUS:

- 930 Sir, we too fear these things. But until you see this man  
face to face and hear his story, hope.

OEDIPUS:

Yes, I have just this much of hope—to wait until the herdsman comes.

JOCASTA:

And when he comes, what do you want with him?

OEDIPUS:

935 I'll tell you; if I find that his story is the same as yours, I  
at least will be clear of this guilt.

JOCASTA:

Why what so particularly did you learn from my story?

OEDIPUS:

You said that he spoke of highway *robbers*  
who killed Laius. Now if he uses the same num-  
940 ber, it was not I who killed him. One man cannot  
be the same as many. But if he speaks of a man  
travelling alone, then clearly the burden of the  
guilt inclines toward me.

JOCASTA:

Be sure, at least, that this was how he  
945 told the story. He cannot unsay it now, for every  
one in the city heard it—not I alone. But, Oedi-  
pus, even if he diverges from what he said then,  
he shall never prove that the murder of Laius  
squares rightly with the prophecy—for Loxias  
950 declared that the king should be killed by his own  
son. And that poor creature did not kill him  
surely,—for he died himself first. So as far as

950 declared that the king should be killed by his own  
son. And that poor creature did not kill him  
surely,—for he died himself first. So as far as  
prophecy goes, henceforward I shall not look to  
the right hand or the left.

OEDIPUS:

955 Right. But yet, send some one for the peasant to bring  
him here; do not neglect it.

JOCASTA:

I will send quickly. Now let me go indoors. I will do  
nothing except what pleases you.

[*Exit .*]