

SETTING: *Outside the palace of the royal family in Thebes. Two benches that can be shifted to represent various locations. On each bench rests a cloak and other pieces the actors might need to become the various characters. Resting on the floor near one of the benches is a drum. On the other bench is a flute or pipe.*

AT RISE: *The sounds of night – crickets, the hoot of an owl. CHORUS, CITIZEN 1, CITIZEN 2, CITIZEN 3, and CITIZEN 4 enter.*

CHORUS/CITIZENS

(Whispering)

Antigone... Antigone... Antigone...

(Whispering continues under as ANTIGONE runs on as if chased by the sound. She crosses to center and falls to her knees, pressing her hands to her ears. CHORUS and the CITIZENS crowd around her, their voices getting louder and louder...)

ANTIGONE... ANTIGONE... ANTIGONE...

(CITIZEN 2 steps forward and becomes ISMENE. She touches ANTIGONE on the shoulder. The other voices stop instantly and move to the background.)

ISMENE

Antigone.

ANTIGONE

Ismene!

(She gets to her feet.)

You startled me.

ISMENE

I was a given a message to meet you here. Why are you outside the palace at this time of night? You should be sleeping.

ANTIGONE

How can I ever sleep again? O, cursed night, that robbed me forever of two brothers most dear!

ISMENE

The night is not to blame for the death of our brothers. The fault lies with our father, Oedipus, the King of Thebes...

ANTIGONE/CHORUS/CITIZENS

Oedipus...

(CHORUS hands a crown to ISMENE. She holds it aloft. The crown represents Oedipus.)

ISMENE

For his crimes against Man and Nature, Oedipus was banished from the Kingdom...

ANTIGONE/CHORUS/CITIZENS

Banished...

ISMENE

We, his loyal daughters, traveled at his side, giving him aid and comfort in his old age. But our brothers, Polynices...

ANTIGONE/CHORUS/CITIZENS

Polynices...

(CHORUS dons a cloak and steps forward as POLYNICES.)

ISMENE

And Eteocles...

ANTIGONE/CHORUS/CITIZENS

Eteocles...

(CITIZEN 3 dons a cloak and steps forward as ETEOCLES.)

ISMENE

Abandoned Oedipus to the woods and wild animals, choosing instead to remain in Thebes and fight for the crown.

ANTIGONE/CHORUS/CITIZENS

The crown...

(POLYNICES and ETEOCLES reach for the crown. ISMENE releases it. They hold it aloft between them.)

ISMENE

Eteocles won the battle for supremacy and became our new King...

(ETEOCLES wrests the crown from POLYNICES and holds it aloft.)

Polynices fled to Argos, where he raised an army in order to attack Thebes and regain the crown.

(POLYNICES takes a few steps away from his brother then turns to face him.)

And Oedipus, when he heard the news of his sons' rivalry, cursed them both. "Wretched sons, you shall each die by the other's hand!"

ANTIGONE

And now our father's curse is fulfilled. I close my eyes to sleep, and I see it, over and over again...

(CITIZEN 4 starts beating the drum, a beat used to precede an ancient battle. ANTIGONE points to ETEOCLES.)

Our brother Eteocles – standing there, defending our city from the enemy...

(ETEOCLES hands his crown to ISMENE, turns to POLYNICES and draws his sword. ANTIGONE points to POLYNICES.)

And opposed to him, our brother Polynices, leading the army of Argos against us...

(POLYNICES draws his sword. The drumming gets faster. They start for each other.)

Brother against brothers, the two armies collide and then...

(POLYNICES stabs ETEOCLES at the same time ETEOCLES stabs POLYNICES. The drumming stops instantly, as if the moment was frozen in time. In slow-motion, POLYNICES and ETEOCLES fall to the floor, dead.)

NOOOOO!

(ISMENE takes ANTIGONE in her arms.)

ISMENE

Oh, my poor sister! Rest easy, now – there is nothing to fear. The enemy is vanquished and our city is safe. We are safe.

ANTIGONE

And our brothers?

ISMENE

Dead and buried – and with their burial, Hades will come...

(CITIZEN 1 steps forward with the flute and becomes HADES. He crosses downstage center, between the two men.)

And he will lead our brothers safely to the underworld.

(HADES plays his flute. The spirits of ETEOCLES and POLYNICES rise, leaving their cloaks on the floor to represent their bodies.)

ANTIGONE

Stop!

(HADES stops playing. HADES, POLYNICES and ETEOCLES freeze in place. ANTIGONE turns to ISMENE.)

You haven't heard the news. The doom reserved for enemies has become the fate of one we hold most dear.

ISMENE

You don't mean...?

ANTIGONE

Yes – our brothers' burial! Now that they are dead, Creon, our uncle has claimed the throne.

ISMENE

Creon...

(Citizen 4 steps forward as CREON enters. He takes the crown from ISMENE and places it on his head.)

ANTIGONE

He has decided that Eteocles shall be buried with full military honors – laid in the earth to go with glory to the underworld...

(HADES, POLYNICES and ETEOCLES unfreeze. HADES starts playing the flute again. CREON crosses to the cloak worn by ETEOCLES. He bends down and carefully scoops it up, cradling it in his arms as if it were a body. A funeral procession is formed, with HADES leading the way, then CREON, then ETEOCLES. They process, winding their way upstage until they approach the “burial site.” CREON places the cloak under a bench. The flute stops and HADES, CREON and ETEOCLES sit on the bench, becoming CITIZENS again. POLYNICES watches then turns to ANTIGONE.)

ISMENE

And our brother Polynices?

ANTIGONE

Creon plans to issue a city-wide proclamation forbidding anyone to bury him.

(ANTIGONE crosses to POLYNICES. She crouches next to his cloak.)

Like all our enemies, Polynices is to rot in the field, his bones picked clean by the birds that roost there. A royal feast.

(POLYNICES gives her one last look then crosses to the other bench and sits, leaving his cloak behind. He becomes CHORUS.)

ISMENE

Preparing the body, the funeral rites – these are the duties and privilege of the women. Surely our uncle won’t deny us our place!

ANTIGONE

He is only waiting for daylight to alert the city of his decision. Anyone caught disobeying his order will be stoned to death.

ISMENE

O most ignoble end!

ANTIGONE

Now you understand the purpose of our meeting. The gods demand burial. We must work quickly if we hope to complete our task before sunrise.

(ANTIGONE starts to exit. ISMENE grabs her arm to stop her.)

ISMENE

Antigone, wait! This task of which you speak...?

ANTIGONE

We are going to bury the body of our brother.

(She starts to pull ISMENE off. ISMENE resists.)

ISMENE

No! We mustn't! Creon has forbidden it!

ANTIGONE

Creon has no right to keep me from my own. Polynices is my brother. No one will ever convict me for a traitor.

ISMENE

Not you, no – but Polynices *was* a traitor. He led an army against Thebes, against our city. Perhaps Creon is right – perhaps this punishment is just.

ANTIGONE

You dare say that to me?!

ISMENE

What else am I to believe? Remember, sister, we are the daughters of Oedipus – cursed King who, in turn, cursed his sons. Now King and sons are dead. Let the curse end there so that we might live in peace.

ANTIGONE

Coward.

ISMENE

We are women in a man's world! We were not born to contend with them, but rather to submit to them. And if we are caught violating the law...

ANTIGONE

To think I once called you "sister!"

ISMENE

If you would persist in this madness, ask Haemon to help you!

(Beat.)

ANTIGONE

Haemon...?

(CHORUS drums softly under as CITIZEN 3 steps forward and becomes HAEMON. He and ANTIGONE lock eyes. During the following, HAEMON crosses to ANTIGONE and they circle each other, gazing at each other the whole time.)

ISMENE

Why not? He is soon to be your husband.

ANTIGONE

He is also Creon's son.

ISMENE

He loves you. And he is strong and able...

ANTIGONE

Yes...

ISMENE

Capable of digging a grave, of lifting a body...

ANTIGONE

Polynices is not Haemon's responsibility. Burial rites are the privilege of the women, a tradition given to us by the gods.

ISMENE

Still...

ANTIGONE

Enough!

(The drumming stops. ANTIGONE and HAEMON stop circling. ANTIGONE breaks eye contact with HAEMON and turns to ISMENE.)

I will hear no more of this!

(Beat.)

ISMENE

He said no... didn't he?

ANTIGONE

I don't know what you...

ISMENE

(Interrupting)

Haemon came to you, told you what Creon had planned and when you asked him to help you bury Polynices, he refused... am I right?

(ANTIGONE turns to HAEMON. HAEMON turns, crosses back to the bench and sits, becoming CITIZEN 3. ANTIGONE turns back to ISMENE.)

ANTIGONE

Will you help me or not?

ISMENE

No.

ANTIGONE

Then I will bury him myself.

ISMENE

Antigone...

ANTIGONE

I would rather die a glorious death honoring the gods than live a coward's life. Farewell.

(She starts off. ISMENE grabs her arm.)

ISMENE

Please, don't! I'm so afraid for you!

ANTIGONE

Fear for yourself.

(She tries to pull away. ISMENE holds firm.)

ISMENE

At the very least don't tell anyone what you're about. Let this be our secret. I swear I'll never tell a soul.

ANTIGONE

Shout it from the rooftops for all I care. Your silence only makes me hate you more.

(She pulls her arm away and starts off again.)

ISMENE

Antigone, this quest is hopeless!

(ANTIGONE is gone.)

Hate me then, wild, irrational sister – but rest assured you are truly loved.

(ISMENE crosses to the bench and becomes CITIZEN 2. CHORUS drums softly under as ANTIGONE enters and looks around. She crosses to the cloak left by POLYNICES, checks once more to make sure the coast is clear, then picks up one end of it and drags it off. Drumming shifts to a different rhythm as the scene shifts to morning in front of the Palace. CHORUS stands up and steps downstage as he notices the rising sun. The drumming stops.)

CHORUS

The sun... *Citizens of Thebes!*

(CITIZENS cross downstage to join CHORUS. CHORUS points off.)

Behold.

CITIZEN 1

The sun...

CITIZEN 2

The sun...

CITIZEN 3

The sun...

CITIZENS

The sun.

CHORUS

The sun rises, chasing away the night, and with it, the enemy Argos!

CITIZENS

O glorious sun!

CHORUS

The great eye of golden day
Blazes white on their shields
As they flee its bright beam

CITIZENS

Run, Argos – run!

CHORUS

How different now from the pit of night
 When the enemy
 Led by that traitor Polynices
 Attacked the seven gates of Thebes

(CITIZEN 3 and CITIZEN 4 grab a piece of fabric off the bench and stretches it out between them. CITIZEN 2 grasps it in the middle. CITIZEN 3 and CITIZEN 4 move the fabric up and down, like the wings of an eagle.)

CHORUS

Like a screaming eagle
 Winging havoc over the land
 He drove against our borders
 Climbing the walls of our city

He hovered above our roofs
 His vast maw gaping
 His spears thirsting for the kill

But before he could glut his jaws with our blood
 He grappled the Dragon none can master
 The dragon known as Thebes!

(CITIZEN 1 raises a spear and attacks the “eagle.”)

Our soldiers met the fury head on
 The mighty eagle was felled!
 Our city has been saved!

(CITIZEN 2 raises his arms above his head and releases the fabric into the air, signifying the death of the “eagle.” CITIZEN 3 and CITIZEN 4 gather the fabric, cross back to the benches and sit.)

CITIZEN 1

Thanks be to Zeus!

CITIZEN 2

Argos has been vanquished!