**SCENE 1 – The royal palace in Thebes |**

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| |  |  | | --- | --- | |  | [The palace doors are thrown open and guards appear at the doors] | |  | **CHORUS LEADER** | |  | But here comes Creon, new king of our land, | | 185 | son of Menoikeos. Thanks to the gods, | |  | who’ve brought about our new good fortune. | |  | What plan of action does he have in mind? | |  | What’s made him hold this special meeting, | |  | with elders summoned by a general call? | |  | [Enter **CREON** from the palace. He addresses the assembled elders] | |  | **CREON** | |  | Men, after much tossing of our ship of state, | | 190 | the gods have safely set things right again. | |  | Of all the citizens I’ve summoned you, | |  | because I know how well you showed respect | |  | for the eternal power of the throne, | |  | first with Laius and again with Oedipus, | | 195 | once he restored our city. When he died, | |  | you stood by his children, firm in loyalty. | |  | Now his sons have perished in a single day, | |  | killing each other with their own two hands, | |  | a double slaughter, stained with brother’s blood. | | 200 | And so I have the throne, all royal power, | |  | for I’m the one most closely linked by blood | |  | to those who have been killed. It’s impossible | |  | to really know a man, to know his soul, | |  | his mind and will, before one witnesses | | 205 | his skill in governing and making laws. | |  | For me, a man who rules the entire state | |  | and does not take the best advice there is, | |  | but through fear keeps his mouth forever shut, | |  | such a man is the very worst of men— | | 210 | and always will be. And a man who thinks | |  | more highly of a friend than of his country, | |  | well, he means nothing to me. Let Zeus know, | |  | the god who always watches everything, | |  | I would not stay silent if I saw disaster | | 215 | moving here against the citizens, | |  | a threat to their security. For anyone | |  | who acts against the state, its enemy, | |  | I’d never make my friend. For I know well | |  | our country is a ship which keeps us safe, | | 220 | and only when it sails its proper course | |  | do we make friends. These are the principles | |  | I’ll use in order to protect our state. | | | | | | | | | | |
|  | That’s why I’ve announced to all citizens | | | | | | | |
|  | my orders for the sons of Oedipus— | | | | | | | |
| 225 | Eteocles, who perished in the fight | | | | | | | |
|  | to save our city, the best and bravest | | | | | | | |
|  | of our spearmen, will have his burial, | | | | | | | |
|  | with all those purifying rituals | | | | | | | |
|  | which accompany the noblest corpses, | | | | | | | |
| 230 | as they move below. As for his brother— | | | | | | | |
|  | that Polyneices, who returned from exile, | | | | | | | |
|  | eager to wipe out in all-consuming fire | | | | | | | |
|  | his ancestral city and its native gods, | | | | | | | |
|  | keen to seize upon his family’s blood | | | | | | | |
| 235 | and lead men into slavery—for him, | | | | | | | |
|  | the proclamation in the state declares | | | | | | | |
|  | he’ll have no burial mound, no funeral rites, | | | | | | | |
|  | and no lament. He’ll be left unburied, | | | | | | | |
|  | his body there for birds and dogs to eat, | | | | | | | |
| 240 | a clear reminder of his shameful fate. | | | | | | | |
|  | That’s my decision. For I’ll never act | | | | | | | |
|  | to respect an evil man with honors | | | | | | | |
|  | in preference to a man who’s acted well. | | | | | | | |
|  | Anyone who’s well disposed towards our state, | | | | | | | |
| 245 | alive or dead, that man I will respect. | | | | | | | |
|  | **CHORUS LEADER** | | | | | | | |
|  | Son of Menoikeos, if that’s your will | | | | | | | |
|  | for this city’s friends and enemies, | | | | | | | |
|  | it seems to me you now control all laws | | | | | | | |
|  | concerning those who’ve died and us as well— | | | | | | | |
| 250 | the ones who are still living. | | | | | | | |
|  | **CREON** | | | | | | | |
|  | See to it then, | | | | | | | |
|  | and act as guardians of what’s been proclaimed. | | | | | | | |
|  | **CHORUS** | | | | | | | |
|  | Give that task to younger men to deal with. | | | | | | | |
|  | **CREON** | | | | | | | |
|  | There are men assigned to oversee the corpse. | | | | | | | |
|  | **CHORUS LEADER** | | | | | | | |
| 255 | Then what remains that you would have us do? | | | | | | | |
|  | **CREON** | | | | | | | |
|  | Don’t yield to those who contravene my orders | | | | | | | |
|  |
|  | **CHORUS LEADER**  No one is such a fool that he loves death. | | | | | | |
|  | **CREON** | | | | | | |
|  | Yes, that will be his full reward, indeed. | | | | | | |
|  | And yet men have often been destroyed | | | | | | |
| 260 | because they hoped to profit in some way. | | | | | | |
|  | [Enter a **Guard**, coming toward the palace] | | | | | | |
|  | **Guard** | | | | | | |
|  | My lord, I can’t say I’ve come out of breath | | | | | | |
|  | by running here, making my feet move fast. | | | | | | |
|  | Many times I stopped to think things over— | | | | | | |
|  | and then I’d turn around, retrace my steps. | | | | | | |
| 265 | My mind was saying many things to me, | | | | | | |
|  | “You fool, why go to where you know for sure | | | | | | |
|  | your punishment awaits?”—“And now, poor man, | | | | | | |
|  | why are you hesitating yet again? | | | | | | |
|  | If Creon finds this out from someone else, | | | | | | |
| 270 | how will you escape being hurt?” Such matters | | | | | | |
|  | kept my mind preoccupied. And so I went, | | | | | | |
|  | slowly and reluctantly, and thus made | | | | | | |
|  | a short road turn into a lengthy one. | | | | | | |
|  | But then the view that I should come to you | | | | | | |
| 275 | won out. If what I have to say is nothing, | | | | | | |
|  | I’ll say it nonetheless. For I’ve come here | | | | | | |
|  | clinging to the hope that I’ll not suffer | | | | | | |
|  | anything that’s not part of my destiny. | | | | | | |
|  | **CREON** | | | | | | |
|  | What’s happening that’s made you so upset? | | | | | | |
|  | **Guard** | | | | | | |
| 280 | I want to tell you first about myself. | | | | | | |
|  | I did not do it. And I didn’t see | | | | | | |
|  | the one who did. So it would be unjust | | | | | | |
|  | if I should come to grief. | | | | | | |
|  | **CREON** | | | | | | |
|  | You hedge so much. | | | | | | |
| 285 | Clearly you have news of something ominous. | | | | | | |
|  | **Guard** | | | | | | |
|  | Yes. Strange things that make me pause a lot. | | | | | | |
|  | **CREON** | | | | | | |
|  | Why not say it and then go—just leave. | | | | | | |
|  | **Guard** | | | | | | |
|  | All right, I’ll tell you. It’s about the corpse. | | | | | | |
|  | | Someone has buried it and disappeared, | | | | |
| 290 | | after spreading thirsty dust onto the flesh | | | | |
|  | | and undertaking all appropriate rites. | | | | |
|  | | **CREON** | | | | |
|  | | What are you saying? What man would dare this? | | | | |
|  | | **Guard** | | | | |
|  | | I don’t know. There was no sign of digging, | | | | |
|  | | no marks of any pick axe or a mattock. | | | | |
| 295 | | The ground was dry and hard and very smooth, | | | | |
|  | | without a wheel track. Whoever did it | | | | |
|  | | left no trace. When the first man on day watch | | | | |
|  | | revealed it to us, we were all amazed. | | | | |
|  | | The corpse was hidden, but not in a tomb. | | | | |
|  | | It was lightly covered up with dirt, | | | | |
| 300 | | as if someone wanted to avert a curse. | | | | |
|  | | There was no trace of a wild animal | | | | |
|  | | or dogs who’d come to rip the corpse apart. | | | | |
|  | | Then the words flew round among us all, | | | | |
|  | | with every guard accusing someone else. | | | | |
| 305 | | We were about to fight, to come to blows— | | | | |
|  | | no one was there to put a stop to it. | | | | |
|  | | Every one of us was responsible, | | | | |
|  | | but none of us was clearly in the wrong. | | | | |
|  | | In our defense we pleaded ignorance. | | | | |
| 310 | | Then we each stated we were quite prepared | | | | |
|  | | to pick up red-hot iron, walk through flames, | | | | |
|  | | or swear by all the gods that we’d not done it, | | | | |
|  | | we’d no idea how the act was planned, | | | | |
|  | | or how it had been carried out. At last, | | | | |
| 315 | | when all our searching had proved useless, | | | | |
|  | | one man spoke up, and his words forced us all | | | | |
|  | | to drop our faces to the ground in fear. | | | | |
|  | | We couldn’t see things working out for us, | | | | |
|  | | whether we agreed or disagreed with him. | | | | |
| 320 | | He said we must report this act to you— | | | | |
|  | | we must not hide it. And his view prevailed. | | | | |
|  | | I was the unlucky man who won the prize, | | | | |
|  | | the luck of the draw. That’s why I’m now here, | | | | |
|  | | not of my own free will or by your choice. | | | | |
| 325 | | I know that—for no one likes a messenger | | | | |
|  | | who comes bearing unwelcome news with him. | | | | |
|  | | |
|  | | | **CHORUS LEADER**  My lord, I’ve been wondering for some time now— | | |
|  | | | could this act not be something from the gods? | | |
|  | | | **CREON** | | |
|  | | | Stop now—before what you’re about to say | | |
| 330 | | | enrages me completely and reveals | | |
|  | | | that you’re not only old but stupid, too. | | |
|  | | | No one can tolerate what you’ve just said, | | |
|  | | | when you claim gods might care about this corpse. | | |
|  | | | Would they pay extraordinary honors | | |
| 335 | | | and bury as a man who’d served them well | | |
|  | | | someone who came to burn their offerings, | | |
|  | | | their pillared temples, to torch their lands | | |
|  | | | and scatter all its laws? Or do you see | | |
|  | | | gods paying respect to evil men? No, no. | | |
| 340 | | | For quite a while some people in the town | | |
|  | | | have secretly been muttering against me. | | |
|  | | | They don’t agree with what I have decreed. | | |
|  | | | They shake their heads and have not kept their necks | | |
|  | | | under my yoke, as they are duty bound to do | | |
| 345 | | | if they were men who are content with me. | | |
|  | | | I well know that these guards were led astray— | | |
|  | | | such men urged them to carry out this act | | |
|  | | | for money. To foster evil actions, | | |
|  | | | to make them commonplace among all men, | | |
| 350 | | | nothing is as powerful as money. | | |
|  | | | It destroys cities, driving men from home. | | |
|  | | | Money trains and twists the minds in worthy men, | | |
|  | | | so they then undertake disgraceful acts. | | |
|  | | | Money teaches men to live as scoundrels, | | |
| 355 | | | familiar with every profane enterprise. | | |
|  | | | But those who carry out such acts for cash | | |
|  | | | sooner or later see how for their crimes | | |
|  | | | they pay the penalty. For if great Zeus | | |
|  | | | still has my respect, then understand this— | | |
| 360 | | | I swear to you on oath—unless you find | | |
|  | | | the one whose hands really buried him, | | |
|  | | | unless you bring him here before my eyes, | | |
|  | | | then death for you will never be enough. | | |
|  | | | | No, not before you’re hung up still alive |
| 365 | | | | and you confess to this gross, violent act. |
|  | | | | That way you’ll understand in future days, |
|  | | | | when there’s a profit to be gained from theft, |
|  | | | | you’ll learn that it’s not good to be in love |
|  | | | | with every kind of monetary gain. |
| 370 | | | | You’ll know more men are ruined than are saved |
|  | | | | when they earn profits from dishonest schemes. |
|  | | | | **Guard** |
|  | | | | Do I have your permission to speak now, |
|  | | | | or do I just turn around and go away? |
|  | | | | **CREON** |
|  | | | | But I find your voice so irritating— |
| 375 | | | | don’t you realize that? |
|  | | | | **Guard** |
|  | | | | Where does it hurt? |
|  | | | | Is it in your ears or in your mind? |
|  | | | | **CREON** |
|  | | | | Why try to question where I feel my pain? |
|  | | | | **Guard** |
|  | | | | The man who did it—he upsets your mind. |
| 380 | | | | I offend your ears. |
|  | | | | **CREON** |
|  | | | | My, my, it’s clear to see |
|  | | | | it’s natural for you to chatter on. |
|  | | | | **Guard** |
|  | | | | Perhaps. But I never did this. |
|  | | | | **CREON** |
|  | | | | This and more— |
| 385 | | | | you sold your life for silver. |
|  | | | | **Guard** |
|  | | | | How strange and sad |
|  | | | | when the one who sorts this out gets it all wrong. |
|  | | | | **CREON** |
|  | | | | Well, enjoy your sophisticated views. |
|  | | | | But if you don’t reveal to me who did this, |
| 395 | | | | you’ll just confirm how much your treasonous gains |
|  | | | | have made you suffer. |
|  | | | | [ **CREON** back into the palace. The doors close behind him] |
|  | | | | **Guard** |
|  | | | | Well, I hope he’s found. |
|  | | | | That would be best. But whether caught or not— |
|  | | | | and that’s something sheer chance will bring about— |
| 400 | | | | you won’t see me coming here again. |
|  | | | | This time, against all hope and expectation, |
|  | | | | I’m still unhurt. I owe the gods great thanks. |
|  | | | | [Exit **Guard** away from the palace] |

**ODE 1**

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| |  |  | | --- | --- | |  | **CHORUS** | |  | There are many strange and wonderful things, | |  | but nothing more strangely wonderful than man. | | 405 | He moves across the white-capped ocean seas | |  | blasted by winter storms, carving his way | |  | under the surging waves engulfing him. | |  | With his teams of horses he wears down | |  | the unwearied and immortal earth, | | 410 | the oldest of the gods, harassing her, | |  | as year by year his ploughs move back and forth. | |  | He snares the light-winged flocks of birds, | |  | herds of wild beasts, creatures from deep seas, | |  | trapped in the fine mesh of his hunting nets. | | 415 | O resourceful man, whose skill can overcome | |  | ferocious beasts roaming mountain heights. | |  | He curbs the rough-haired horses with his bit | |  | and tames the inexhaustible mountain bulls, | |  | setting their savage necks beneath his yoke. | | 420 | He’s taught himself speech and wind-swift thought, | |  | trained his feelings for communal civic life, | |  | learning to escape the icy shafts of frost, | |  | volleys of pelting rain in winter storms, | |  | the harsh life lived under the open sky. | | 425 | That’s man—so resourceful in all he does. | |  | There’s no event his skill cannot confront— | |  | other than death—that alone he cannot shun, | |  | although for many baffling sicknesses | |  | he has discovered his own remedies. | | 430 | The qualities of his inventive skills | |  | bring arts beyond his dreams and lead him on, | |  | sometimes to evil and sometimes to good. | |  | If he treats his country’s laws with due respect | |  | and honors justice by swearing on the gods, | | 435 | he wins high honors in his city. | |  | But when he grows bold and turns to evil, | |  | then he has no city. A man like that— | |  | let him not share my home or know my mind. | |