

# THE TRAGEDY OF OEDIPUS

SOPHOCLES'S TALE RETOLD IN BRIEF BY LARA HALE

A LONG TIME AGO, QUEEN JOCASTA AND KING LAIUS HAD A BABY BOY



LET'S NAME HIM OEDIPUS!

FINE BUT WE CAN'T KEEP HIM

BUT...

THE PROPHECY OF THE CRACLE SAYS HE'LL GROW UP TO KILL ME AND MARRY YOU! TOO DANGEROUS!

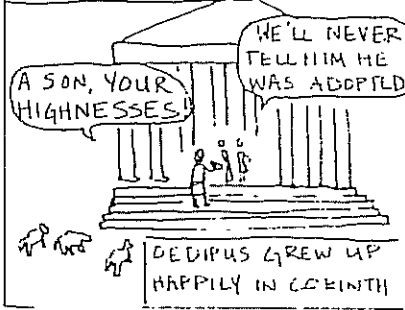
SO LAIUS GAVE OEDIPUS TO A SHEPHERD

ABANDON HIM IN THE WOODS!



BUT THE SHEPHERD WAS KIND-HEARTED

...AND FOUND OEDIPUS A NEW HOME FAR AWAY IN THE CITY OF CORINTH



A SON, YOUR HIGHNESSES!

WE'LL NEVER TELL HIM HE WAS ADOPTED

OEDIPUS GREW UP HAPPILY IN CORINTH

BUT YEARS LATER, OEDIPUS LEARNED THE HORRIBLE PROPHECY OF THE CRACLE

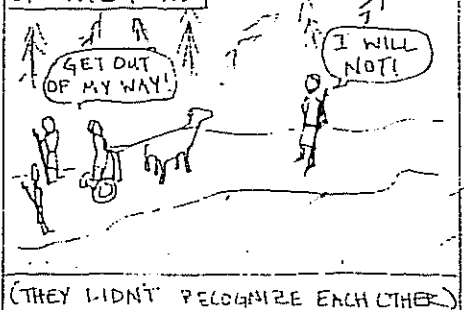


YOU WILL DESTROY YOUR FATHER AND WED YOUR MOTHER

NO!

I CAN NEVER RETURN HOME TO CORINTH AGAIN!

UNFORTUNATELY, LEAVING THE CRACLE, HE MET KING LAIUS ON THE ROAD



GET OUT OF MY WAY!

I WILL NOT!

(THEY DIDN'T RECOGNIZE EACH OTHER)

THEY FOUGHT



OEDIPUS KILLED LAIUS AND HIS MEN, THEN KEPT ON TRAVELLING.

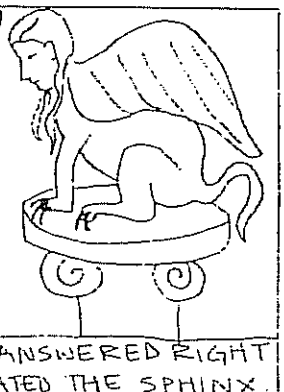
NEAR THE CITY OF THEBES, OEDIPUS LEARNED ABOUT A CRUEL BEAST CALLED THE SPHINX



SHE STRANGLES ANYONE WHO ANSWERS HER RIDDLE WRONG!

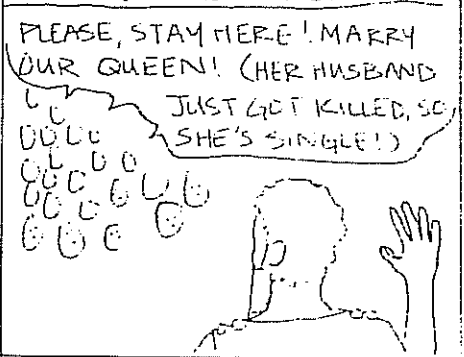
NO ONE HAS EVER ANSWERED RIGHT!

WELL, I CAN AT LEAST TRY



OEDIPUS ANSWERED RIGHT AND DEFEATED THE SPHINX.

OEDIPUS WAS A HERO



PLEASE, STAY HERE! MARRY OUR QUEEN! (HER HUSBAND JUST GOT KILLED, SO SHE'S SINGLE!)

SO OEDIPUS TOOK (HIS FATHER) LAIUS'S JOB AS KING AND MARRIED (HIS MOTHER) QUEEN JOCASTA



THEY HAD FOUR CHILDREN TOGETHER, AND LIFE WAS GOOD

AFTER A WHILE, THOUGH, EVERYTHING STARTED TO GO DOWNHILL IN THEBES.

## THE THEBAN LEGEND

The place called Thebes lay in the central plain of Boeotia, part of the narrow tongue of land joining the Athenian country to the more northerly mainland. Here, under the guidance of the oracle of Delphi, a city was first founded by Cadmus, son of Agenor and brother of that Europa whom Zeus courted in the likeness of a bull. Misfortune befell him even before his city was established, for all the trusty companions who should have been his first citizens were devoured by a fierce dragon which inhabited a neighbouring glen. But Cadmus was a match for the dragon and at one stroke laid him dead. Again the word of Heaven guided him, and he was instructed to sow the dragon's teeth in the ground prepared for his future city; from which seed there instantly sprang up a tribe of giants so fierce and fully armed that a deadly combat immediately broke out between them. At length but five remained alive, and these offering their submission to Cadmus became the founders and fathers of the Thebes to be.

Cadmus begat Polydorus, and Polydorus begat Labdacus, and Labdacus begat Laius; and to Laius and his wife Jocasta a son was born. Before even a name had been given to this infant — indeed, by some accounts, before he was born — his life was clouded with the presage of disaster; for Apollo's oracle had nothing but ill to foretell of him: he was destined one day to kill his father, and to become his own mother's husband. Could any mortal device be proof against the god's predication? Could any mortal be so presumptuous as to try to thwart it? Laius and Jocasta would so presume. One way alone offered any hope — more than hope, certainty. The child should not live. They would not indeed take upon themselves the guilt of infanticide, but they would deliver the child to a servant of theirs, a shepherd, with orders to abandon it on the mountain-side, its feet cruelly pierced with an iron pin, so that it might not even crawl to safety.

This was done. But still the word of Apollo — and human compassion — prevailed. For the shepherd had not the heart to leave the child to perish; instead he entrusted it to a fellow-labourer, a Corinthian

shepherd, beseeching him to take it away beyond the borders of Thebes and rear it as his own. The Corinthian, a servant of Polybus, King of Corinth, in due course brought the child to his royal master, who, being childless, gladly welcomed the infant and adopted it as his own, giving it the name of Oedipus (Swollen-foot) in commiseration for its painful treatment.

Oedipus grew to manhood, the honoured Prince of Corinth and loved foster-son of those whom he supposed to be his true parents. But by chance he came to hear, again from the mouth of Apollo's ministers, the terrible predication concerning him. Again, as his parents had done, he sought to give the lie to the oracle. He fled from Corinth, resolved never again to set eyes on his supposed father and mother as long as they lived. His wanderings brought him to Thebes, where now all was calamity and confusion. King Laius had been killed by an unknown traveller on a lonely road; the city was in the grip of a deadly monster, the Sphinx, who pitted her ferocity against the wits of man, destroying all who failed to answer her running riddle; and none could answer it. But in Oedipus the creature met her match. He answered her riddle and destroyed her power, and so was received joyfully into Thebes as her king and heir to the house and fortune; a happy man, a wise and resourceful man, and (save for one sharp encounter on his journey from Corinth to Thebes) a man of peace. He married Jocasta; and sons and daughters were born to them.

There passed some fifteen years of seeming prosperity. But beneath the deceptive surface a hideous depth of shame and infamy lay concealed. The gods could no longer brook in silence the affront of Oedipus's unwitting sins. Pestilence and famine brought Thebes once more to the verge of utter extinction. In their despair her citizens cried to their king for yet more proofs of his infallible resource, and to their gods, chief among them Apollo, for light and healing in their wretchedness.

[Here the play of KING OEDIPUS begins.]