

ANTIGONE

A Tragedy

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CHARACTERS

CHORUS

ANTIGONE

NURSE

ISMENE

HAEMON

CREON

FIRST GUARD (Jonas)

SECOND GUARD (a Corporal)

THIRD GUARD

MESSENGER

PAGE

EURYDICE

CHORUS. Well, here we are.

These people that you see here are about to act out for you the story of Antigone. That THIS LITTLE CREATURE by herself, staring straight ahead, seeing nothing, is Antigone. She is thinking. She is thinking that the instant I finish telling you who's who and what's what in this play, she will burst forth as the, TENSE, SALLOW, WILLFUL GIRL, who is about to rise up and face the whole world alone – alone against the world and against Creon, her Uncle, the King

Another thing that she is thinking is this: she is going to die. Antigone is young. She would much rather live than die. But there is no help for it. ~~When you are on the side of the gods~~ TRUTH

~~against the tyrant, the Man against the State, of purity against corruption—~~
 when ~~in short~~ your name is Antigone, there is only one part you can play;
 and she will have to play hers through to the end.

Mind you, Antigone doesn't know all these things about herself. ~~I know~~
~~them because it is my business to know them. That's what a Greek~~
~~Chorus is for.~~ All that she knows is that Creon won't allow her dead
 brother to be buried; and that despite Creon, she must bury him. Antigone
 doesn't *think*, she acts, she doesn't "*reason*," she feels.

And from the moment the curtain went up, she began to feel that
 inhuman forces were whirling her out of this world, snatching her away
 from her sister Ismene, whom you see smiling with that young man;
~~making herself an instrument of the gods in a way she cannot fathom but~~
~~will faithfully pursue.~~ You have never seen inhuman forces at work? You
 will tonight.

CHORUS indicates HAEMON.

The young man talking to Ismene — to the gay and golden BEAUTIFUL
 Ismene — is Haemon. He is the King's son, Creon's son. ~~The apple of the~~
~~tyrant's eye~~ Antigone and he are engaged to be married. You wouldn't
 have thought she was his type. He likes dancing, sports, competition; he
 likes women, too. Now look at Ismene again. She is certainly more
 beautiful than Antigone. She is the girl you'd think he'd go for.
 Well... There was a ball one night. Ismene wore a new evening dress. She
 was radiant. Haemon danced every dance with her: he wouldn't look at
 any other girl. And yet, that same night, before the dance was over,
 suddenly he went in search of Antigone, found her sitting alone — like
 that, with her arms clasped round her knees — and asked her to marry
 him. We still don't know how it happened. It didn't seem to surprise
 Antigone in the least. ~~It didn't seem to surprise Antigone in the least.~~ She
 looked up at him

out of those solemn eyes of hers, smiled sort of sadly and said "yes." That was all. The band struck up another dance. Ismene, surrounded by a group of young men, laughed out loud. And... well, here is Haemon expecting to marry Antigone. He won't, of course. He didn't know, when he asked her, that the earth wasn't meant to hold a husband of Antigone, and that this princely distinction was to earn him no more than the right to die sooner than he might otherwise have done.

CHORUS indicate CREON.

That gray-haired, powerfully built man sitting lost in thought, with his little page at his side, is Creon, the King. His face is lined. He is tired. He practices the difficult art of a leader of men. When he was younger, when Oedipus was King and Creon was no more than the King's brother-in-law, he was different. He loved music, bought rare manuscripts, was a kind of art patron. He would while away whole afternoons in the antique shops of this city of Thebes. But Oedipus died. Oedipus' sons died. Creon's moment had come. He took over the kingdom. HAD TO ROLL UP HIS SLEEVES AND TAKE OVER THE KINGDOM. I'll tell you something about Creon. NOW AND THEN, WHEN HE GOES TO BED WEARY WITH THE DAY'S WORK, HE WONDERS WHETHER THIS BUSINESS OF BEING A LEADER OF MEN IS WORTH THE TROUBLE. He has a tendency to fool himself. This leader of men, this brilliant debater and logician, likes to believe that if it were not for his sense of responsibility, he would step right down from the throne and go back to collecting manuscripts. But the fact is he loves being king. He's an artist who has always believed that he could govern just as well as any man of action could; and he's quite sure that no god nor any man can tell him anything about what is best for the common people. WHEN HE WAKES UP, THE PROBLEMS ARE THERE TO BE SOLVED; AND LIKE A CONSCIENTIOUS WORKMAN, HE DOES HIS JOB.

Creon has a wife, a Queen. Her name is Eurydice. There she sits, the

old lady with the knitting, next to the old Nurse who brought up the two girls. She will go on knitting all through the play, till the times comes for her to go to her room and die. She is a good woman, a worthy, loving soul. But she is no help to her husband. Creon has to face the music alone. Alone with his Page, who is too young to be of any help. The others? Well, let's see.

CHORUS indicates the MESSENGER.

That pale young man ONE leaning against the wall is the Messenger. Later on (S)he will come running in to announce that Haemon is dead. (S)He has a premonition of catastrophe. That's what (S)he is brooding over. That's why (S)he won't mingle with the others.

As for those three ~~pasty~~-RED-faced card players — they are the guards, ~~members of Creon's police~~. They chew tobacco; one smells of garlic, another of beer; but they're not a bad lot. They have wives they are afraid of, kids who are afraid of them; they're bothered by the little day-today worries that beset us all. At the same time — they are policemen: eternally innocent, no matter what crimes are committed; eternally indifferent, for nothing that happens can matter to them. They are quite prepared to arrest any body at all, including Creon himself, should the order be given by a new leader.

That's the lot. Now for the play.

Oedipus, who was the father of the two girls, Antigone and Ismene, had also two sons, Eteocles and

Polynices. After Oedipus died, it was agreed that the two sons should share his throne, each to reign over Thebes in alternate years.

But when Eteocles, the elder son, had reigned a full year, and time had come for him to step down, he refused to yield up the throne to his younger brother, Polynices. There was civil war. Polynices brought up allies — seven foreign princes; and in the course of the war he and the foreigners were defeated, each in front of one of the seven gates of the city. Eteocles and Polynices met in SINGLE combat and THE TWO BROTHERS killed one another just outside the city walls. And now Creon is King. A reign of terror has begun.

Creon has issued a solemn edict that Eteocles, on whose side he was, is to be buried with pomp and honors, and that the younger brother, Polynices is to be left to rot. The vultures and the dogs are to bloat themselves on his carcass. NOBODY IS TO GO INTO MOURNING FOR HIM. NO GRAVESTONE IS TO BE SET UP IN HIS MEMORY. And above all, any person who attempts to give him religious burial will himself be put to death. It is against this blasphemy that Antigone rebels. What is for Creon merely the climax of a political purge, is for her a hideous offense against God and Man. ~~Since time began, men have recoiled with horror from the desecration of the dead. It is this spirit which prompts us today to suspend battle in order to bury our dead, to bury even the enemy dead.~~

NURSE. Where have you been?

ANTIGONE. Nowhere. It was beautiful. The whole world was grey when I went out. And now — you wouldn't recognize it. It's like a post card: all pink, and green, and yellow. You'll have to get up earlier, Nurse, if you want to see a world without color.

NURSE. It was still pitch black when I got up. I went to your room, for I thought you might have flung off your blanket in the night. You weren't there.

ANTIGONE. The garden was lovely. It was still asleep.

NURSE. You hadn't slept in your bed. I couldn't find you. I went to the back door. You'd left it half open.

ANTIGONE. The fields were wet. They were waiting for something to happen. The whole world was breathless, waiting. I can't tell you what a roaring noise I seemed to make as I went up the road. I took off my sandals and slipped into a field.

NURSE. You'll do well to wash your feet before you go back to bed, Miss.

ANTIGONE. I'm not going back to bed.

NURSE. Don't be a fool! You get some sleep! And me, getting

NURSE (cont'd). up to see if she hasn't flung off her blanket; and I find her bed cold and nobody in it!

ANTIGONE. Do you think that if a person got up every morning like this, it would be just as thrilling every morning to be the first girl out-of-doors?

NURSE. *Morning* my grandmother! It was night. It still is. And now, my girl, you'll stop trying to squirm out of this and tell me what you were up to. Where've you been?

ANTIGONE. That's true. It was still night. There wasn't a soul out of doors but me, who thought that it was morning.

NURSE. Oh, my little flibberty-gibbety! Just can't imagine what I'm talking about, can she? Go on with you! I know that game. ~~I was a girl myself once; just as pig-headed and hard to handle as you are.~~ You went out to meet someone, didn't you? Deny it if you can.

ANTIGONE. Yes. I went out to meet someone.

NURSE. ~~You have~~ a lover?

ANTIGONE. Yes, Nurse. I have a lover.

NURSE. Well, that's *very* nice now, isn't it! Such goings-on! *You*, the daughter of a king, running out to meet lovers. And we work our fingers to the bone for you, we slave to bring you up like young ladies!

You're all alike, all of you. Even you — who never used to stop to primp in front of a looking glass, or smear your mouth with rouge, or dindle and dandle to make the boys ogle you, and you ogle back. How many times I'd say to myself, "Now that one, now: I wish she was a little more of a coquett - always wearing the same dress, her hair tumbling round her face. One thing's sure," I'd say to myself, "none of the boys will look at her while Ismene's about, all curled and

cute and tidy and trim. I'll have this one on my hands for the rest of my life." And now, you see? Just like your sister, after all. Only worse: a hypocrite! WHO'S THE LAD? SOME LITTLE SCAMP, EH? THAT'S HOW IT IS, IS IT?

ANTIGONE. THAT'S HOW IT IS. YES, NURSE.

NURSE. YES, SAYS SHE! God save us! I took her when she wasn't that high. I promised her poor mother I'd make a lady of her. And look at her! But don't you go thinking this is the end of this, my young 'un. I'm only your nurse and you can play deaf and dumb with me; I don't count. But your Uncle Creon will hear of this! That, I promise you.

ANTIGONE. Yes. Creon will hear of this.

NURSE. And we'll hear what he has to say when he finds out that you go wandering alone o' nights. Not to mention Haemon. For the girl's engaged! Going to be married! Going to be married, and she hops out of bed at four in the morning to meet somebody else in a field.

ANTIGONE. Please, Nurse, I want to be alone.

NURSE. And if you so much as speak of it, she says she wants to be alone!

ANTIGONE. Nanny, don't scold. This isn't a day when you should be losing your temper.

NURSE. Not scold, indeed! Along with the rest of it, I'm to like it. Didn't I promise your mother? What would she say if she was here? "Old Stupid!" That's what she'd call me. "Old Stupid. Not to know how to keep my little girl pure! Spend your life making them behave, watching over them like a mother hen, and then at four o'clock in the morning letting them slip out into the night." That's what she'd say, your mother. And I'd stand there, dying of shame if I wasn't dead already. And all I could do would be not to dare look her in the face; and "That's true," I'd say. "That's all true what you say, Your Majesty."

ANTIGONE. Nanny, dear, don't cry. You'll be able to look Mamma in the face when it's your time to see her. And she'll say, "Good morning, Nanny. Thank you for my little Antigone.

NURSE (cont'd). You did look after her so well." She knows why I went out this morning.

NURSE. Not to meet a lover?

ANTIGONE. No. Not to meet a lover.

NURSE. Well, you've a queer way of teasing me, I must say! Not to know when she's teasing me! I must be getting awfully old, that's what it is. Your sister was always the sweet-natured one; but I took it into my head that you were the one that was fondest of me. But if you loved me, you'd tell me the truth. You'd tell me why your bed was empty when I went along to tuck you in. Wouldn't you?

ANTIGONE. Nanny dear, don't cry. Don't cry. There now, my sweet red apple. Do you remember how I used to rub your cheeks to make them shine? My dear, wrinkled red apple! I didn't do anything tonight that was worth sending tears down the little gullies of your dear face. I'm pure, and I swear that I have no other lover than Haemon. If you like, I'll swear that I shall never have any other lover than Haemon. Save your tears, Nanny, save them, Nanny dear; you may still need them. When you cry like that, I become a little girl again; and I mustn't be a little girl today.

ISMENE enters.

ISMENE. Antigone! What are you doing up at this hour? I've just been to your room.

NURSE. The two of you, now! You're both going mad. To be up before the kitchen fire has been started. Do you like running about without a mouthful of breakfast! Do you think it's decent for the

daughters of a king? And look at you, with no wraps on, and the sun not up! I'll have you both on my hands with colds before I know it.

ANTIGONE. Nanny dear, go away now. It's not chilly, really; summer's here. Go ~~get me something to eat~~. AND MAKE US SOME COFFEE. IT WOULD DO ME SO MUCH GOOD.

NURSE. My poor baby! Her head's swimming, what with nothing on her stomach, and me standing here like an idiot when I could be getting her something hot to drink.

Exit NURSE.

ISMENE. Aren't you well!

ANTIGONE. Of course I am. Just a little tired. I got up too early.

ISMENE. I couldn't sleep, either.

ANTIGONE. Ismene, you ought not to go without your beauty sleep.

ISMENE. Don't make fun of me.

ANTIGONE. I'm not, truly. This particular morning, seeing how beautiful you are makes everything easier for me. Wasn't I a miserable little beast when we were small? I used to fling mud at you, and put worms down your neck. I can remember tying you to a tree and cutting off your hair. Your beautiful hair! How easy it must be never to be unreasonable with all that smooth silken hair so beautifully set round your head.

ISMENE. Why do you insist upon talking about other things?

ANTIGONE. I am not talking about other things.

ISMENE. Antigone, I've thought about it a lot.

ANTIGONE. Did you?

ISMENE. I thought about it all night long. Antigone, you're mad.

ANTIGONE. Am I?

ISMENE. We cannot do it.

ANTIGONE. Why not?

ISMENE. Creon will have us put to death.

ANTIGONE. Of course he will. HE WILL DO WHAT HE HAS TO DO, AND WE WILL DO WHAT WE HAVE TO DO. HE IS BOUND TO PUT US TO DEATH. But we are bound to go out and bury our brother. That's the way it is. What do you think we can do to change it?

ISMENE. I don't want to die.

ANTIGONE. I'd prefer not to die, myself.

ISMENE. Listen to me, Antigone. I thought about it all night. I may be younger than you are, but I always think things over, and you don't.

ANTIGONE. Sometimes it is better not to think too much.

ISMENE. I don't agree with you! Oh, I know it's horrible. ~~I know Polynices was cheated out of his rights. That he made war—that Creon took sides against him, and he was killed.~~ And I pity Polynices just as much as you do. But all the same, I sort of see what Uncle Creon means.

ANTIGONE. I DON'T WANT TO "SORT OF SEE" ANYTHING.

ISMENE. He has to set an example!

ANTIGONE. Example! Creon orders our brother to rot and putrify, and be mangled by dogs ~~and birds of prey.~~ ~~That's an offence against every decent human instinct against the laws of God and Man.~~ And you talk about examples!

ISMENE. There you go, off on your own again, refusing

ISMENE (cont'd). to pay the slightest heed to anybody. I'M RIGHT OFTENER THAN YOU ARE.

ANTIGONE. I DON'T WANT TO BE RIGHT!

ISMENE. At least you might try to understand.

ANTIGONE. ~~I only understand that a man lies rotting, unburied. And that he is my brother, and that he must be buried.~~ UNDERSTAND! THE FIRST WORD I EVER HEARD OUT OF ANY OF YOU WAS THAT WORD "UNDERSTAND." WHY DIDN'T I "UNDERSTAND" THAT I MUST NOT PLAY WITH WATER — COLD, BLACK, BEAUTIFUL FLOWING WATER — BECAUSE I'D SPILL IT ON THE PALACE TILES. OR WITH EARTH, BECAUSE EARTH DIRTIES A LITTLE GIRL'S DRESS. WHY DIDN'T I "UNDERSTAND" THAT NICE CHILDREN DON'T EAT OUT OF EVERY DISH AT ONCE; OR RUN IN THE WIND SO FAST THAT THEY FALL DOWN; OR GIVE EVERYTHING IN THEIR POCKETS TO BEGGARS. UNDERSTAND! I DON'T WANT TO UNDERSTAND.

ISMENE. ~~But Creon won't let us bury him. And he is stronger than we are,~~ ANTIGONE. He is the king. ~~He has made himself king.~~ AND THE WHOLE CITY IS WITH HIM.

ANTIGONE. I am not listening to you.

ISMENE. You must! ~~You know how Creon works.~~ His mob will come running, howling as it runs. A thousand arms will seize our arms. A thousand breaths will breathe into our faces. Like one single pair of eyes, a thousand eyes will stare at us. We'll be driven in a tumbrel through their hatred, through the smell of them and their cruel, roaring laughter. We'll be dragged to the scaffold for torture, surrounded by guards with their idiot faces all bloated, their animal hands clean-washed for the sacrifice, their beefy eyes squinting as they stare at us. And we'll know that no shrieking and no begging will make them understand that we want to live, for they are like trained beasts who go through the motions they've been taught, without caring about right or wrong. And we shall suffer, we shall feel pain rising in us until it becomes so unbearable that we know it must stop: but it won't stop: it will go on rising and rising, like a screaming voice. Oh, I can't, I can't, Antigone!

ANTIGONE. How well have you thought it all out,

ISMENE. I thought of it all night long. Didn't you?

ANTIGONE. Oh, yes.

ISMENE. I'm an awful coward, Antigone.

ANTIGONE. So am I. But what has that to do with it!

ISMENE. But, Antigone! Don't you want to go on living?

ANTIGONE. Go on living! Who was it that was always the first out of bed because she loved the touch of the cold morning air on her bare skin! Or the last to bed because nothing less than infinite weariness could wear her from the lingering night!

ISMENE. Antigone! My darling little sister!

ANTIGONE. No! For ~~pity's~~ HEAVEN'S sake! Don't PAW ME! You say you've thought it all out. The howling mob: the torture: the fear of death: They've made up your mind for you. Is that it?

ISMENE. Yes.

ANTIGONE. All right. They're as good excuses as any.

ISMENE. Antigone, be reasonable. It's all very well for men to believe in ideas and die for them. But you are a girl!

ANTIGONE. DON'T I KNOW I'M A GIRL? HAVEN'T I SPENT MY LIFE CURSING THE FACT THAT I WAS A GIRL?

ISMENE. Antigone! You have everything in the world to make you happy. All you have to do is reach out for it. You are going to be married; you are young; you are beautiful –

ANTIGONE. I am not beautiful.

ISMENE. Oh, yes, you are! Not the way other girls are. But it's always you that the little ~~tough~~ boys turn to look back at when they pass us in the street. And when you go by, the little girls stop talking. They stare and stare at you, until we've turned a corner.

ANTIGONE. "Little ~~tough~~ boys – little girls."

ISMENE. And what about Haemon?

ANTIGONE. I shall see Haemon this morning. I'll take care of Haemon. Go back to bed now, Ismene. The sun is coming up, and, as you see, there is nothing I can do today. Our brother Polynices is as well guarded as if he had won the war and were sitting on his throne.

ISMENE. What are you going to do?

NURSE [*from off-stage*]. Come, my dove. Come to breakfast.

ANTIGONE. Please go back to bed.

ISMENE. If I do – promise me you won't leave the house. YOU'LL LET ME TALK TO YOU ABOUT THIS AGAIN? PROMISE!

ANTIGONE. Very well then – I promise. [*ISMENE exits.*] POOR ISMENE!

NURSE. Come along. Breakfast, my dear.

ANTIGONE. I'm not really hungry, Nurse.

NURSE. ~~My darling~~ – Where is your pain?

ANTIGONE. Nowhere. But you must keep me warm and safe, as you used to do when I was little. Oh, Nanny! STRONGER THAN ANY NIGHTMARE, STRONGER THAN THE SHADOW OF THE CUPBOARD THAT USED TO SNARL AT ME AND TURN INTO A DRAGON ON THE BEDROOM WALL. STRONGER THAN THE NIGHT ITSELF. NANNY, STRONGER THAN DEATH. Give me your hand, as if I were sick in bed, and you sitting beside me.

NURSE. My lamb! What is it that's eating your heart out?

ANTIGONE. Nothing. It's just that I'm not quite strong enough for what I have to go through. But nobody but you must know that.

NURSE. A little young for what, my kitten?

ANTIGONE. Nothing. Oh, it's so good that you are here. I can hold your callused hand, your hand that is so prompt and strong to ward off evil. You are very powerful, Nanny.

NURSE. What is it you want me to do for you, my baby!

ANTIGONE. There isn't anything to do, except put your hand like this against my cheek. I'm not afraid any more.

NURSE. There!

ANTIGONE. Nanny –

NURSE. Yes?

ANTIGONE. My dog, Puff . . .

NURSE. Well?

ANTIGONE. Promise me that you will never scold her again.

NURSE. Dogs that dirty up a house with their filthy paws deserve to be scolded.

ANTIGONE. I KNOW. JUST THE SAME, PROMISE ME.

NURSE. YOU MEAN YOU WANT ME TO LET HER MAKE A MESS ALL OVER THE PLACE AND NOT SAY A THING!

ANTIGONE. YES, and promise me that you will talk to her. That you will talk to her often.

NURSE. Me, talk to a dog!

ANTIGONE. But you are not to talk to her the way people usually talk to dogs. You're to talk to her the way I talk to her.

NURSE. I don't see why both of us have to make fools of ourselves. So long as you're here, one ought to be enough.

ANTIGONE. But if there was a reason why I couldn't go on talking to her —

NURSE. *[interrupting]*. Couldn't go on talking to her! And why couldn't you go on talking to her! What kind of poppycock —

ANTIGONE. And if she got too unhappy, if she moaned and moaned, waiting for me with her nose under the door as she does when I'm out all day, then the best thing, Nanny, might be to have her mercifully put to sleep.

NURSE. Now what has got into you this morning? *[HAEMON enters.]* Running around in the darkness, won't sleep, won't eat — *[ANTIGONE Sees HAEMON.]*— and now it's her dog she wants killed. I never.

ANTIGONE. *[interrupting.]* Nanny! Haemon is here. Go inside, please. And don't forget that you've promised me. *[NURSE exits.]* Haemon, Haemon! Forgive me for quarreling with you last night. Forgive me for everything. It was all my fault. Oh, I beg you to forgive me.

HAEMON. You know that I've forgiven you. You had hardly slammed the door, your perfume still hung in the room, when I had already forgiven you. You stole that perfume. From whom?

ANTIGONE. Ismene.

HAEMON. And the rouge? and the face powder? and the dress?

ANTIGONE. Ismene.

HAEMON. And in whose honor did you get yourself up so glamorously?

ANTIGONE. I'll tell you. Oh, what a fool I was! To waste a whole evening! A whole, beautiful evening!

HAEMON. We'll have other evenings, my sweet.

ANTIGONE. Perhaps we won't.

HAEMON. And other quarrels, too. A happy love is full of quarrels.

ANTIGONE. A happy love, yes. Haemon, listen to me.

HAEMON. Yes?

ANTIGONE. And don't laugh at me this morning. Be serious.

HAEMON. I am serious.

ANTIGONE. And hold me tight. Tighter than you have ever held me. I want all your strength to flow into me.

They embrace.

HAEMON. There! With all my strength.

ANTIGONE. That's good. Haemon! I wanted to tell you. You know – the little boy we were going to have when we were married?

HAEMON. Yes.

ANTIGONE. I'd have protected him against everything in the world.

HAEMON. Yes, dear sweet.

ANTIGONE. Oh, you don't know how I should have held him in my arms and given him my strength. He wouldn't have been afraid of anything, Haemon. His mother wouldn't have been very imposing: her hair wouldn't always have been brushed; but she would have been strong where he was concerned, so much stronger than ~~any other mother in the world~~ all those real mothers with their real bosoms and their aprons around their middle. You believe that, don't you, Haemon?

HAEMON. Yes, ~~my dearest~~.

ANTIGONE. And you believe me when I say that you would have had a real wife?

HAEMON. I have a real wife.

ANTIGONE. Haemon, you loved me! You did love me that night. You're sure of it!

HAEMON. What night, my sweet!

ANTIGONE: And you are sure that that night, at the dance, when you came to the corner where I was sitting, there was no mistake? It was me you were looking for? It wasn't another girl! And that not in your most secret heart of hearts, have you said to yourself that it was Ismene you ought to have asked to marry you?

HAEMON. Antigone, you are idiotic.

ANTIGONE. ~~Oh you do love me, don't you?~~—You love me as a woman — as a woman wants to be loved, don't you? Your arms around me aren't lying, are they? Your hands, so warm against my back — they aren't lies? This warmth; this strength that flows through me as I stand so close to you: they aren't lies, are they?

HAEMON. Antigone, darling, I love you WITH ALL OF MYSELF.

They Kiss.

ANTIGONE. I'm sallow, and I'm ~~not pretty~~ SCRAWNY. Ismene is pink and golden. She's like a fruit.

HAEMON. Look here, Antigone—

ANTIGONE. Oh forgive me, I am ashamed of myself. But this morning, this special morning, I must know. Tell me the truth! I beg you to tell me the truth! When you think about me, when it strikes you suddenly that I am going to belong to you —

ANTIGONE (cont'd). do you get the sense that — that a great empty space is being hollowed out inside you; and that there is something inside you that is just — dying!

HAEMON. Yes, I do, I do.

ANTIGONE. That's the way I feel. There! Now I have two things more to tell you. And when I have told them to you, you must go away instantly, without asking any questions. However strange they may seem to you. However much they may hurt you. Swear that you will!

HAEMON. What are these things that you are going to tell me!

ANTIGONE. Swear, first, that you will go away without one word. Without so much as looking at me. You hear me, Haemon. Swear it, please. This is the last mad wish that you will ever have to grant me.

HAEMON. I swear it.

ANTIGONE. Thank you. Well, here it is. First, about last night, when I went to your house. You asked me a moment ago why I wore Ismene's dress and rouge. I did it because I was stupid. I wasn't very sure that you loved me as a woman; and I did it because I wanted you to want me.

HAEMON. Was that the reason? My poor—

ANTIGONE. ~~No! Wait! That was the reason.~~ And you laughed at me. And we quarreled; AND MY TEMPER GOT THE BETTER OF ME and I flung out of the house. The reason why I went to your house last night was that I wanted you to take me; I wanted to be your wife – before –

HAEMON. Antigone —?

ANTIGONE. Haemon! You swore you wouldn't ask a single question. You swore, Haemon. As a matter of fact, I'll tell you why. I wanted to be your wife last night because I love you that way very — very strongly. And also because — ~~Oh, my beloved~~; I'm going to cause you such a lot of pain. I wanted it also because I shall never, never be able to marry you, never!

HAEMON. Antigone!

ANTIGONE. Haemon! You took a solemn oath! You swore! Leave me now! Tomorrow the whole thing will be clear to you. Even before tomorrow: this afternoon. If you please, Haemon, go now. It's the only thing left that you can do for me if you still love me. [*HAEMON exits*] Well, it's over for Haemon, Antigone.

ISMENE enters.

ISMENE. I can't sleep. I'm terrified. I'm so afraid that, even though it is daylight, you'll still try to bury Polynices. Antigone, you know I love you: you know I want to make you happy. And you remember what Polynices was like. He was our brother, of course. But he's dead; and he never loved us. He was a bad brother. He was like an enemy in this house. He never thought of you. Why should you think of him? What if he does have to lie rotting in a field? WHAT IF HIS SOUL DOES HAVE TO WANDER THROUGH ENDLESS TIME WITHOUT REST OR PEACE! It's Creon's doing, not ours.

Don't try to change things. You can't bury Polynices. I won't let you.

ANTIGONE. You are too late, Ismene. When you first saw me this morning, I had just come in from burying him.

ANTIGONE exits.

LATER THAT DAY

CREON. A private of the guards, you say! One of those standing watch over the body! Show him in.

The PAGE exits. PAGE re-enters, preceded by the FIRST GUARD. FIRST GUARD salutes.

FIRST GUARD. Private Jonas, Second Battalion.

CREON. What are you doing here?

FIRST GUARD. It's like this, ~~Chief~~ SIR. Soon as it happened, we said: "Got to tell the chief about this before anybody else spills it. He'll want to know right away." So we tossed a coin to see which one would come up and tell you about it. You see, ~~Chief~~ SIR, we thought only one man had better come, because, after all, you don't want to leave the body without a guard. Right? I mean, there's three of us on duty, guarding the body.

CREON. The body? What's wrong about the body?

FIRST GUARD. ~~Chief~~ SIR, I've been seventeen years in the service. Volunteer. Two citations. My record's clean. I know my business and I know my place. I carry out orders. Sir, ask any officer in the battalion; they'll tell you. "Leave it to Jonas. Give him an order: he'll carry it out." That's what they'll tell you, ~~Chief~~ SIR. Jonas, that's me — that's my name.

CREON. What's the matter with you, man? What are you shaking for?

FIRST GUARD. By rights it's the corporal's job, sir. I've been recommended for a corporal, but they haven't put it through yet. June, it was supposed to go through. But with all this red tape and —

CREON. [*interrupts*]. Stop chattering and tell me why you are here. If anything has gone wrong with that body, I'll break all three of you.

FIRST GUARD. Nobody can say we didn't keep our eye on that body. We had the two-o'clock watch — the tough one. You know how it is, ~~Chief~~ SIR. It's nearly the end of the night. Your eyes are like lead. You've got a crick in the back of your neck. There's shadows, and the fog is beginning to roll in. A fine watch they give us! And me, seventeen years in the service. But we was doing our duty all right. On our feet, all of us. Anybody says we were sleeping is a liar. First place, it was too cold. Second place — [*CREON makes a gesture of impatience.*] Yes, ~~Chief~~ SIR. Well, I turned around and looked at the body. We wasn't only ten feet away from it, but that's how I am. I was keeping my eye on it. Listen, Chief, I was the first man to see it! Me! They'll tell you. I was the one let out that yell!

CREON. What for! What was the matter?

FIRST GUARD. ~~Chief~~ SIR, the body! Somebody had been there and buried him.

CREON. ~~My~~ BY God, I'll —

FIRST GUARD. It wasn't much, you understand. With us three there, it couldn't have been. Just covered over with a little dirt, that's all. But enough to hide it from the buzzards.

CREON. You are sure that it couldn't have been a dog, scratching up the earth?

FIRST GUARD. Not a chance, Chief. That's kind of what we hoped it was. But the earth was scattered over the body just like the priests tell you you should do it. Whoever did that job knew what he was doing, all right.

CREON. Who could have dared? Was there anything to indicate who might have done it?

FIRST GUARD. Not a thing, ~~Chief~~ SIR. Maybe we heard a footstep – I can't swear to it. Of course we started right in to search, and the corporal found a shovel, a kid's shovel no bigger than that, all rusty and everything. Corporal's got the shovel for you. We thought maybe a kid did it.

CREON. A kid! I broke the back of the rebellion; but like a snake, it is coming together again. Polynices' friends, with their gold, blocked by my orders in the banks of Thebes. The leaders of the ~~populace~~ MOB, allied to envious princes. And the temple priests, always ready for a bit of fishing in troubled waters. A kid! I can imagine what he is like, their kid: a baby-faced killer, creeping in the night with a toy shovel under his jacket. [*He looks at his PAGE.*] Though why shouldn't they have corrupted a real child? There is something, now, to soften the hearts and weaken the minds of the people. Very touching! Very useful to them, an innocent child. A martyr. A real white-faced baby of fourteen who will spit with contempt at the guards who kill him. A free gift to their cause: the precious, innocent blood of a child on my hands. They must have accomplices in the Guard itself. Look here, you. Who knows about this!

FIRST GUARD. Only us three, Chief. We flipped a coin, and I came right over.

CREON. Right. Listen, now. You will continue on duty. When the relief squad comes up, you will tell them to return to barracks. You will uncover the body; keep a sharp watch and if another attempt is made to bury it, you will make an arrest and bring the person straight to me. And you will keep your mouths shut ~~about this~~. Not one word of this to a human soul. You are all guilty of neglect of duty, and you will be punished; but if the rumor spreads through Thebes that the body received burial, you will be shot – all three of you.

FIRST GUARD. ~~Chief~~ SIR, we never told nobody, I swear we didn't! Anyhow, I've been up here. Suppose my pals spilled it to the relief; I couldn't have been with them and here too. That wouldn't be my fault if they talked. ~~Chief~~ SIR, I've got two kids. You're my witness, ~~Chief~~ SIR, it couldn't have been me. I was here with you. I've got a witness! If anybody talked, it couldn't have been me! I was –

CREON. Clear out! If the story doesn't get around, you won't be shot. *[FIRST GUARD exits.]* A child! *[He looks at PAGE.]* Come here, ~~my~~ ~~boy~~. SINCE WE CAN'T HOPE TO KEEP THIS TO OURSELVES, WE SHALL HAVE TO BE THE FIRST TO GIVE OUT THE NEWS. AND AFTER THAT, WE SHALL HAVE TO CLEAN UP THE MESS. Would you defy the Guard with your little shovel? Of course you would. You would do it, too. A child!

CREON & PAGE exit.

LATER THAT DAY.

CHORUS. The spring is wound up tight. It will uncoil of itself. That is what is so convenient in tragedy. The least little turn of the wrist will do the job. Anything will set it going: a glance at a girl who happens to be lifting her arms to her hair as you go by; a feeling when you wake up on a fine morning that you'd like a little respect paid to you today, as if it were as easy to order as a second cup of coffee; one question too many, idly thrown out over friendly drink — and the tragedy is on.

The rest is automatic. You don't need to lift a finger. The machine is in perfect order; it has been oiled ever since time began, and it runs without friction. Death, treason, and sorrow are on the march; and they move in the wake of storm, of tears, of stillness. Every kind of stillness. The hush when the executioner's ax goes up at the end of the last act. The unbreathable silence when, at the beginning of the play, the two lovers, their hearts bared, their bodies naked, stand for the first time face to face in the darkened room, afraid to stir. The silence inside you when the roaring crowd acclaim the winner — so that you think of a film without a sound track, mouths agape and no sound coming out of them, a clamor that is no more than a picture; and you, the victor, already vanquished, alone in the desert of your silence. That is tragedy.

Tragedy is clean, it is firm RESTFUL, it is flawless. It has nothing to do with melodrama — with wicked villains, persecuted maidens, avengers, gleams of hope, and eleventh-hour repentances. Death, in a melodrama, is really horrible because it is never inevitable. The dear old father might so easily have been saved; the honest young man might so easily have brought in the police five minutes earlier.

CHORUS (cont'd). In a tragedy, nothing is in doubt and everyone's destiny is known. That makes for tranquility. HE WHO KILLS IS AS INNOCENT AS HE WHO GETS KILLED: IT'S ALL A MATTER OF WHAT PART YOU ARE PLAYING. Tragedy is restful; and the reason is that hope, that foul, deceitful thing, has no part in it. There isn't any hope. You're trapped. The whole sky has fallen on you, and all you can do about it is to shout.

Now, don't mistake me: I said "shout": I did not say groan, whimper, complain. That, you cannot do. But you can shout aloud; you can get all those things said that you never thought you'd be able to say — or never even knew you had it in you to say. And you don't say these things because it will do any good to say them: you know better than that. You say them for their own sake; you say them because you learn a lot from them.

In melodrama you argue and struggle in the hope of escape. That is vulgar; it's practical. But in tragedy, where there is no temptation to try to escape, argument is gratuitous: it's kingly

Voices of the GUARDS and scuffling sound heard.

The play is on. Antigone has been caught. For the first time in her life, Antigone is going to be able to be herself.

CHORUS exits.

FIRST GUARD enters, followed buy ANTIGONE between SECOND and THIRD GUARD.

FIRST GUARD. Come on, now, Miss, give it a rest. The Chief will be here in a minute and you can tell him about it. All I know is my orders. I don't want to know what you were doing there. People always have excuses; but I can't afford to listen to them, see. Say, if we had to listen to all the people who want to tell us what's the matter with this country, we'd never get our work done.

ANTIGONE. They are hurting me. Tell them to take their dirty hands off me. I DON'T MIND BEING KILLED, BUT I DON'T WANT THEM TO TOUCH ME.

FIRST GUARD. Dirty hands, eh? And what about stiffs, and dirt, and such like? You wasn't afraid to touch them, was you? "Their dirty hands!" Take a look at your own hands. THE LEAST YOU CAN DO IS TRY TO BE POLITE, MISS. LOOK AT ME: I'M POLITE.

ANTIGONE. Tell them to let me go. I won't run away. My father was King Oedipus. I am Antigone.

FIRST GUARD. King Oedipus' little girl! What do you know about that! Listen, Miss, the night watch never picks up a lady but they say, you better be careful: I'm sleeping with the police commissioner. [*The GUARDS laugh. ANTIGONE looks at her hands, which are grubby.*] Guess you must have lost your shovel, didn't you? Had to go at it with your fingernails the second time, I'll bet. By God, I never saw such nerve! I turn my back for about five seconds TO ASK A PAL FOR A CHEW and there she is, clawing away like a hyena. RIGHT OUT IN BROAD DAYLIGHT! And did she scratch and kick when I grabbed her! Straight for my eyes with them nails she went. And yelling something fierce about, "I haven't finished yet; let me finish" ~~You keep hold of her and I'll see that she keeps her face shut.~~ SHE AIN'T GOT ALL HER MARBLES!

SECOND GUARD. ~~Don't worry. She won't get away this time!~~ I NABBED A NUT LIKE THAT THE OTHER DAY. RIGHT ON THE MAIN SQUARE SHE WAS, HOISTING UP HER SKIRTS AND SHOWING HER BEHIND TO ANYBODY THAT WANTED TO TAKE A LOOK.

FIRST GUARD. Listen, we're going to get a bonus out of this. What do you say we throw a party, the three of us?

SECOND GUARD. At the old woman's? Behind Market Street?

THIRD GUARD. Suits me. Sunday would be a good day. We're off duty Sunday. What do you say: we bring our wives?

FIRST GUARD. ~~Nix~~. NO. Let's have some fun this time. Bring your wife, and they always put the damper on! FIRST PLACE, WHAT DO YOU DO WITH THE KIDS? BRING THEM, THEY ALWAYS WANT TO GO TO THE CAN JUST WHEN YOU'RE RIGHT IN THE MIDDLE OF A GAME OF CARDS OR SOMETHING. Say, listen. Who would have thought an hour ago that us three would be talking about throwing a party now! The way I felt when the old man was interrogating me, we'd be lucky if we got off with being docked a month's pay. I want to tell you, I was scared.

SECOND GUARD. You sure we're going to get a bonus?

FIRST GUARD. Yeah. Something tells me this is big stuff.

THIRD GUARD. [*to SECOND GUARD*]. What's-his-name, you know — in the Third Battalion! He got an extra month's pay for catching a firebug.

SECOND GUARD. If we get an extra month's pay, I vote we throw the party at the Arabian's.

FIRST GUARD. You're crazy! He charges twice as much for liquor as anybody else in town. Unless you want to go upstairs, of course. Can't do that at the old woman's.

THIRD GUARD. ~~Say, we ain't going to do so hot~~, WELL, WE CAN'T KEEP THIS FROM OUR WIVES, no matter how you figure it. You get an extra month's pay, and what happens? Everybody in the outfit knows it, and your wife knows it too. They might even line up the battalion and give it to you in front of everybody, SO HOW COULD YOU KEEP YOUR WIFE FROM FINDING OUT?

FIRST GUARD. Well, we'll see about that. If they do the job out in the barrack yard — of course that means women, kids, everything.

ANTIGONE. I should like to sit down, if you please.

FIRST GUARD. Let her sit down. But keep hold of her. [*CREON enters, followed by his PAGE.*] ‘TenShun!

CREON. Antigone! What is this? [*To The FIRST GUARD.*] Take off those handcuffs! What is this?

FIRST GUARD. The watch, Chief SIR. We all came this time.

CREON. Who is guarding the body?

FIRST GUARD. We sent for the relief.

CREON. But I gave orders that the relief was to go back to barracks and stay there! I told you not to open your mouth about this!

FIRST GUARD. Nobody's said anything, Chief SIR. But acting out your orders, we made this arrest, and brought the party in.

CREON [*to ANTIGONE*]. Where did these men find you?

FIRST GUARD. Right by the body.

CREON. What were you doing near your brother's body! You knew what my orders were.

FIRST GUARD. What was she doing? ~~Chief~~ SIR, that's why we brought her in. She was digging up the dirt with her nails. She was trying to cover up the body all over again.

CREON. Do you realize what you are saying?

FIRST GUARD. ~~Chief~~ SIR, ask these men here. After I reported to you, I went back, and first thing we did, we uncovered the body. The sun was coming up and it was beginning to smell, so we moved it up on a little rise to get him in the wind. Of course, you wouldn't expect any trouble in broad daylight. But just the same, we decided one of us had better keep his eye peeled all the time. About noon, what with the sun and the smell, and as the wind dropped and I wasn't feeling none too good, I went over to my pal to get a chew. I just had time to say "thanks" and stick it in my mouth, when I turned round and there she was, clawing away at the dirt with both hands. Right out in broad daylight! Wouldn't you think when she saw me come running she'd stop and beat it out of there? Not her! She went right on digging as fast as she could, as if I wasn't there at all. And when I grabbed her, she scratched and bit and yelled to leave her alone, she hadn't finished yet, the body wasn't all covered yet, and the like of that.

CREON. *[to ANTIGONE]*. Is this true?

ANTIGONE. Yes, it is true.

FIRST GUARD. We scraped the dirt off as fast as we could, then we sent for the relief and we posted them. But we didn't tell them a thing, ~~Chief~~ SIR. And we brought ~~her to~~ IN the party so's you could see her. And that's the truth, so help me God.

CREON. *[to ANTIGONE.]* And was it you who covered the body the first time? In the night?

ANTIGONE. Yes, it was. With a toy shovel we used to take to the seashore when we were children. It was Polynices' own shovel; he had cut his name in the handle. That was why I left it with him. But these men took it away; so the next time, I had to do it with my hands.

FIRST GUARD. Sir, she was clawing away like a wild animal. Matter of fact, first minute we saw her, what with the heat haze and everything, my pal says, "That must be a dog," he says. "Dog!" I says, "that's a girl, that is!" And it was.

CREON. Very well. *[Turns to the PAGE.]* Show these men to the anteroom. *[The PAGE stands waiting. To the FIRST GUARD.]* You three men will wait outside. I may want a report from you later.

FIRST GUARD. Do I put the cuffs back on her, ~~Chief~~ SIR?

CREON. No. *[The GUARDS exeunt. PAGE exits.]* Had you told anybody what you meant to do?

ANTIGONE. No.

CREON. Did you meet anyone on your way — coming or going?

ANTIGONE. No, nobody.

CREON. Sure of that, are you?

ANTIGONE. Quite sure.

CREON. Very well. Now listen to me. You will go straight to your room. When you get there, you will go to bed. You will say that you are not well and that you have not been out since yesterday. Your nurse will tell the same story. And I'll ~~dispose~~ GET RID of those three men.

ANTIGONE. Uncle Creon, there's no reason to kill those three guards. You must know that I'll do it all over again tonight.

CREON. Why did you try to bury your brother?

ANTIGONE. I owed it to him.

CREON. I had forbidden it.

ANTIGONE. I owed it to him. Those who are not buried wander eternally and find no rest. Everybody knows that. IF MY BROTHER WERE ALIVE, AND HE CAME HOME WEARY AFTER A LONG DAY'S HUNTING, I SHOULD FETCH HIM FOOD AND DRINK AND SEE THAT HIS BED WAS READY FOR HIM. POLYNICES IS HOME FROM THE HUNT. I owe it to him to unlock the house of the dead in which my father and my mother are waiting to welcome him. Polynices has earned his rest.

CREON. Polynices was a rebel and a traitor, and you know it.

ANTIGONE. He was my brother.

CREON. You heard my edict. It was proclaimed throughout Thebes. You read my edict. It was posted up on the city walls.

ANTIGONE. ~~Yes~~. OF COURSE I DID.

CREON. You knew the punishment I decreed for any person who attempted to give him burial.

ANTIGONE. Yes, I knew the punishment.

CREON. Did you by any chance act on the assumption that a daughter of Oedipus, a daughter of Oedipus' stubborn pride, was above the law?

ANTIGONE. NO, I did not act on that assumption.

CREON. Because if you had acted on that assumption, Antigone, you would have been deeply wrong. Nobody has a more sacred obligation to obey the law than those who make the law. You are a daughter of lawmakers, a daughter of kings, Antigone. You must observe the law.

ANTIGONE. Had I been a scullery maid washing my dishes when that law was read aloud to me, I should have scrubbed the greasy water from my arms and gone out in my apron to bury my brother.

CREON. What nonsense! If you had been a scullery maid, there would have been no doubt in your mind about the seriousness of that edict. You would have known that it meant death; and you would have been satisfied to weep for your brother in your kitchen. But you! You thought that because you come of the royal line, because you were my niece and were going to marry my son, I shouldn't dare have you killed.

ANTIGONE. ~~You are mistaken.~~ QUITE THE CONTRARY. I never doubted for an instant that you would have me put to death.

CREON. The pride of Oedipus! Oedipus and his headstrong pride all over again. I can see your father in you and I believe you. Of course you thought that I should have you killed! Proud as you are, it seemed to you a natural climax in your existence. Your father was like that. For him, as for you, human happiness was meaningless; and mere human misery was not enough to satisfy his passion for torment. You come of people for whom the human vestment is a kind of straitjacket: it cracks at the seams. You spend your lives wriggling to get out of it. Nothing less than a cozy tea party with death and destiny will quench your thirst. The happiest hour of your father's life came when he listened greedily to the story of how, unknown to himself, he had killed his own father and dishonored the bed of his own mother. Drop by drop, word by word, he drank in the dark story that the gods had destined him first to live and then to hear. How avidly men and women drink the brew of such a tale when their names are Oedipus – and Antigone! And it is so simple, afterwards, to do what your father did, to put out one's eyes and take you, his daughter, begging on the highways.

Let me tell you, Antigone: those days are over for Thebes. Thebes has a right to a king without a past. My name, thank God, is only Creon. I stand here with both feet firm on the ground; with both hands in my pockets; and I have decided that so long as I am king — being less ambitious than your father was — I shall merely devote myself to introducing a little order into this absurd kingdom; if that is possible.

CREON (cont'd). Don't think that being a king seems to me romantic. It is my trade; a trade a man has to work at every day; and like every other trade, it isn't all beer and skittles. But since it is my trade, I take it seriously. And if, tomorrow, some wild and bearded messenger walks in from some wild and distant valley — which is what happened to your father — and tells me that he's not quite sure who my parents were, but thinks that my wife Eurydice is actually my mother, I shall ask him to do me the kindness to go back where he came from; and I shan't let a little matter like that persuade me to order my wife to take a blood test and the police to let me know whether or not my birth certificate was forged. Kings, my girl, have other things to do than to surrender themselves to their private feelings. Hand you over to be killed! I have other plans for you. You're going to marry Haemon; and ~~you're going to~~ I WANT YOU TO FATTEN UP A BIT SO THAT YOU CAN give him a sturdy boy. Let me assure you that Thebes needs that boy a good deal more than it needs your death. Now, you will go straight to your room, and do as you have been told; and not a word about this to anybody. Don't fret about the guards: I'll see that their mouths are shut. And don't annihilate me with those eyes. I know that you think I am a brute, and I'm sure you must consider me very prosaic. But the fact is, I have always been fond of you, stubborn though you always were. Don't forget that the first doll you ever had came from me. Where are you going?

ANTIGONE. You know very well where I am going.

CREON. What sort of game are you playing?

ANTIGONE. I am not playing games.

CREON. Antigone, do you realize that if, apart from those three guards, a single soul finds out what you have tried to do, it will be impossible for me to avoid putting you to death? There is still a chance that I can save you; but only if you keep this to yourself and give up your crazy purpose. Five minutes more, and it will be too late, UNDERSTAND?

ANTIGONE. I must go and bury my brother. Those men have uncovered him.

CREON. What good will it do? You know that there are other men standing guard over Polynice's body. And even if you did cover him over with earth again, the earth would again be removed.

ANTIGONE. I know all that. But that much, at least, I can do. And what a person can do, a person ought to do.

CREON. Tell me, Antigone, do you believe all that flummery about religious burial? Do you really believe that a so-called shade of your brother is condemned to wander forever homeless if a little earth is not flung on his corpse to the accompaniment of some priestly abracadabra? Have you ever listened to the priests of Thebes when they were mumbling their formula? Have you ever watched their dreary sullen faces while they were preparing the dead for burial — skipping half the gestures required by the ritual, swallowing half their words, hustling the dead into their graves out of fear that they might be late for lunch?

ANTIGONE. Yes, I have seen all that.

CREON. And did you never say to yourself as you watched them, that if someone you really loved lay dead under the shuffling, mumbling ministrations of the priests, you would scream aloud and beg the priests to leave the dead in peace?

ANTIGONE. ~~No, Creon. There is a God and there are his priests.~~ YES, I'VE THOUGHT ALL THAT. BUT FLAWLESS GOD AND THOSE FAULTY PRIESTS ARE NOT THE SAME THING. You are not free to do with as you wish – not even when they are dead.

CREON. And HOW are you ~~are~~ going to stop me, ~~are you~~? BY INSISTING UPON BEING PUT TO DEATH –THE WHOLE THING IS ABSURD!

ANTIGONE. Yes, ~~I am going to stop you~~ IT'S ABSURD.

CREON. You must want very much to die. You look like; a trapped animal.

ANTIGONE. Stop feeling sorry for me. Do as I do. Do your job. But if you are a human being, do it quickly.

CREON. I want to save you, Antigone.

ANTIGONE. You are the king, and you are all-powerful. But that you cannot do.

CREON. You think not?

ANTIGONE. Neither save me nor stop me.

CREON. Prideful Antigone! LITTLE OEDIPUS!

ANTIGONE. Only this can you do: have me put to death.

CREON. Have you tortured, perhaps?

ANTIGONE. Why would you do that? To see me cry! To hear me beg for mercy? Or swear whatever you wish, and then begin over again?

CREON. You listen to me. You have cast me for the villain in this little play of yours, and yourself for the heroine. And you know it, you damned little mischiefmaker! But don't you drive me too far! If I were one of your preposterous little tyrants that Greece is full of, you would be lying in a ditch this minute with your tongue pulled out and your body drawn and quartered. But you can see something in my face that makes me hesitate to send for the guards and turn you over to them. Instead, I let you go on arguing; and you taunt me, you take the offensive. What are you driving at, ~~you she devil?~~

ANTIGONE. Let me go. You are hurting my arm.

CREON. I will not let you go.

ANTIGONE. Oh!

CREON. I should have done this from the beginning. ~~I was a fool to waste words.~~ I may be your uncle - but we are not a particularly affectionate family. Are we, eh? Are we? What fun for you, eh? To be able to spit in the face of a king who has all the power in the world; a man who has done his own killing in his day; who has killed people just as pitiable as you are — and who is still soft enough to go to all this trouble in order to keep you from being killed.

ANTIGONE. Now you are squeezing my arm too tightly. It doesn't hurt any more.

CREON. I shall save you yet. God knows, I have things enough to do today without wasting my time on an insect like you. But urgent things can wait. I am not going to let politics be the cause of your death. For it is a fact that this whole business is nothing but politics: the mournful shade of Polynices, the decomposing corpse, the sentimental weeping, and the hysteria that you mistake for heroism — nothing but politics.

CREON (cont'd). Look here. I may not be soft, but I'm fastidious. I like things clean, shipshape, well scrubbed. Don't think that I am not just as offended as you are by the thought of that meat rotting in the sun. In the evening, when the breeze comes in off the sea, you can smell it in the palace, and it nauseates me. But I refuse even to shut my window. It's vile; and I can tell you what I wouldn't tell anybody else: it's stupid, monstrously stupid. But the people of Thebes have got to have their noses rubbed into it a little longer. My God! If it was up to me, I should have had them bury your brother long ago as a mere matter of public hygiene. But if the feather-headed rabble I govern are to understand what's what, that stench has got to fill the town for a month!

ANTIGONE. You are a loathsome man!

CREON. I agree. My trade forces me to be. We could argue whether I ought or ought not to follow my trade; but once I take on the job, I must do it properly.

ANTIGONE. Why do you do it at all?

CREON. My dear, I woke up one morning and found myself King of Thebes. God knows, there were other things I loved in life more than power.

ANTIGONE. Then you should have said no.

CREON. Yes, yes, I could have done that. Only, I felt that it would have been cowardly. I should have been like a workman who turns down a job that has to be done. So I said yes.

ANTIGONE. So much the worse for you, then. I didn't say yes. I can say no to anything I think vile, and I don't have to count the cost. But because you said yes to your lust for power, all that you can do, for all your crown and your trappings, and your guards — all that you can do is to have me killed.

CREON. Listen to me.

ANTIGONE. If I want to. I don't have to listen to you if I don't want to. There is nothing more you can tell me that I don't know. ~~Whereas there a thousand things I can tell you that you don't know.~~ You stand there, drinking in my words. Why is it that you don't call your guards? I'll tell you why? You want to hear me out to the end; that's why.

CREON. You amuse me.

ANTIGONE. Oh, no, I don't. I frighten you. That is why you talk about saving me. Everything would be so much easier if you had a docile, tongue-tied little Antigone living in the palace. But you are going to have to put me to death today, and you know it. And that's what frightens you. **GOD! IS THERE ANYTHING UGLIER THAN A FRIGHTENED MAN!**

CREON. Very well. I am afraid, then. Does that satisfy you? I am afraid that if you insist upon it, I shall have to have you killed. And I don't want to.

ANTIGONE. I don't have to do things that I think are wrong. If it comes to that, you didn't really want to leave my brother's body unburied, did you? Say it! Admit that you didn't.

CREON. I have said it already.

ANTIGONE. But you did it just the same. And now, though you don't want to do it, you are going to have me killed. And you call that being a king!

CREON. Yes, I call that being a king.

ANTIGONE. Poor Creon! My nails are broken, my fingers are bleeding, my arms are covered with the welts left by the paws of your guards — but I am a queen!

CREON. Then why not have pity on me, and live? Isn't your brother's corpse, rotting there under my windows, payment enough for peace and order in Thebes? **MY SON LOVES YOU. DON'T MAKE ME ADD YOUR LIFE TO THE PAYMENT. I'VE PAID ENOUGH.**

ANTIGONE. No, Creon! You said yes, and made yourself king. Now you will never stop paying.

CREON. But God in heaven! Won't you try to understand me? I'm trying hard enough to understand you! There had to be one man who said yes. Somebody had to agree to captain the ship. She had sprung a hundred leaks; she was loaded to the water line with crime, ignorance, and poverty. The wheel was swinging with the wind. **THE CREW REFUSED TO WORK AND WERE LOOTING THE CARGO. THE OFFICERS WERE BUILDING A RAFT, READY TO DESERT THE SHIP. THE MAST WAS SPLITTING, THE WIND WAS HOWLING, THE SAILS WERE BEGINNING TO RIP.** Every man jack on board was about to drown —

CREON (cont'd). and only because the only thing they thought of was their own skins and their cheap little day-to-day traffic. Was that a time, do you think, for playing with words like yes and no? Was that a time for a man to be weighing the pros and cons, wondering if he wasn't going to pay too dearly later on; if he wasn't going to lose his life, or his family, or his touch with other men? You grab the wheel, you right the ship in the face of a mountain of water. You shout an order, and if one man refuses to obey, you shoot straight into the mob. Into the mob, I say! The beast as nameless as the wave that crashes down upon your deck; as nameless as the whipping wind. The thing that drops when you shoot may be someone who poured you a drink the night before; but it has no name. And you, braced at the wheel, you have no name, either. Nothing has a name — except the ship, and the storm. Now do you understand!

ANTIGONE. I am not here to understand ~~these things~~. I am here because I said to you.

CREON. It is easy to say no.

ANTIGONE. Not always.

CREON. It is easy to say no. To say yes, you have to sweat and roll up your sleeves and plunge both hands into life up to the elbows. It is easy to say no, even if saying no means death. All you have to do is to sit still and wait. Wait to go on living; wait to be killed. That is the coward's part. No is one of your man-made words. Can you imagine a world in which trees say no to the sap? In which beasts say no to hunger or to propagation? Animals are good, simple, tough. They move in droves, nudging one another onwards, all traveling the same road. Some of them keel over, but the rest go on; and no matter how many may fall by the wayside, there are always those few left that go on bringing their young into the world, traveling the same road with the same obstinate will, unchanged from those who went before.

ANTIGONE. Animals! What a king you could ~~make~~ BE, Creon if only men were animals!

CREON. You despise me, don't you? Strange. Again and again, I have imagined myself holding this conversation with a pale young man I have never seen in the flesh. He would have come to assassinate me, and he would have failed. And I would be trying to find out from him why he wanted to kill me. But with all my logic and all my powers of debate, the only thing I could get out of him would be that he despised me. Who would have thought that the white-faced boy would turn out to be you? And that the debate would arise out of something so meaningless as the burial of your brother?

ANTIGONE. MEANINGLESS?

CREON. And yet, you must hear me out. My part is not a heroic one, but I shall play my part. I shall have you put to death. But, before I do, I want to make one last appeal. I want to be sure that you know what you are doing as well as I know what I am doing. Do you know what you are dying for, Antigone? Do you know the sordid story to which you are going to sign your name in blood, for all time to come?

ANTIGONE. What story?

CREON. The story of Eteocles and Polynices, the story of your brothers. You think you know it, but you don't. Nobody in Thebes knows that story but me. And today, I feel, that you have a right to know it too. It is not a pretty story. You'll see. Tell me, first. What do you remember about your brothers? They were older than you, so they must have looked down on you. And I imagine that they tormented you – pulled your pigtails, broke your dolls, whispered secrets to each other to put you in a rage.

ANTIGONE. They were big and I was little.

CREON. And later on, when they came home wearing evening clothes, smoking cigarettes, strutting like men, they would take no notice of you and you thought they were wonderful.

ANTIGONE. They were boys and I was a girl.

CREON. You didn't know why, exactly, but you knew that they were making your mother unhappy. You saw her in tears over them; and your father would fly into a rage because of them. You heard them come in, slamming doors, laughing noisily in the corridors — insolent, spineless, unruly, smelling of drink.

ANTIGONE. Once, it was very early and we had just got up. I saw them coming home, and hid behind a door. Polynices was very pale and his eyes were shining. He was so handsome in his evening clothes. He saw me, and said: "Here, this is for you" and he gave me a big paper flower that he had brought home from his night out.

CREON. And of course you still have that flower. Last night, before you crept out, you opened a drawer and looked at it for a time, to give yourself courage.

ANTIGONE. Who told you so?

CREON. Poor Antigone! With her night-club flower. Do you know what your brother really was?

ANTIGONE. Whatever he was, I know that you will say vile things about him.

CREON. A cheap, idiotic bounder, that is what he was. A cruel, vicious little voluptuary. A little beast with just wit enough to drive a car faster and throw more money away than any of his pals. I was with your father one day when Polynices, who had lost a lot of money gambling, asked him to settle the debt; and when your father refused, the boy raised his hand against him and called him a vile name.

ANTIGONE. That's a lie!

CREON. He struck your father in the face with his fist. It was pitiful. Your father sat at his desk with his head in his hands. His nose was bleeding. He was weeping with anguish. And in a corner of your father's study, Polynices stood sneering and lighting a cigarette.

ANTIGONE. That's a lie.

CREON. When did you last see Polynices alive? When you were twelve years old. That's true, isn't it!

ANTIGONE. Yes, that's true.

CREON. Now you know why. Oedipus was too chicken-hearted to have the boy locked up. Polynices was allowed to go off and join the Argive army. And as soon as he reached Argos, the attempts upon your father's life began — upon the life of an old man who couldn't make up his mind to die, couldn't bear to be parted from his kingship. One after another, men slipped into Thebes from Argos for the purpose of assassinating him, and every killer we caught always ended by confessing who had put him up to it, who had paid him to try it. And Polynices wasn't the only one. That is really what I am trying to tell you. I want you to know what went on in the back room, in the smelly kitchen of politics; I want you to know what took place in the wings of this drama in which you are burning to play a part.

Yesterday, I gave Eteocles a State funeral, with pomp and honors. Today, Eteocles is a saint and a hero in the eyes of all Thebes. The whole city turned out to bury him. The schoolchildren emptied their piggy-banks to buy wreaths for him. Old men, orating in quavering, hypocritical voices, glorified the virtues of the great-hearted brother, the devoted son, the loyal prince.

CREON (cont'd). I made a speech myself; and every temple priest was there with an appropriate show of sorrow and solemnity in his stupid face. And military honors were accorded the dead hero.

Well, what else could I have done! People had taken sides in the civil war. Both sides couldn't be wrong; that would be too much. I couldn't have made them swallow the truth. Two gangsters was more of a luxury than I could afford. And yet, this is the whole point of my story. Eteocles, that virtuous brother, was just as rotten as Polynices. That great-hearted son had done his best, too, to procure the assassination of his father. That loyal prince had also offered to sell out Thebes to the highest bidder.

Funny, isn't it? Polynices lies rotting in the sun while Eteocles is given a hero's funeral and will be housed in a marble vault. Yet I have absolute proof that everything that Polynices did, Eteocles had plotted to do. They were a pair of blackguards — both engaged in selling out Thebes, and both intent in selling out each other; and they died like the cheap gangsters they were, over a division of the spoils.

But, as I told you a moment ago, I had to make a martyr of one of them. I sent out to the holocaust for their bodies; they were found clasped in one another's arms — for the first time in their lives, I imagine. Each had been spitted on the other's sword, and the Argive cavalry had trampled them down. They were mashed to a pulp, Antigone. I had the prettier of the two carcasses brought in and gave it a State funeral; and I left the other to rot. I don't know which was which. And I assure you, I don't care.

Antigone. Why do you tell me all this?

CREON. ~~You hold a treasure in your hand, Antigone — life I mean. And you were about to throw it all away.~~ Would it have been better to let you die a victim to that obscene story?

ANTIGONE. IT MIGHT HAVE BEEN.

CREON. Antigone, go and find Haemon and get married quickly. Be happy.

ANTIGONE. YES.

CREON. YOU HAVE YOUR WHOLE LIFE AHEAD OF YOU — AND LIFE IS A TREASURE.

ANTIGONE. YES.

CREON. AND YOU WERE ABOUT TO THROW IT AWAY. LIFE FLOWS LIKE WATER, AND YOU YOUNG PEOPLE LET IT RUN AWAY THROUGH YOUR FINGERS. SHUT YOUR HANDS; HOLD ON TO IT, ANTIGONE. Life is not what you think it is. Life is a child playing round your feet, a tool you hold firmly in your grip, a bench you sit down upon in the evening, in your garden. People will tell you that that's not life, that life is something else. They will tell you that because they need your strength and your fire, and they will want to make use of you. Don't listen to them. Believe me when I tell you – the only poor consolation that we have in our old age is to discover that what I have just said to you is true. Life is nothing more than the happiness that you get out of it.

ANTIGONE. Happiness...

CREON. Not much of a word, is it!

ANTIGONE. What kind of happiness do you foresee for me? Paint me the picture of your happy Antigone. What are the unimportant little sins that I shall have to commit before I am allowed to sink my teeth into life and tear happiness from it! Tell me: to whom shall I have to lie? Upon whom shall I have to fawn! To whom must I sell myself? Whom do you want me to leave dying, while I turn away my eyes?

CREON. Antigone, be quiet.

ANTIGONE. Why do you tell me to be quiet when all I want to know is what I have to do to be happy? You tell me that life is so wonderful. I want to know what I have to do in order to be able to say that myself.

CREON. Do you love Haemon?

ANTIGONE. Yes, I love Haemon. The Haemon I love is hard and young, and faithful and difficult to satisfy, just as I am. But if what I love in Haemon is to be worn away like a stone step by the tread of the thing you call life, the thing you call happiness, if Haemon reaches the point

where he stops growing pale with fear when I grow pale, if he stops thinking that I have been killed in an accident when I am five minutes late, if he stops feeling that he is alone on earth when I laugh and he doesn't know why — if he too has to learn to say yes to everything — why, no, then, no! I do not love Haemon!

CREON. You don't know what you are talking about!

ANTIGONE. I do know what I am talking about! ~~It is you who can't hear me!~~ NOW IT IS YOU WHO DON'T UNDERSTAND. I am too far away from you now, talking to you from a kingdom you can't get into, with your ~~preaching~~ QUICK TONGUE and your politics and your ~~persuasive logic~~ HOLLOW HEART. [*Laughs.*] I laugh at your smugness, Creon, thinking you could prove me wrong by telling me vile stories about my brothers or alter my purpose with your IMPOTENT platitudes about happiness.

CREON. It is your happiness, too, Antigone!

ANTIGONE. I spit on your happiness! I spit on your idea of life — that life that must go on, come what may. You are all like dogs that lick everything they smell. You with your promise of a humdrum happiness — provided a person doesn't ask too much of life. I WANT EVERYTHING OF LIFE AND I WANT IT NOW! I WILL NOT BE MODERATE. I WILL NOT BE SATISFIED WITH THE BIT OF CAKE YOU OFFER ME IF I PROMISE TO BE A GOOD LITTLE GIRL. If life must be a thing of fear, and lying and compromise; if life cannot be free and incorruptible — then Creon, I choose death!

CREON. Scream on, daughter of Oedipus! In your father's own voice!

ANTIGONE. Yes! In my father's own voice! We come ~~of~~ FROM a tribe that asks questions, and we ask them ~~remorselessly~~, to the bitter end. ~~You have just told me the filthy reasons why you can't bury Polynices. Now tell me why I can't bury him!~~ UNTIL NO TINIEST CHANCE OF HOPE REMAINS TO BE STRANGLERED BY OUR HANDS. WE ARE FROM THE TRIBE THAT HATES YOUR FILTHY HOPE, YOUR DOCILE HOPE; HOPE, YOUR WHORE —

~~—CREON. Because it is my order!~~

~~—ANTIGONE. The order of a coward king who desecrates the dead!~~

CREON. Be quiet! If you could see how ugly you are, shrieking those words!

ANTIGONE. Yes, I am ugly! Father was ugly, too. But Father became beautiful. And do you know when? At the very end. When all his questions had been answered. When he could no longer doubt that he had killed his own father; that he had gone to bed with his own mother. WHEN ALL HOPE WAS GONE, STAMPED OUT LIKE A BEETLE. When it was absolutely certain that he had to die if the plague was to be lifted from his people. Then he was at peace; then he could smile, almost; then he became beautiful – Whereas you! Look at yourself, Creon! THE CANDIDATE FOR ELECTION TO HAPPINESS. That glint of fear and suspicion in the corner of your eye – that ugly crease at the corner of your power-loving mouth. Oh, you said the word a moment ago: the smelly kitchen of politics. That's where you were fathered and whelped – in a filthy kitchen!

CREON. I order you to shut up! Do you hear me?

ANTIGONE. You order me? Cook! Do you really believe that you can give me orders!

CREON. Antigone! The anteroom is full of people! Do you want them to hear you!

ANTIGONE. Open the doors! Let us make sure that they can hear me!

CREON. By God! You shut up, I tell you!

ISMENE enters.

ISMENE. Antigone!

ANTIGONE. You, too? What do you want?

ISMENE. Oh, forgive me, Antigone. I've come back. I'll be brave. I'll go with you now.

ANTIGONE. Where will you go with me?

ISMENE. Creon! If you kill her, you'll have to kill me too. I was with her. I helped her bury Polynices.

ANTIGONE. Oh, no, Ismene. You had your chance to come with me in the black night, creeping on your hands and knees. You had your chance to claw up the earth with your nails, as I did; to get yourself caught like a thief, as I did. And you refused it. I DIE ALONE.

ISMENE. Not any more. If you die, I don't want to live. I'll do it alone tonight.

ANTIGONE. You hear that, Creon? The thing is catching! Who knows but that lots of people will catch the disease from me! What are you waiting for? Call in your guards! Come on, Creon! Show a little courage! It only hurts for a minute! Come on, cook!

CREON. Guard!

GUARDS and CHORUS enter.

ANTIGONE. At last, Creon!

CREON. Take her away!

~~ISMENE. Oh no! Creon!~~

GUARDS exit with ANTIGONE. ISMENE exits.

CHORUS. You are out of your mind, Creon. What have you done?

CREON. She had to die.

CHORUS. You must not let Antigone die. We shall carry the scar of her death for centuries.

CREON. No man on earth was strong enough to dissuade her. DEATH WAS HER PURPOSE. Polynices was a mere pretext. SHE WAS BENT UPON ONLY ONE THING: TO REJECT LIFE AND TO DIE.

CHORUS. That is not the truth, Creon – and you know it. SHE IS A MERE CHILD, CREON.

CREON. What do you want me to do for her! Condemn her to live?

HAEMON. [*from offstage*]. Father!

HAEMON enters.

CREON. Forget Antigone, Haemon. Forget her, my dearest boy.

HAEMON. How can you talk like that?

CREON. I did everything I could to save her, Haemon. I used every argument. I swear I did. The girl doesn't love you. She could have gone on living for you; but she refused. She wanted it this way; she wanted to die.

HAEMON. Father! The guards are dragging Antigone away! You've got to stop them!

CREON. I can't stop them. It's too late. Antigone has spoken. THE STORY IS ALL OVER THEBES. I cannot save her now.

HAEMON. You must!

CHORUS. CREON, YOU MUST FIND A WAY.

CREON. I cannot.

HAEMON. Recall your edict. Bury Polynices.

CREON. Too late. The law must be obeyed. I can do nothing.

CHORUS. LOCK HER UP. SAY THAT SHE HAS GONE OUT OF HER MIND.

CREON. EVERYBODY WILL KNOW IT ISN'T SO.

HAEMON. But, Father, you are master in Thebes!

CREON. I am master under the law. Not above the law.

HAEMON. But you made the law yourself, and what you ordained, you can repeal.

CHORUS. YOU CAN STILL GAIN TIME, AND GET HER OUT OF THEBES.

CREON. THE MOB ALREADY KNOWS THE TRUTH. IT'S HOWLING FOR HER BLOOD.

HAEMON. You cannot let Antigone be taken from me.

CREON. I cannot do anything else, my boy. She must die and you must live.

HAEMON. Live! For what? A life without Antigone? A life in which I am to go on admiring you as you busy yourself about your kingdom, make your persuasive speeches, strike your attitudes? Not without Antigone. I love Antigone. She never struck a pose and waited for me to me to admire her. Mirrors meant nothing to her. ~~She never looked at herself. She looked at me, and expected me to be somebody. And I was — when I was with her.~~ Do you think I am not going after her? I will not live without Antigone!

CREON. Haemon — you will have to resign yourself to life without Antigone. Sooner or later there comes a day of sorrow in each man's life when he must cease to be a child and take up the burden of being a man. That day has come for you.

HAEMON. That giant strength, that courage. That massive god who used to pick me up in his arms and shelter me from shadows and monster — was that you, Father? Was it of you I stood in awe! Was that man you?

CREON. ~~Yes, Haemon, that was me.~~ FOR GOD'S SAKE, HAEMON, DON'T JUDGE ME! NOT YOU, TOO!

HAEMON. ~~You are not that man today. For if you were, you'd know that your enemies were abroad in every street. You'd know that the people revere those gods that you despise. You cannot put Antigone to death. She will not have been dead an hour, before the shame will sit on every Theban forehead and horror will fill every Theban heart. Already people curse you because you do not bury Polynices. If you kill Antigone, they will hate you.~~ WE DON'T HAVE TO SAY YES TO THIS

TERRIBLE THING. YOU ARE STILL KING. YOU ARE STILL THE FATHER I REVERED. THE WORLD WILL BE TOO BARE, I SHALL BE TOO ALONE IN THE WORLD, IF YOU FORCE ME TO DISOWN YOU.

CREON. ~~Silence! The edict stands!~~ THE WORLD IS BARE, HAEMON, AND YOU ARE ALONE. YOU MUST STOP THINKING YOUR FATHER ALL-POWERFUL. LOOK STRAIGHT AT ME. SEE YOUR FATHER AS HE IS. THAT IS WHAT IT MEANS TO GROW UP AND BE A MAN.

HAEMON. I TELL YOU THAT I WILL NOT LIVE WITHOUT ANTIGONE.

HAEMON exits.

CHORUS. Creon, the boy will go mad.

CREON. Poor boy! He really loves her.

CHORUS. Creon, the boy is wounded to death.

CREON. We are all wounded to death.

FIRST GUARD enters, followed by SECOND and THIRD GUARDS pulling ANTIGONE.

FIRST GUARD. Chief SIR, the people are crowding into the palace!

ANTIGONE. Creon, I don't want to hear them howl anymore. You are going to kill me; let that be enough. I want to be alone until it is over.

CREON. Empty the palace! Guards at the gates!

CREON exits. SECOND and THIRD GUARD exit.

LATER THAT DAY

ANTIGONE. It's you, is it?

FIRST GUARD. What do you mean, me!

ANTIGONE. The last human face that I shall see. Was it you that arrested me this morning!

FIRST GUARD. Yes, that was me.

ANTIGONE. You hurt me. There was no need for you to hurt me. Did I act as if I was trying to escape?

FIRST GUARD. Come on now, Miss. It was my business to arrest you. I did it.

ANTIGONE. How old are you?

FIRST GUARD. Thirty-nine.

ANTIGONE. Have any children?

FIRST GUARD. Yeah. Two.

ANTIGONE. Do you love your children?

FIRST GUARD. What's that got to do with you?

ANTIGONE. How long have you been in the Guards?

FIRST GUARD. Since the war. I was in the army. Sergeant. Then I joined the Guard. But when they make you a guard, you lose your stripes.

ANTIGONE. I see.

FIRST GUARD. Yeah. Of course, if you're a guard, everybody knows you're something special; they know you're an old non-com. Take pay, for instance. When you're a guard you get your pay, and on top of that you get six months' extra pay, to make sure you don't lose anything by not being a sergeant any more.

ANTIGONE. I see.

FIRST GUARD. That's what I'm telling you. That's why sergeants, now, they don't like guards. Maybe you noticed they try to make out they're better than us? Promotion, that's what it is. In the army, anybody can get promoted. ~~Take a look around your own boyfriends.~~ All you need is good conduct. Now in the Guards, it's slow, and you have to know your business — like how to make out a report and the like of that. But when you're a non-com in the guards, you've got something that even a sergeant-major ain't got. For instance-

ANTIGONE. Listen.

FIRST GUARD. Yes, Miss.

ANTIGONE. I'm going to die soon.

FIRST GUARD. For instance, people have a lot of respect for guards, they have. A guard may be a soldier, but he's kind of in the civil service, too.

ANTIGONE. Do you think it hurts to die?

FIRST GUARD. How would I know? Of course, if somebody sticks a saber in your guts and turns it round, it hurts.

ANTIGONE. How are they going to put me to death?

FIRST GUARD. Well, I'll tell you. I heard the proclamation all right. There isn't much that gets away from me. It seems that they don't want to — Wait a minute. How did it go now? "In order that our fair city shall not be pol-luted with her sinful blood, she shall be im-mured — immured," That means, they shove you in a cave and wall up the cave.

ANTIGONE. Alive!

FIRST GUARD. Yep –

ANTIGONE. O God! Alone!

FIRST GUARD. Yep! Outside the southeast gate of the town. In the Cave of Hades. In broad daylight. Some detail, eh, for them that's on the job! First they thought maybe it was a job for the army. Now it looks like it's going to be the Guards. There's an outfit for you! Nothing the Guards can't do. No wonder the army's jealous.

ANTIGONE. A pair of animals.

FIRST GUARD. What do you mean, a pair of animals?

ANTIGONE. When the winds blow cold, all they need do is to press close against one another. I am all alone.

FIRST GUARD. Say, is there anything you want? I can send out for it you know.

ANTIGONE. You are very kind. Yes, there is something I want. I want you to give someone a letter from me, when I am dead.

FIRST GUARD. How's that again! A letter!

ANTIGONE. Yes, I want to write a letter; and I want you to give it to someone for me.

FIRST GUARD. Hey, wait a minute. Take it easy. It's as much as my job is worth to go handing out letters from prisoners.

ANTIGONE. I'll give you this ring if you will do it.

FIRST GUARD. Uh-uh. No can do. Suppose they go through my pockets. I might get six months for a thing like that. Listen, tell you what I'll do. You tell me what you want to say, and I'll write it down in my book. Then, afterwards, I'll tear out the pages and give them to the party, see? If it's in my handwriting, it's all right.

ANTIGONE. In your handwriting? NO. THAT WOULD BE AWFUL.
~~Oh, the poor darling!~~ In your handwriting.

FIRST GUARD. O.K. It's no skin off my nose.

ANTIGONE. No, keep ~~it~~ THE RING. But be quick about it. Time is getting short. Where is your notebook? Ready? Write, now. "My darling—"

FIRST GUARD. The boy friend, eh?

ANTIGONE. "My darling. I had to die, and perhaps you will not love me any more..."

FIRST GUARD. "— love me any more."

ANTIGONE. "Perhaps you think it would have been simple to accept life — "

FIRST GUARD. "— to accept life — "

ANTIGONE. "But it was not for ~~myself~~ ME. And now, it's all—so dreadful here alone. I am afraid— And I don't even know what I'm dying for."

FIRST GUARD. Hey, take it easy! How fast do you think I can write?

ANTIGONE. Where are you?

FIRST GUARD. "— I am afraid. And I don't —"

ANTIGONE. No. Scratch that out. Nobody must know that. They have no right to know. It's as if they saw me naked and touched me, after I am dead. Scratch it all out. Just write: "Forgive me."

FIRST GUARD. I cut out everything you said there at the end, and I put down, "Forgive me."

ANTIGONE. Yes. "Forgive me, my darling. You would all have been so happy if it hadn't been for Antigone. I love you." No, it wasn't for ~~myself~~ ME.

FIRST GUARD. "—been for Antigone. I love you." Is that all?

ANTIGONE. That's all.

FIRST GUARD. ~~You know that's a funny kind of letter.~~ DAMN FUNNY LETTER.

ANTIGONE. I know.

FIRST GUARD. Now who is it to? [*A drum roll begins. SECOND and THIRD GUARD enter.*]

~~—ANTIGONE. But I haven't finished it yet.~~

FIRST GUARD. ~~Shut up!~~ O.K. THAT'S ENOUGH OUT OF YOU!
COME ON!

GUARDS exeunt with ANTIGONE.

LATER THAT DAY. CHORUS enters.

CHORUS. It is over for Antigone. And now it is Creon's turn.

MESSENGER enters.

MESSENGER. The Queen ... the Queen! Where is the Queen?

CHORUS. What do you want with the Queen? What have you to tell the Queen!

MESSENGER. News to break her heart. Antigone had been thrust into the cave. They hadn't finished heaving the last block of stone into place when Creon and the rest heard a sudden moaning from the tomb. A hush fell over us all, for it was not the voice of Antigone. It was Haemon's voice that came forth from the tomb. Everybody looked at Creon; and he howled like a man demented: "Take away the stones! Take away the stones!" The slaves leaped at the wall of stones, and Creon worked with them, sweating and tearing at the blocks with bleeding hands. Finally a narrow opening was forced, and into it slipped the smallest guard.

Antigone had hanged herself by the cord of her robe, by the red and golden twisted cord of her robe. The cord was round her neck like a child's collar. Haemon was on his knees, holding her in his arms and moaning, his face buried in her robe. More stones were removed, and Creon went into the tomb. He tried to raise Haemon to his feet. I could hear him begging Haemon to rise to his feet. Haemon was deaf to his father's voice, till suddenly he stood up of his own accord, his eyes dark and burning. Anguish was in his face. He stared at his father. Then suddenly he struck him – hard in the face, then he drew his sword. Creon leaped out of range. Haemon went on staring at him, his eyes full of contempt – a glance that WAS LIKE A KNIFE, AND THAT Creon couldn't escape. The King stood trembling in the far corner of the tomb, and Haemon went on staring. Then, without a word, he stabbed himself and lay down beside Antigone, embracing her in a great pool of blood.

CREON and PAGE enter. MESSENGER exits.

CREON. I have had them laid out side by side. They are together at last, and at peace. Two lovers on the morrow of their bridal. Their work is done.

CHORUS. **But not yours, Creon. You have still one thing to learn. Eurydice, the Queen, your wife –**

CREON. A good woman. ALWAYS BUSY WITH HER KNITTING – THOSE SWEATERS SHE NEVER STOPPED KNITTING FOR THE POOR. STRANGE, HOW THE POOR NEVER STOP NEEDING SWEATERS.

CHORUS. **THE POOR IN THEBES ARE GOING TO BE COLD THIS WINTER, CREON.** When the Queen was told of her son's death, she waited carefully until she had finished her row, then put down her knitting calmly — as she did everything. She went up to her room and there, Creon, she cut her throat. She is laid out now exactly where you went to her one night when she was still a maiden. **Her smile is still the same. AND IF IT WERE NOT FOR THAT GREAT RED BLOT ON THE BED LINEN BY HER NECK, one might think she was asleep.**

CREON. She, too. They are all asleep. [Pause.] It must be good to sleep.

CHORUS. **Tomorrow they will sleep sweetly in the earth, Creon. And you will bury them.** ~~You who would not bury Polynices today will bury Eurydice and Haemon tomorrow. And Antigone, too. The gods take a hand in every game Creon. Even in politics.~~ **And now you are alone, Creon.**

CREON. Yes, all alone. [To PAGE.] MY LAD.

PAGE. SIR?

CREON. LISTEN TO ME. THEY DON'T KNOW IT, BUT THE TRUTH IS THE WORK IS THERE TO BE DONE, AND A MAN CAN'T FOLD HIS ARMS AND REFUSE TO DO IT. THEY SAY IT'S DIRTY WORK. BUT IF WE DIDN'T DO IT, WHO WOULD?

PAGE. I DON'T KNOW, SIR.

CHORUS. **WHY MUST DIRTY WORK BE DONE?**

CREON. OF COURSE YOU DON'T. YOU'LL BE LUCKY IF YOU NEVER FIND OUT. IN A HURRY TO GROW UP, AREN'T YOU?

PAGE. OH, YES, SIR.

CREON. I SHOULDN'T BE IF I WERE YOU. NEVER GROW UP IF YOU CAN HELP IT. What time is it?

PAGE. Five o'clock, sir.

CREON. What DO ~~have~~ we HAVE ~~on today~~ at five o'clock?

PAGE. Cabinet meeting, sir.

CREON. Cabinet meeting. Then we had better go along to it.

Exeunt CREON and PAGE.

CHORUS. And there we are. All those who were meant to die have died: those who believed one thing, those who believed the contrary thing, and even those who believed nothing at all, yet were caught up in the web without knowing why. All dead: stiff, useless, rotting. ~~Creon was the most rational, the most persuasive of tyrants. But like all tyrants, he refused to distinguish between the things that are Caesar's and the things that are God's. Now and again—in the three thousand years since the first Antigone—other Antigones have arisen like a clarion call to remind men of this distinction. Their cause is always the same—a passionate belief that moral law exists, and a passionate regard for the sanctity of human dignity.~~ AND THOSE WHO HAVE SURVIVED WILL NOW BEGIN QUIETLY TO FORGET THE DEAD: THEY WON'T REMEMBER WHO WAS WHO OR WHICH WAS WHICH. IT IS ALL OVER. Antigone is calm tonight. She has played her part.

Three GUARDS enter and begin to play cards.

A great MELANCHOLY wave of ~~unrest~~ PEACE now settles down upon Thebes, upon the empty palace, upon Creon, who can now begin to long for his own death.

Only the guards are left, and none of this matters to them. It's no skin off their noses. They go on playing cards.

END OF PLAY.