

# Antigone

by

*Sophocles*

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## ARGUMENT

Antigone, daughter of Oedipus, the late king of Thebes, in defiance of Creon who rules in his stead, resolves to bury her brother Polyneices, slain in his attack on Thebes. She is caught in the act by Creon's watchmen and brought before the king. She justifies her action, asserting that she was bound to obey the eternal laws of right and wrong in spite of any human ordinance. Creon, unrelenting, condemns her to be immured in a rock-hewn chamber. His son Haemon, to whom Antigone is betrothed, pleads in vain for her life and threatens to die with her. Warned by the seer Teiresias Creon repents him and hurries to release Antigone from her rocky prison. But he is too late: he finds lying side by side Antigone who had hanged herself and Haemon who also has perished by his own hand. Returning to the palace he sees within the dead body of his queen who on learning of her son's death has stabbed herself to the heart.

## **DRAMATIS PERSONAE**

ANTIGONE and ISMENE - daughters of Oedipus and sisters of Polyneices and Eteocles.

CREON, King of Thebes.

HAEMON, Son of Creon, betrothed to Antigone.

EURYDICE, wife of Creon.

TEIRESIAS, the prophet.

CHORUS, of Theban elders.

A WATCHMAN

A MESSENGER

A SECOND MESSENGER

## **ANTIGONE and ISMENE before the Palace gates.**

### **ANTIGONE**

Ismene, sister of my blood and heart,  
See'st thou how Zeus would in our lives fulfill  
The weird of Oedipus, a world of woes!  
For what of pain, affliction, outrage, shame,  
Is lacking in our fortunes, thine and mine?  
And now this proclamation of today  
Made by our Captain-General to the State,  
What can its purport be? Didst hear and heed,  
Or art thou deaf when friends are banned as foes?

### **ISMENE**

To me, Antigone, no word of friends  
Has come, or glad or grievous, since we twain  
Were reft of our two brethren in one day  
By double fratricide; and since i' the night  
Our Argive leaguers fled, no later news  
Has reached me, to inspirit or deject.

### **ANTIGONE**

I know 'twas so, and therefore summoned thee  
Beyond the gates to breathe it in thine ear.

### **ISMENE**

What is it? Some dark secret stirs thy breast.

**ANTIGONE**

What but the thought of our two brothers dead,  
The one by Creon graced with funeral rites,  
The other disappointed? Eteocles  
He hath consigned to earth (as fame reports)  
With obsequies that use and wont ordain,  
So gracing him among the dead below.  
But Polyneices, a dishonored corse,  
(So by report the royal edict runs)  
No man may bury him or make lament--  
Must leave him tombless and unwept, a feast  
For kites to scent afar and swoop upon.  
Such is the edict (if report speak true)  
Of Creon, our most noble Creon, aimed  
At thee and me, aye me too; and anon  
He will be here to promulgate, for such  
As have not heard, his mandate; 'tis in sooth  
No passing humor, for the edict says  
Whoe'er transgresses shall be stoned to death.  
So stands it with us; now 'tis thine to show  
If thou art worthy of thy blood or base.

**ISMENE**

But how, my rash, fond sister, in such case  
Can I do anything to make or mar?

**ANTIGONE**

Say, wilt thou aid me and abet? Decide.

**ISMENE**

In what bold venture? What is in thy thought?

**ANTIGONE**

Lend me a hand to bear the corpse away.

**ISMENE**

What, bury him despite the interdict?

**ANTIGONE**

My brother, and, though thou deny him, thine  
No man shall say that I betrayed a brother.

**ISMENE**

Wilt thou persist, though Creon has forbid?

**ANTIGONE**

What right has he to keep me from my own?

**ISMENE**

Bethink thee, sister, of our father's fate,  
Abhorred, dishonored, self-convinced of sin,  
Blinded, himself his executioner.  
Think of his mother-wife (ill sorted names)  
Done by a noose herself had twined to death  
And last, our hapless brethren in one day,  
Both in a mutual destiny involved,  
Self-slaughtered, both the slayer and the slain.  
Bethink thee, sister, we are left alone;  
Shall we not perish wretchedest of all,  
If in defiance of the law we cross  
A monarch's will?--weak women, think of that,  
Not framed by nature to contend with men.  
Remember this too that the stronger rules;  
We must obey his orders, these or worse.  
Therefore I plead compulsion and entreat  
The dead to pardon. I perforce obey  
The powers that be. 'Tis foolishness, I ween,  
To overstep in aught the golden mean.

**ANTIGONE**

I urge no more; nay, wert thou willing still,  
I would not welcome such a fellowship.  
Go thine own way; myself will bury him.  
How sweet to die in such employ, to rest,--  
Sister and brother linked in love's embrace--  
A sinless sinner, banned awhile on earth,  
But by the dead commended; and with them  
I shall abide for ever. As for thee,  
Scorn, if thou wilt, the eternal laws of Heaven.

**ISMENE**

I scorn them not, but to defy the State  
Or break her ordinance I have no skill.

**ANTIGONE**

A specious pretext. I will go alone  
To lap my dearest brother in the grave.

**ISMENE**

My poor, fond sister, how I fear for thee!

**ANTIGONE**

O waste no fears on me; look to thyself.

**ISMENE**

At least let no man know of thine intent,  
But keep it close and secret, as will I.

**ANTIGONE**

O tell it, sister; I shall hate thee more  
If thou proclaim it not to all the town.

**ISMENE**

Thou hast a fiery soul for numbing work.

**ANTIGONE**

I pleasure those whom I would liefest please.

**ISMENE**

If thou succeed; but thou art doomed to fail.

**ANTIGONE**

When strength shall fail me, yes, but not before.

**ISMENE**

But, if the venture's hopeless, why essay?

**ANTIGONE**

Sister, forbear, or I shall hate thee soon,  
And the dead man will hate thee too, with cause.  
Say I am mad and give my madness rein  
To wreck itself; the worst that can befall  
Is but to die an honorable death.

**ISMENE**

Have thine own way then; 'tis a mad endeavor,  
Yet to thy lovers thou art dear as ever.  
[Exeunt]

**CHORUS**

(Str. 1)

Sunbeam, of all that ever dawn upon  
    Our seven-gated Thebes the brightest ray,  
    O eye of golden day,  
How fair thy light o'er Dirce's fountain shone,  
Speeding upon their headlong homeward course,  
Far quicker than they came, the Argive force;



Putting to flight

The argent shields, the host with scutcheons white.  
Against our land the proud invader came  
To vindicate fell Polyneices' claim.

Like to an eagle swooping low,  
On pinions white as new fall'n snow.  
With clanging scream, a horsetail plume his crest,  
The aspiring lord of Argos onward pressed.

(Ant. 1)

Hovering around our city walls he waits,  
His spearmen raven at our seven gates.  
But ere a torch our crown of towers could burn,  
Ere they had tasted of our blood, they turn  
Forced by the Dragon; in their rear  
The din of Ares panic-struck they hear.  
For Zeus who hates the braggart's boast  
Beheld that gold-bespangled host;  
As at the goal the paeon they upraise,  
He struck them with his forked lightning blaze.

(Str. 2)

To earthy from earth rebounding, down he crashed;  
The fire-brand from his impious hand was dashed,  
As like a Bacchic reveler on he came,  
Outbreathing hate and flame,  
And tottered. Elsewhere in the field,  
Here, there, great Area like a war-horse wheeled;  
Beneath his car down thrust  
Our foemen bit the dust.

Seven captains at our seven gates  
Thundered; for each a champion waits,  
Each left behind his armor bright,  
Trophy for Zeus who turns the fight;  
Save two alone, that ill-starred pair  
One mother to one father bare,  
Who lance in rest, one 'gainst the other  
Drave, and both perished, brother slain by brother.

(Ant. 2)

Now Victory to Thebes returns again  
And smiles upon her chariot-circled plain.

Now let feast and festal should  
Memories of war blot out.  
Let us to the temples throng,  
Dance and sing the live night long.  
God of Thebes, lead thou the round.  
Bacchus, shaker of the ground!  
Let us end our revels here;  
Lo! Creon our new lord draws near,  
Crowned by this strange chance, our king.  
What, I marvel, pondering?  
Why this summons? Wherefore call  
Us, his elders, one and all,  
Bidding us with him debate,  
On some grave concern of State?

[Enter CREON]

### **CREON**

Elders, the gods have righted one again  
Our storm-tossed ship of state, now safe in port.  
But you by special summons I convened  
As my most trusted councilors; first, because  
I knew you loyal to Laius of old;  
Again, when Oedipus restored our State,  
Both while he ruled and when his rule was o'er,  
Ye still were constant to the royal line.  
Now that his two sons perished in one day,  
Brother by brother murderously slain,  
By right of kinship to the Princes dead,  
I claim and hold the throne and sovereignty.  
Yet 'tis no easy matter to discern  
The temper of a man, his mind and will,  
Till he be proved by exercise of power;  
And in my case, if one who reigns supreme  
Swerve from the highest policy, tongue-tied

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