Antigone

Scene 1:

Antigone enters from city path (CP); Ismene enters from skenê.

Antigone
My dear heart, Ismene, more than blood-sister, is there even one thing from the evils of Oedipus that Zeus doesn’t inflict on the two of us still living? There is no pain or disaster, shame or dishonor that I have not seen among these evils of yours and mine. Now what is the new proclamation they say the commander has just made to the whole city? Did you hear anything? Or didn’t you notice that evils from our enemies advance upon our kin?

Ismene
No word of our family, sweet or painful, has come to me, Antigone, not since the two of us lost our two brothers, dead in one day by each other’s hands. Since the Argive army left this very night, I know nothing more, whether my fortune is brighter or doomed.

Antigone
I thought so. I took you outside the courtyard gate so you alone could hear.

Ismene
What is it? You look like you’re brooding over some news.
Sophocles’ Antigone

ANTIGONE
Well, hasn’t Kreon honored one of our brothers with proper rites, while refusing the other burial? They say he buried Eteokles with true observance of justice and custom, honored below among the dead. But the wretched corpse of Polynices?
They say, by proclamation to the citizens, that no one may bury him or cry aloud, that he be left unmourned, unburied, a sweet treasure for birds spying him to eat at their pleasure.
That’s what they say our good Kreon has proclaimed to you and me – yes, to me, too. He comes here to proclaim once more to any who haven’t heard. He’s not treating this as some minor matter – whoever would take action is sentenced to death by public stoning in the city. There you have it. You will soon reveal whether you run true to your noble birth or not.

ISMENE
Poor sister, if that’s how things stand, what more could I offer to do or undo?

ANTIGONE
Consider whether you will share the burden and work together.

ISMENE
With what risk? What are you thinking of?

ANTIGONE
Will your hand join mine to lift his body?
Antigone

Ismene
What? Do you intend to bury him, forbidden in Thebes?

Antigone
He’s my brother and – like it or not – yours, too. I will not be caught betraying him.

Ismene
Stubborn! Even though Kreon has spoken against it?

Antigone
He has no right to keep me from my own.

Ismene
Oimoi! Think, my sister, how our father, hateful, infamous, was destroyed by discovering his own crimes, striking his eyes with his own blinding hands. Second, mother and wife, both in one, ended her life with a twisted noose. Third, two brothers in one day killed their miserable selves, completing a shared doom in each other’s hands. Now, consider again that the two of us left will be utterly destroyed if in violence against the law we transgress the decree and power of the king. We need to recognize that we are women, not meant to fight against men. Since we are ruled by those more powerful, we must obey now and in yet more painful ways. I beg those below the earth for pardon since I’m forced in this matter.
I will obey the authorities.
To do something so extreme makes no sense.

**Antigone**
I won’t insist, nor if you change your mind, would your assistance please me.
Do as you think fit. I will bury him, and doing so, will find a noble death.
Having dared a holy crime, I will lie with the one I loved, and be loved. I must satisfy those below far longer than those here since I’ll lie there forever. But if you think it’s right, keep dishonoring what the gods honor.

**Ismene**
I do no dishonor, but it goes against my nature to act in violence against the people.

**Antigone**
You can make these excuses. I will go to heap up a burial mound for my dearest brother.

**Ismene**
*Oimoi*, Antigone, I’m afraid for you!

**Antigone**
Don’t worry about me. Set your own fate right.

**Ismene**
At least don’t tell anyone else what you’re doing. Hide the secret and I will too.

**Antigone**
*Oimoi*, call it out! Your silence will earn you far more hatred than if you proclaim it aloud.
**Antigone**

**Ismene**
You have a hot heart for cold matters.

**Antigone**
I know I satisfy the ones I truly must please.

**Ismene**
If you can. But you desire the impossible.

**Antigone**
Then as soon as I lose strength, I'll stop.

**Ismene**
It's not fitting to hunt the impossible in the first place.

**Antigone**
Keep talking and I'll hate you, and you'll justly lie beside your dead brother as an enemy. But let me, and my ill-conceived plan, suffer this dreadful fate – Nothing I will suffer could be so terrible as to keep me from a noble death.

**Ismene**
Go if you think it's right. Even though you act without sense, to your family you are truly dear.

*Antigone exits burial path (BP); Ismene exits skenê.*

*Entrance Song: Chorus enters CP.*

**Chorus**
Ray of sun, the loveliest light ever to appear in seven-gated Thebes, you have come at last,
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Sophocles’ Antigone

eye of golden day, shining
above the streams of Dirce.

The Argive with his white shield,
who fled in full armor,
you goaded by a sharper bit
into headlong flight,

who Polynices raised against our land
in his contentious quarrel.
That man, a screaming eagle
soaring over the land
with wings of white snow,
one among the many armed warriors
in crested helmets of horse-hair.

Hovering above our roofs,
poised to swallow the seven gates
surrounded by bloodthirsty spears,
before his jaws were sated
on our blood, he left
before the pine torch of Hephaistos
consumed our crown of towers.

Clamor of Ares
all around – matched in battle,
conquest by the Theban serpent.

Since Zeus despises
boasts of an arrogant tongue,
seeing them swarm against us
with presumptuous flash of gold,
he struck with his thunderbolt
the one on the high ramparts
right as he began his victory cry.

He plunged to the solid earth ablaze, who until then raged with Bacchic madness, and exhaled blasts of most hostile gales. Things did not turn out as he had planned, and to the rest, powerful Ares, striking hard, dealt other fates:

the seven captains at the seven gates, face to face with seven equals, left their bronze shields, fee to Zeus the Battle-turner. All except the hating two, sprung from the same father and mother, who planted their double-edged spears through each other, together sharing a common death.

Now great-named Victory has come rejoicing with Thebes of the many chariots. Let us forget the war. Let us go round to all the temples of the gods, and dance all night and sing, and may Theban Dionysos, Earthshaker, lead the way!

CHORUS LEADER
Now here comes the king of the land, Kreon son of Menoeceus, new ruler
through recent fortunes from the gods.
What plan is he piloting that he summoned
by proclamation this special council of elders?

**Scene 2:**

*Kreon enters skenê.*

**Kreon**

Men, the affairs of state, wildly shaken
by the gods, have steadied aright again.
You, out of all the rest, I summoned here,
knowing well that you always
honored the power of the throne of Laius.
And again, when Oedipus set aright the state
and after he perished, you still stood
beside his sons with sound counsel.
Yet, since they were destroyed
by a double destiny in a single day, striking
and struck with their own stained hands,
I now hold all the power and the throne
by being next of kin to those destroyed.
It is impossible to learn the spirit,
mind, and judgment of any man
until he is tested in office and laws.
Whoever does not pursue the best policies
to steer the entire state,
but locks tight his tongue out of some fear,
has always seemed to me the worst.
And whoever thinks a friend more important