

## Excerpt from *Oedipus Rex*

Sophocles

CHORUS

O generations of mortal men,  
how I count your life as scarcely living.  
What man is there, what human being,  
who attains a greater happiness  
than mere appearances, a joy  
which seems to fade away to nothing?  
Poor wretched Oedipus, your fate  
stands here to demonstrate for me 1430  
how no mortal man is ever blessed.  
Here was a man who fired his arrows well—  
his skill was matchless—and he won  
the highest happiness in everything.  
For, Zeus, he slaughtered the hook-taloned Sphinx  
and stilled her cryptic song. For our state,  
he stood there like a tower against death,  
and from that moment, Oedipus,  
we have called you our king  
and honoured you above all other men, 1440  
the one who rules in mighty Thebes.  
But now who is there whose story  
is more terrible to hear? Whose life  
has been so changed by trouble,

by such ferocious agonies?

Alas for celebrated Oedipus,

the same spacious place of refuge

served you both as child and father,

the place you entered as a new bridegroom.

How could the furrow where your father planted, 1450

poor wretched man, have tolerated you

in such silence for so long?

Time, which watches everything

and uncovered you against your will,

now sits in judgment of that fatal marriage,

where child and parent have been joined so long.

O child of Laius, how I wish

I'd never seen you—now I wail

like one whose mouth pours forth laments.

To tell it right, it was through you 1460

I found my life and breathed again,

and then through you the darkness veils my eyes.

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