

Jocasta Interviewed in Hell

Well, naturally I blamed myself – blamed myself for giving up my baby – we all do, even when we say we don't. Being queen of Thebes was no compensation, though Laius insisted it would be. I don't say he made me do it, though being king he made me understand he could have. Laius was a bully anyway, and a bit dull, as many bullies are. If he thought he could confound the oracle, if he really believed he could defeat the old ones, why did I have to make that choice? Why did I have to send my child away?

Later I understood how great his fear had been. But when we argued, while we argued, I had no idea. I was so young then, still crying over my loose belly, still soaked in milk – I had set down my own power, and he was the king. He said, Send the child away; turn it out. And I did that. I did what he asked.

And so the queen of Corinth raised my son. Her servants and tutors grew him into a strong one who left home on a tide of fear, fearfilled love for his parents – love for his *parents!* But then, like an animal with instinct for its birth blood, he came back to be my suitor, my mysterious lover, the savior of my city.

You people always ask why I didn't recognize him, but have you ever seen a newborn? Or even a dear six month infant? Do you think I have the gift, the eye of the Graiae? Do you? Can you look at such children and imagine who they'll be at 18, standing in front of you? I think not. When you look down at them in their baskets, wrapped in soft cloth, rooting for the nipple under your gown, pursing their tiny budlipped mouths toward the smell of you, their eyes still fogged, still changing? How could I have *recognized* him?