

Cast of Characters

ISMENE KADMOS: A SLEEK, BEAUTIFUL, WELL-GROOMED NEWSCASTER, A WOMAN IN HER TWENTIES, POLITE, CHEERFUL AND USUALLY NOT LOUD OR FORCEFUL IN HER MANNER.

BOB: ISMENE'S BOSS, THE ANCHOR/PRODUCER OF THE THEBES TV NEWS, A BIT OLDER THAN ISMENE, MORE CONFIDENT AND ASSERTIVE, BUT EQUALLY MEDIAGENIC (GREAT HAIR, GREAT SMILE, ETC.)

ANTIGONE KADMOS: ISMENE'S FIERY, RADICAL SISTER. ANTIGONE IS NOT CONCERNED WITH FASHION OR WITH PLEASING OTHERS. SHE HAS AN IN-YOUR-FACE, UNCOMPROMISING ATTITUDE.

MALE ANNOUNCER: A SMOOTH FIXTURE OF THEBES TV, WHO HANDLES TRANSITIONS BETWEEN SHOWS AND SOMETIMES A WORD OR TWO FROM THE SPONSORS. OFF THE AIR, HE'S A GENIAL TEAM PLAYER.

SCENE

THE NEWSFLOOR OF THEBES TV.

TIME

SOMEWHERE BETWEEN SEVERAL THOUSAND YEARS AGO AND THE NOT-SO-DISTANT FUTURE.

SETTING: We are in a TV news studio.
We HEAR STATION IDENTIFICATION MUSIC.

AT RISE: BOB sits behind a desk,
reading from a prompter, smiling into
the camera in his perfect suit and tie.
ISMENE stands to the side in a
tailored, sexy suit, camera ready.

A MALE ANNOUNCER STEPS up to a mic in a
booth:

MALE ANNOUNCER

Welcome back from that station break, folks. You're watching Thebes TV. From the mountains of Cithaeron, to the Cadmeian Citadel, if it's worth covering, then Thebes TV has got it covered! And now, we rejoin Bob in the newsroom, for more election day updates.

(LIGHTS DOWN on the MALE ANNOUNCER.
Newsroom THEME MUSIC plays.)

BOB

Hi, folks, is this a beautiful election day, or what? It's almost like the gods smiled down on Thebes and wanted to give people a break, as they wait in line at their polling stations. Now, the polls have closed already at gates one through four, but voting is on-going at gates five, six and seven. For those who haven't cast a vote yet, here are some election day tips from our own Ismene Kadmos!

(LIGHTS UP on ISMENE. She looks into
the camera with a radiant smile.)

ISMENE

Thanks, Bob. Though I think most people know the drill. But for first-time voters, you might want to bring a book or your iPod or a hand-held device along. The waiting in line can get kind of tedious. But don't give up -- your vote is too important for that! Once you get inside the polling station, a volunteer will lead you to your touch-screen machine and show you how to use it. Don't be afraid to ask for advice if you need it. Remember: one of the best ways to show your loyalty to Thebes is to get on out there and vote!

(The LIGHT is off of her now, and back
on BOB)

BOB

Ismene, you are so right. Folks, we're taking a break, but then Brad is gonna be back with sports news. And remember -- the Olympics are not that far away! This could be the year when our Theban athletes break all records, and leave Athens and Sparta in the dust! So, keep it tuned here, to Thebes TV.

(The newsroom THEME MUSIC plays again for a moment. He sees the signal, and says to ISMENE)

BOB

(CONT'D)

Okay, we're off. Ismene, hold up a second -- I know you're due for a break.

ISMENE

Sure, Bob, what is it?

BOB

(Reaching behind his desk)

I've got something I need to show you and talk to you about.

(With difficulty, he lifts a large, black, heavy box into the air, from behind the desk where he sat as anchorman.)

BOB (CONT'D)

Could we maybe step into your dressing room to talk?

ISMENE

That's fine.

(They move to the part of the stage that represents her dressing room.)

ISMENE

Are you okay with that thing?

BOB

Yeah, I've got it.

ISMENE

What is it?

BOB

(Setting it down in her dressing room)

It's a vote box. From the First Gate of Thebes.

ISMENE

A vote box?

BOB

Well, it contains the hard drive, which contains all the votes. It lifts right out. You can access it on your computer, using this new program -- here's the CD Rom.

(He produces the a slim-line
jewel-case containing a CD
from his suit pocket)

Your airport card will pick up the signal from the vote box; you don't need to be plugged into it.

ISMENE

(Taking disk)

Should -- should we have this here in the studio?

BOB

Well, we've got a little bit of a crisis on our hands right now, Ismene. To be perfectly frank -- you could get us out of a hole -- not just Thebes TV, but all the networks.

ISMENE

Me? How?

BOB

You're just about the prettiest computer geek I know. Geekette, whatever. If anyone at the station can figure out this new software, it's you.

(points)

That CD rom contains a new system for adjusting our exit polls. The exit polls at the First Gate of the city were off again -- way off. This time they showed your Uncle Kreon losing by something like seven percent of the vote. But as you'll see when you look at the figures in that box, he actually won at the First Gate by five percent!

ISMENE

Did we adjust for --

BOB

For everything! We changed how we sampled, the demographics of who we asked . . . It didn't compensate this time. And other networks are having the same problem. This program should be able to pinpoint what's wrong, and correct it. As soon as you get the thing running, let me know.

ISMENE

Well, I'll -- I'll certainly try, Bob.

BOB

Great. And, you know, you are going to get credit for this. We'd like you to hold a press conference later today, to announce the results of the election, and let the world know that Thebes TV has the most accurate exit polls of any network around. We'll get this program to the others eventually -- but let them sweat it out with their erratic numbers a little longer.

ISMENE

Sure, I hear you.

BOB

Atta girl, talk to you later.

(He gives her a last warm smile and leaves. ISMENE sits at her own small desk, and opens her laptop. She inserts the CD ROM. Her fingers fly over her keyboard.)

(ANTIGONE enters. She looks disheveled, wild-eyed, determined. She calls in a loud whisper:)

ANTIGONE

Ismene!

(ISMENE looks up, stands and calls out to her with a smile:)

ISMENE

Antigone!

ANTIGONE

Sssshh! I slipped past security to get in here. I'm not sure they'd want me in the building.

ISMENE

Oh, if you're with me it's all right. It's good to see you! Did you vote yet today?

ANTIGONE

No, I'm -- I'm actually going to perform my civic duty right about now. I was wondering . . . if you would come with me.

ISMENE

Oh, I already voted. At the Third Gate, on my way to work this morning.

ANTIGONE

That's -- not what I had in mind.

ISMENE

What, then?

ANTIGONE

I'm asking you to join with me. That's what I came here for. Come with me to the Seventh Gate. And when we get inside -- we'll lift a vote box out of a voting machine --

(She points to the box on the floor)

-- one that looks like that -- and in front of the security cameras, we'll hold it up in the air and then smash it to pieces on the floor! Now THAT will make for some hot footage for the evening news broadcast!

ISMENE

(Horrorified)

You're asking me to be a terrorist? To sabotage the elections?

ANTIGONE

I'm asking you to acknowledge with me, before all of Thebes, that an election without a paper trail is a joke and a farce and a parody of real elections!

(Stares pointedly at the box)

What is that, anyway? It looks like the real thing. Where did you get it?

ISMENE

It's -- it's only a dummy. With made-up results inside.

ANTIGONE

(Scornful)

And how is that any different from the real thing? They call it a vote box, or a black box -- why don't they just call it a black hole? Votes get lost inside of it, irretrievable, unverifiable, never to be seen again --

ISMENE

Look, I'm still learning about it. I'm going to use that dummy to -- we've got to adjust the exit polls, and --

ANTIGONE

"Adjust" the exit polls. With every election, now, it seems, you media talking heads do that. Exit polls could be the one control group, the one fail-safe system, the one thing their computers didn't touch. Ismene, don't you understand that exit polls don't lie, they can't lie, until they are "adjusted"?

ISMENE

A lot of things can go wrong with the sampling, reporters can show a bias in who they stop and ask without realizing it --

ANTIGONE

No. Uh uh. When you have that many people who are asked, at random, or every third person who comes out, whatever it is, you get accurate results. Plus or minus one percentage point, that's as far off as they can be. How much are your exit polls off by this time?

ISMENE

(Looking away)

More than that.

ANTIGONE

And how are you going to "adjust" them?

ISMENE

I don't know. I'm not sure yet. I'll learn by -- by trying things out with this dummy vote box.

ANTIGONE

Well, it looks pretty authentic to me. But I'm not going to try anything here, don't worry. I'm not going to bully you, or wreck your career. I want you to choose to wreck it. I want you to join me of your own free will, Ismene.

ISMENE

I can't join you.

ANTIGONE

You're a princess. You're the daughter of a king who loved this city of Thebes more than --

ISMENE

I know who and what our father was.

ANTIGONE

Never be ashamed to be the daughter of Oedipus and Jocasta. Look people in the eye, and represent the House of Kadmos with pride.

ISMENE

I do look people in the eye, now. I've gotten away from all that sordid business. With Mom and Dad, the whole soap opera and curse, destroying ourselves and everyone around us, the insanity with our brothers, all of it!

ANTIGONE

Yes, you're quite the famous girl reporter. You always liked bringing news -- prophecies from the Oracle at Delphi.

ISMENE

Go ahead and laugh at me if you want to, but I've won two awards for journalism this year alone. I've worked hard to earn the respect of my colleagues.

ANTIGONE

(scornful)

Colleagues! You're a freak to them. A freak, whose father killed his own father and married his mother. That's what you symbolize, on the air, when you walk down the street, to everyone who sees you. Patricide, regicide, incest, abomination --

ISMENE

Antigone, don't --

ANTIGONE

Every day of your life, so don't try to pass, don't try to get along with them, don't you ever forget who you are, girl. You're a freak, like me! But not quite like me. You'll take any crumb they throw to you. You're a tame, convenient freak, who knows how to dress.

ISMENE

You're wrong.

ANTIGONE

I'm not wrong about you knowing how to dress. That's an amazing suit. And your hair -- you look great.

ISMENE

Well, thanks, and you can mock me and spit on all I've accomplished till you're out of breath, I just don't care. I love my job and I'm good at it, and I feel accepted by my peers. I take a lot of pride in what I do.

ANTIGONE

And you think that what goes on here -- that this is real journalism? That there's a difference between you people and the PR men, the Spin Doctors who put out the official story?

(There is a KNOCK at the door, and then the MALE ANNOUNCER ENTERS.)

MALE ANNOUNCER

Hey, Ismene? Sorry to bother you, I just wanted to tell you -- I was telling Bob -- you're looking really sharp out there.

ISMENE

Thanks, I appreciate it.

MALE ANNOUNCER

You're really selling it. You've really got it together.

(glances at both women)

Sorry, is this a bad time?

ISMENE

No, it's okay --

MALE ANNOUNCER

Hey, that's all I had to say. See you in a bit.

(He EXITS.)

ANTIGONE

Ismene --

ISMENE

Antigone, I know exactly how real this is. They used to give me fluff pieces on the morning show -- birthdays of baby animals in the zoo! Celebrity gossip. Now they're letting me take on some real news, the more substantial stories. And kudos like what he just said -- I didn't used to get that. Accolades from colleagues don't come cheap. I've worked hard, and, yes, I think I have every right, at this stage of my career, to call myself a journalist.

ANTIGONE

And right about now you think your crazy sister Antigone is going to ruin all of that for you, is that it? Out of spite, or jealousy, or recklessness?

ISMENE

Look, I've -- I've got a new software program to learn, Antigone. I'm sorry, but I don't have time for your political rants and your conspiracy theories --

ANTIGONE

Why have computerized voting machines at all? And why does the palace oppose safeguards, if the elections are real?

ISMENE

Look, every voting system has its problems, and every change to the system is extremely expensive --

ANTIGONE

Uncle Kreon has been stealing election after election, Ismene, and that's no conspiracy theory --

ISMENE

Uncle Kreon is popular with many people, just not with you and your radical friends.

ANTIGONE

Yes, the elections used to be closer, almost a tie, easier to steal without people taking notice. Now he's less popular, but the precedent has been established, hasn't it. He knows what he can expect when he cheats.

ANTIGONE (CONT'D)

You media cowards go along with it, the public accepts it, and so the man is willing to take any desperate chance --

ISMENE

This is all conjecture --

ANTIGONE

Everything is all conjecture without a paper trail! Now, will you come with me?

ISMENE

To the Seventh Gate?

ANTIGONE

We'll lift that fat vote box out of the machine together, high in the air, and then dash all the lies inside of it to smithereens! And together we'll be shouting, as they drag us away: "Free elections, free city of Thebes!" A perfect sound-bite, a perfect photo op, a clip they can keep on playing in a loop, all day long. It'll get people thinking.

ISMENE

Antigone, you don't even know what you're saying. A clip like that would be obscene! We could never air footage like that on TV! Of someone desecrating the voting process? If we showed it to our viewers, we'd be helping you in the filthy act! It would be like desecrating Theban soldiers killed by the Argive Army, by showing their bodies coming home from the war on TV.

ANTIGONE

It wouldn't desecrate the soldiers if you showed that. It would be a tribute to them. That's not why you people censor the footage of our dead as they come home.

ISMENE

No one will see your insane act, Antigone!

ANTIGONE

The gods will see it. They can be my witnesses.

ISMENE

No one will see it, it won't impact the process at all. But you still will be killed for it. Kreon will put you to death. You'll be committing suicide, and you'll be doing it for nothing! I beg you not to do this thing.

ANTIGONE

And one more time, I ask you to join me.

ISMENE

Think what you're doing, Antigone. Don't just throw your life away on a crazy cause, on agit-prop.

ANTIGONE

You know what? Forget it. I've changed my mind. I'm sorry I stopped by here. I wouldn't want you to come with me. The dead, down below us in Hades, wouldn't want you to come with me. In another moment I'll be hating you.

ISMENE

(Softly)

Don't hate me. You're my sister. Our brothers died at the end of each other's swords. You're all the family I have left. We're it -- we're the end of a cursed line.

(With more urgency)

Please don't hate me, Antigone. And please don't do this terrible thing, please!

ANTIGONE

Goodbye, Ismene.

(She leaves. ISMENE takes a step in the direction in which ANTIGONE left. Then ISMENE gets out her cell phone and punches in a number.)

ISMENE

Security?

(She hesitates for a long moment, at last says:)

Never mind.

(She closes the phone and puts it away. Smooths back her hair. Takes a deep breath. Still shaken and upset, she sits once again at her desk, and takes a look at the computer program on the CD rom. We hear a few BEEPS and BOOPS as she makes the computer do various things. At last, a cool, soft female voice confirms:)

FEMALE COMPUTER VOICE (V.O.)

Program uploaded.

(ISMENE's fingers continue to click away.)

FEMALE COMPUTER VOICE (V.O.)

Operation is a success.

ISMENE

Wait. No.

(She is alarmed by what she's reading, what she's learning. She stares at the vote box that sits on the floor, and then back at her laptop. She taps a few more keys.)

FEMALE COMPUTER VOICE (V.O.)

The polls have been adjusted. Thank you.

ISMENE

Come on. Come on.

(beat)

You're kidding. Don't do this, you gotta be kidding. No.

(At last, ISMENE turns in her swivel chair. She gets out her cell phone again and again punches a number.)

ISMENE

Bob? Yeah, I've been working on it . . . Bob, could you come in here for a moment, I think I understand how the program works . . . Well, I'm glad, but . . . I really feel a need to talk to you about it. Thanks.

(She closes the phone and puts it away, still looking troubled. She floats around listlessly on the swivel chair.)

(We hear STATION BREAK MUSIC, and LIGHTS GO UP on the MALE ANNOUNCER at his mic)

MALE ANNOUNCER

Rich. Red. Wet. Luxurious. Bakkheia wines. What you reach for to refresh yourself. What you serve to your guests with meats, figs or dates. What you use to toast Thebes, after you've gone to vote. Bold. Intoxicating. Bakkheia wines. Dionysus himself would demand that when you imbibe, you reach for the very best. Ecstatic. Playful. Bakkheia wines. Proud sponsors of Thebes TV.

(LIGHTS DOWN on the MALE ANNOUNCER. BOB comes into ISMENE's space, happy and excited.)

BOB

So, you've got it working? You are so awesome, Ismene. You rock! Show me!

ISMENE

(She stands, very serious, very
upset)

Bob -- where did you get this program?

BOB

Where did I . . . ?

(He sees her expression)

Whoa!

(Laughs)

What is this?

ISMENE

I'm just -- where did it come from?

BOB

An aide from the palace brought it over.

ISMENE

From --

BOB

We were looking pretty stupid with our erratic exit poll
results. I think they just wanted to help us out.

ISMENE

Do you know what this program does?

BOB

Yeah, sure. It adjusts the exit poll results.

ISMENE

But it doesn't just address the balance, the demographics,
the whole idea of who was asked. It doesn't just filter out
more of the people likely to have a bias against Kreon. It --
it just makes the exit poll results match up with the results
in this vote box -- exactly.

BOB

Well -- yeah. It's more efficient that way.

ISMENE

But that's --

BOB

It's how the game is played nowadays.

ISMENE

That's a stolen election. I mean, it could be. If Uncle
Kreon didn't win.

BOB

He did win. The vote boxes say so, and now the exit polls will say so, too.

ISMENE

But where's . . . there has to be some way to confirm the result.

BOB

There is. People come in and touch the screen and their votes are tallied by the computer. Those tallies are contained in the vote box. What's the problem?

ISMENE

But then -- how can the exit polls be so far off?

BOB

Because people are lying to us, or having second thoughts as they leave, or they're messing with us, or -- who knows?

ISMENE

But what if it was hacked? What if someone tampered with the votes?

BOB

Kronos, Inc. has guaranteed that that can't happen.

ISMENE

Kronos, Inc. is a private company.

BOB

That beat out all the others to get the voting machine contract from the palace, because they're the best. They make our ATM machines.

ISMENE

Those have a paper trail. Why don't these?

BOB

(Laughs, incredulous?)

Say, what? I don't see why you're making such an issue of this, Ismene. How is this different from what we've been doing since we got touch-screen machines in the first place?

ISMENE

I don't . . . I don't know if it's different or not.

BOB

Well, then -- what's got into you?

ISMENE

I'm just trying to be -- a good reporter. To look at this thing from different angles.

BOB

Well, that's great if you're putting together a big, in-depth, long-term, magazine-show story, but we're kind of in a time crunch right now, we've got a deadline, the polls close in less than an hour.

ISMENE

I know.

BOB

And yeah, sure, there are crackpots who don't believe in democracy, who try to disrupt every election by calling it illegitimate. Some people also have an irrational fear of technology and new machines.

(Serious, earnest)

That's why your press conference will be so important. People know you as a public figure. They respect you -- in spite of everything, they respect your family. This is where you give your imprimatur to this election -- your seal of approval, your blessing, so to speak. And we avoid civil unrest, and division in a time of war. The whole city-state can come together, behind the election results.

(More upbeat)

And meanwhile, we get to show that we're behind you as a station, that we at Thebes TV believe in you as one of our heavy hitters. That's what you've been after, isn't it?

ISMENE

(Subdued)

Yes.

BOB

This could lead to you getting to anchor your own news segment. I don't just mean celebrity interviews, I mean real news, war coverage. The first female anchor at Thebes TV. Not in prime time, but -- that's still a pretty major step. Don't you think so?

ISMENE

Yes.

BOB

Well, then, let's be a little more happy about it, huh?

(His cell phone RINGS)

BOB (CONT'D)

Excuse me, I'll be just a sec.

(listens)

When?

(a beat)

Are you sure?

(a beat, then, shaken, he
murmurs:)
Oh, snap. May the gods defend us.

(He closes his phone, and turns again
to ISMENE)

BOB (CONT'D)

I'm sorry to be the one to tell you this, Ismene. I've got some -- wild news. Your sister Antigone is in trouble again. She -- she's done something terrible at the polling station at the Seventh Gate. But I'll stand by you. I want you to know, I've been pulling for you from the beginning. I never held your family history against you -- in fact, I've always respected what was good in your family. The gods hated your father and cursed him for some reason, let's face it, before he was even born. But I admired the way he solved the riddle of the Sphinx. I admired him when he was King of Thebes and when he investigated the murder of King Laios -- I mean, the guy risked everything to solve it. And okay, maybe it was hubris, or his own hot, stubborn will, or pride, or whatever, that made him go ahead, even when he was warned, and discover -- certain things. About himself. But again, he saved the city, by discovering those things, by destroying himself. I was a kid back then, you were even younger. But I remember. We've never --

ISMENE

Bob, please don't --

BOB

We've never discussed it, and I'm sorry to cause you pain now. I just want you to know -- if things are about to get weird, and controversial -- I'm a friend. I saw that same kind of bizarro, hot, stubborn pride and passion in your brothers Polynices and Eteocles, and I see it in your sister Antigone, that same obnoxious hubris, with the slash-and-burn, self-righteous trouble she gets into. But you -- you're more like the other side of the family.

ISMENE

(Bitterly)

There is no "other side" in my family. We're the same on both sides. Mother, father -- the same.

BOB

(Embarrassed)

Ah, yes, well . . . what I mean is -- you're more like the old queen, your mother, Jocasta. Quiet, dignified. You're more like her brother --

ISMENE

I'm not like Kreon. Don't say that.

BOB

I'm just saying that you have a sense of decorum and how to present yourself, a sense of how things ought to work, the way Kreon brought order and stability back to Thebes after your brothers fought and destroyed each other. After your father cursed them. After he discovered his own --

ISMENE

I'm my father's daughter also. Like Antigone. I'm the daughter of Oedipus and I'm the sister of Oedipus. Both. He was my father, but we sprang from the same womb. And Antigone is the last person alive who understands what that means.

BOB

Well, she may not be alive for long. Up till now, Kreon has tolerated . . .

(He studies her)

Has she been in contact with you?

ISMENE

(Looks away)

Who?

BOB

Antigone. Did you know of her plans? Am I crazy when I say I support you, I'm 100% behind you?

(Points at the vote box)

Did she tamper with that one also, and try to smash it?

ISMENE

No, she didn't touch it.

BOB

But she was here.

ISMENE

Yes.

BOB

And you didn't try to stop her. You didn't call security.

ISMENE

No.

BOB

Why was she here?

ISMENE

She wanted me to go with her. And I -- I failed her. I said I wouldn't go.

BOB

Well, at least you have some vestige of the sense I thought you had. But I guess that explains your change of attitude. She messed with your mind. She shook you up.

ISMENE

She showed me what my job is, as a journalist. The job I should be doing.

BOB

You've been doing your job as a journalist, Ismene, and doing it pretty damn well.

ISMENE

A good journalist asks inconvenient questions. Investigates beneath the surface. Doesn't just accept whatever is said by the powers that be.

BOB

A good journalist works with the powers that be if he wants to get access. You want interviews with Kreon and the people under him, running Thebes? You want scoops on how the war is going? You want to embed reporters with the troops? You want amazing, top-security footage shot by the military itself, of our new weapons being deployed? If you want those things, sometimes you compromise. You don't fight with people in charge and you don't insult them.

ISMENE

What if they deserve a good fight or an insult?

BOB

You sound like your sister.

ISMENE

Maybe she'd make a better journalist than I am.

BOB

Bull. She's a radical and a fanatic. Journalists are calm and level-headed and objective.

ISMENE

And they just swallow the party line?

BOB

Yeah. A lot of the time. We cooperate closely with Kreon's Office of Public Diplomacy because at the end of the day, we're in the same business. News dissemination, teaching the public, entertaining the public, reassuring the public. Same goals and same techniques.

ISMENE

So, why don't we call this Kreon TV, instead of Thebes TV?

BOB

It comes down to the same thing, supporting Kreon makes the city of Thebes stronger.

ISMENE

I don't see that. I think democracy would make the city of Thebes stronger.

BOB

We were never a democracy. The popular vote doesn't decide elections.

ISMENE

It would still be good to know how it turns out.

BOB

The illusion of participating, of choosing, is what makes people more patriotic, if you really want to know the truth, Ismene. And we're in the illusion business, just like the Office of Public Diplomacy. We know how to wag the dog, we know how to do damage control. We push buttons. We can generate flak about bad things, and hype the good things. We provide entertainment, just like any sitcom or crime show.

ISMENE

We're supposed to be real!

BOB

And we are -- as real as any reality show on the air. As scripted and rehearsed and manufactured and massaged as any "spontaneous" scene on a reality show, as any "candid" interview. I spend half my time making sure that nothing unexpected ever, ever happens during a live broadcast. And you've conducted interviews, you've rehearsed them, and you know about pre-screened questions and scripted answers -- and why are you pretending that all of this is new to you?

ISMENE

Because of my sister. And because of that box.

BOB

Your sister has always been crazy. And that box is nothing new.

ISMENE

I thought that the polls were genuinely off, before! I thought we were striving for greater accuracy --

BOB

You thought what it felt good to think! But the stakes are getting a little too high for that now. You've got to grow up and face facts. Why were you hired by us, huh, Ismene?

I built Thebes TV, I've been anchor-producer for years now, why did I take you on board? Is it because you're the best journalist out there? Is it the punchy, incisive copy you write?

ISMENE

You were just saying what a good journalist I am.

BOB

You're fine, you're better than average. But you're not the only girl who can read cue cards. You're beautiful, Ismene, and you are one of the last of the House of Kadmos. And people are disgusted and fascinated and titillated by your family, they feel a mixture of awe and wonder and respect and pity and fear and curiosity, every time you're on the air. And that's good for ratings. And do you also have your chops now, as a reporter? Sure. And that's part of it too, what the hell. But don't forget for a minute that we're in show business, that we stay on the air because we sell cars and dogfood during commercial breaks, that we're selling a product just like our sponsors and just like the palace, that one hand washes the other and that you've got to know how to play the game!

ISMENE

(sadly)

That's what I've always tried to do. That was always the difference between Antigone and me.

BOB

Yes.

ISMENE

I don't know if it's possible, anymore. I -- I should have gone with her.

BOB

Why? So you could make a crazy, destructive gesture that nobody saw? So, you could be carried away by emotion, like her? Like your father was when he raked his own eyes out -- standing in front of the palace howling, with the blood pouring down his face --

ISMENE

Because my mother, with great dignity and decorum, had gone back inside the palace and hanged herself --

BOB

And then for the rest of his life, Oedipus needed you girls, he needed Antigone to lead him around by the hand? Those moments of drama, those tantrums, those gestures -- tell me, Ismene, what do they accomplish?

ISMENE

My father mocked the old blind seer, Teresius. And Teresius told him -- one day you'll be blind like me. And even with your eyes, you are more blind right now, this second, than I am. Blind to who your parents are, to what your marriage is. He was right. My father said, later on, that Teresius was right. And I have been blind, Bob. Yes, I have my eyes, I have nice color contact lenses, but I have chosen to be blind to -- so many things.

BOB

What you're blind to is what will happen to your sister. You're blind to consequences. You think that you're both princesses, that that's gonna protect you. It can't protect you forever.

ISMENE

I don't think that.

BOB

Antigone is going to be put to death this time, Ismene. She may be tortured first. It may be public, or it may be a slow death, walled up inside a tomb, as dark as any blindness. Pain hurts, Ismene. Okay? And death is not for beautiful, young women, who have found their niche, who are good at their jobs, and who know how to play the game. But if you joined with her, if you proved yourself a traitor to the city also -- there is nothing I could do to protect you. Excuse me, let me just see what they're up to, now.

(He turns on her TV set; its back is to us. LIGHTS go UP on the MALE ANNOUNCER at his mic, and we hear what's on the air:)

MALE ANNOUNCER

Later tonight on Thebes TV: Can you trust your wife at home with your house slaves? And, what do the sacrificial offerings you leave for the gods say about YOU?

(BOB switches off the set. LIGHTS OUT on the MALE ANNOUNCER.)

BOB

They're still doing previews, and then they'll be wrapping up entertainment and nutrition . . . I've got to be on the air in half an hour. And when I'm sitting in that makeup chair, getting pancake and powder and blush put on my face, I won't be thinking oh, I'm fake, I'm cheating the public. Because I take being a news anchor seriously, and I know this is all part of it -- my job is part substance and part illusion, and giving people information in a format they can handle, in a way they understand -- that's what I'm here to do.

I understand you were disturbed by seeing your sister. She went into her diatribes, and she poured out her hatred of everything, and she asked you to crash and burn along with her. But she doesn't know the Ismene I know -- the professional, the team player. The woman who has helped make Thebes TV what it is today. Just let me know if you're willing to give your press conference after all, and officially announce the election results, and the exit poll results for us. And when I get that call from you, I'll make it all happen.

(Smiles)

Okay? Just let me know.

(He leaves. ISMENE sinks into her swivel chair. She hugs her arms, the sleeves of her suit, as if she's cold.)

ISMENE

No, I don't want to die. I don't want to be walled up in darkness. Thirsting, starving, till I can't breathe. I don't want to live in Antigone's world of curses and bitterness, and rage and hate -- oh, Dionysus! Dionysus, hear me! Hear me, Zeus, hear me, Athena, help me! Show me what to do.

(Her chair wobbles and crashes, as she falls to the floor, and feels her way along it.)

ISMENE (CONT'D)

No -- nowhere to go but down. And those of you down below -- Mom, Dad, Eteocles, Polynices -- can you hear me? Can the shades in Hades hear us, and help us? Can you tell me what to do?

(LIGHTS DOWN over ISMENE. LIGHTS UP on the other part of the stage, on BOB sitting at his anchorman desk, as the NEWS THEME MUSIC plays. LIGHTS UP on the MALE ANNOUNCER at his mic -- he speaks over the music:)

MALE ANNOUNCER

What has four legs in the morning, two legs in the afternoon, and three legs at night? Every member of the Thebes TV Action News Team, changing and growing before your eyes, and keeping you informed. And now, once again -- here's Bob!

BOB

Good evening. The polls have closed all over Thebes, and the election results have been tallied. Every vote was counted, despite a very troubling incident some citizens witnessed at the polling station at the Seventh Gate.

Our unstable Princess Antigone was arrested after she sabotaged a vote box, pulling it out of the voting machine, and hurling it to the ground before she was restrained. Thebes TV refuses to show the security camera footage of that hideous incident, but we do have this clip of her, later, as she was led off to prison.

(LIGHTS UP elsewhere on stage, on ANTIGONE, shouting at the audience)

ANTIGONE

An election with no paper trail is a joke! Kreon is a tyrant! Hear me, citizens, the process is yours if you take it back! Free elections, free city of Thebes!

(LIGHTS DOWN on ANTIGONE. BOB looks grave and shakes his head.)

BOB

Hard to believe, isn't it, that anyone could hate the electoral process that much? Even if they didn't think their side was going to win. But I want to assure everyone viewing this broadcast that the votes inside that vote box were salvaged and tallied. All of those citizens who voted there today at the Seventh Gate had a chance for their voices to be heard. The palace has issued a statement saying that it is pained by Antigone's actions, that Kreon loves her as he always has, but that justice must take its course.

(A beat)

And I'd like to say something on another, more personal note. This day must be an emotional roller-coaster for one of our own, our reporter Ismene Kadmos. Even as her Uncle Kreon is preparing for a party in the palace, she has seen her own sister get arrested, charged with a terrible crime. We wouldn't have made her go ahead with her reporting duties under these circumstances -- except that she's a trooper. She knows a good reporter doesn't let personal things get in the way of what she does, and she's told me herself she wants to go ahead with the press conference we had scheduled. Here now, facing a room full of journalists from other networks and media, is our own Ismene Kadmos, ready to announce the official elections results, and tell about the new exit poll technology we're using here at Thebes TV for greater accuracy -- and then she'll answer, live and unscripted, any question they ask her. Ismene?

(LIGHTS UP on ISMENE. She looks perfect, only a little shaky. She is smiling and upbeat. She is standing by the vote box.)

ISMENE

Thanks, Bob.

(To audience)

Hello, everyone. Thank you for coming. You know, today hasn't just been a larger than life day for me -- I'd say it's kind of a turning point for every Theban citizen.

(Smiling, BOB comes out from behind his desk, and wanders over to watch her. The MALE ANNOUNCER joins him.)

ISMENE

Election days are always important. They make us examine who we are, what we believe, what patriotism and duty consist of, and what we owe to the city-state that we call home. And after spending a couple of hours with this one little vote box, learning how it works, I want to say to all of you right now . . .

(She suddenly picks up the heavy vote box, and holds it in the air above her head. BOB is horrified.)

(In a hoarse, defiant voice ISMENE shouts:)

ISMENE

Free elections! Free city of Thebes!

(ISMENE hurls the vote box down onto the ground. Angry and frantic, BOB shouts to the cameraman)

BOB

Cut! Cut!

(We hear STATICKY WHITE NOISE, as the LIGHTS COME DOWN.)

END OF PLAY