

BEFORE

---

by

Scott Glander

A Play

CONTACT:  
[scott@scottglander.com](mailto:scott@scottglander.com)

## CAST

JULIA - sister of Annie, early 20s  
DIRECTOR - of *Oedipus*, female  
SISTER - sister to Antigone, early 20s  
UNCLE - uncle to Antigone, 40s  
FATHER - father to Antigone, early 30s  
SOOTHSAYER - a blind soothsayer, female  
PROFESSOR - of Greek Drama, female  
TALKING HEAD - (doubles with Soothsayer)  
BROTHER ONE - brother to Antigone (doubles with Father)  
BROTHER TWO - brother to Antigone (doubles with Father)  
ANCIENT SLAVE - female, 20s  
MESSENGER  
CITIZEN ONE  
CITIZEN TWO  
CITIZEN THREE  
LO-NO ONE  
LO-NO TWO

## SETTING

Thebes in ancient Greece, before the royal palace.

ACT ONE

Thebes, before the royal palace. The set is not complete

SISTER sits contemplatively twirling her hair or reading or preparing what she will say to someone. There may be backstage noises, as if people are preparing for a rehearsal. A stage hand or two may walk through the space or fix something on the set. SISTER is unaware of any of this

ENTER DIRECTOR. SISTER is unaware of Director. DIRECTOR walks through the space looking at the set from different angles. She makes a couple of notes. EXIT DIRECTOR

ENTER ANCIENT SLAVE pulling an enormous SLAB OF ROCK. She moves slowly across the stage

ENTER JULIA. Lights dim

SISTER  
There you are. I've been waiting for you.

JULIA unsure

SISTER (cont'd)  
Yes, sister. I've been waiting all day.

MOANS from offstage

JULIA  
Sister?

SISTER  
Yes? What is it? We need to talk. We haven't time to waste. This is a troubling day. Do you feel the energy?

JULIA  
The energy?

SISTER  
Yes, the energy! Where is this coming from?

JULIA  
I'm not sure what you mean.

SISTER  
This negative energy is more than the plague.

MOANS from offstage

JULIA  
The plague?

SISTER  
Look around you -- the plague is everywhere. It has consumed  
all of Thebes.

JULIA  
Thebes?

A cell phone RINGS

ANCIENT SLAVE  
(Stops pulling. Takes a breath.  
Pulls out PHONE. Answers it)  
Yes.  
(Listens)  
Yes.  
(Listens)  
Yes, I understand. All the way back, yes.  
(To Others)  
Thank goodness I have my cell phone. I'd be lost without it.  
(Pulls ROCK back in the direction  
she came from)

JULIA  
Is that --

SISTER  
She's a slave, so what. You've seen her before. She's doing  
her job. What's the big deal?

JULIA  
It's just that --

SISTER  
You act as if you never saw a working slave before.

JULIA  
I've seen people at work before, I just never imagined it  
would be so -- look at the size of that --

SISTER  
Father has sent our uncle to Delphi to consult the oracle.

JULIA  
The oracle?

SISTER  
He is due back any time now! I fear the worst!

JULIA  
What is the worst?

ENTER SOOTHSAYER

SISTER  
I don't know, but I fear it! I fear it with all of my being.

MOANS from offstage

SISTER (cont'd)  
Oh, beehives and bowlegged dragonflies.

JULIA  
What?

SISTER  
This plague is devouring our city and everyone expects Father to fix it, as if he is a magician.  
(EXIT)

SOOTHSAYER  
That's because he is a magician. He's a wizard, he's a hero. He's saved Thebes before and he will again -- I've no doubt he'll save us again.

JULIA  
I'm confused.

SOOTHSAYER  
Patience Antigone.

JULIA  
(Under her breath)  
Antigone?

ENTER DIRECTOR (only JULIA is aware of Director)

SOOTHSAYER  
Your father is the greatest hero Thebes has ever seen or ever will see -- if I can see anything.  
(EXIT)

DIRECTOR  
You look rather uncomfortable.

JULIA  
I am.

DIRECTOR  
Not to worry, we're early in the process. I know you've not played the Greeks before, but your training, your craft will serve you well.

JULIA  
But I --

DIRECTOR  
This is a great role and this is a great role for you in particular. You'll attract a lot of attention with this role.

JULIA  
Something's wrong, terribly wrong.

DIRECTOR  
Nonsense, you were born to play this role Annie. Why don't you work on your opening monologue.  
(EXIT)

JULIA  
Annie? I'm not Annie. I'm Julia. What's happening? I'm not an actor. Annie is ... was the actor. Annie where are you? How can this be? Am I in a play? This is your last role, your last play! I'm playing Antigone! How did I get here? I'm not Antigone! I'm not even Annie! Where am I? I can't act? I don't want to act! This can't be! What's going on?! Am I trapped here? What is going on?! Where am I?! How did I get here? I'm Julia I tell you -- where am I -- I'm Julia!

DIRECTOR  
(Offstage)  
Don't forget the flat tire.

JULIA  
How did she know I had a flat tire? I was looking for someone to help me with it when I ...

JULIA tries to leave the stage. ENTER  
SOOTHSAYER

JULIA (cont'd)  
No, wait -- I came in over here or was it over here or over there. Where was it, I need to find the way out ...

SOOTHSAYER  
Remember, the flat tire is only a metaphor.

EXIT ANCIENT SLAVE

JULIA  
A metaphor? How can a flat tire be a metaphor?

SOOTHSAYER  
How can a flat tire not be a metaphor?

JULIA  
What's going on? I don't understand this. Am I in a play? But that's impossible, I can't be in a play!

SOOTHSAYER

I don't know who wrote this play, but why would that matter?

ENTER FATHER

FATHER

Don't give me that flat tire metaphor again! I told you I don't believe a word you're saying! You're vague and full of misinformation. Can't you see there is a plague here in Thebes! A plague I tell you! People are dying. People are sick. People are lost and they're looking to me for the answer. This isn't about you or me or who is right or wrong. This is about *doing* what is right. This is about *doing* what needs to be done! This is about being responsible to your community and your self. This is for all of Thebes. This isn't about one single person. Stores are closing! Factories are shutting down! Jobs are being outsourced! Can't you see it. It's all around. People are struggling just to get by, they're without jobs, they're losing their homes! I ask your advice and you sound like a muttering politician.

SOOTHSAYER

Say hello to your father, Antigone.

JULIA

My father? That would be --

SOOTHSAYER

Don't say his name. The gods don't want to hear his name.

JULIA

I won't say it. I promise.

SOOTHSAYER

Good.

FATHER

(To Antigone)

Don't listen to her, daughter. She's vague and confusing. She's intentionally confusing. That's her game. That's how she avoids the real questions. She dances around the truth and never gets down to something solid, something real. She never gets down to what is genuine. I suppose it makes her feel powerful in some self-serving way.

SOOTHSAYER

Like I said -- I don't know who wrote this play.

(EXIT)

JULIA

That isn't what --

FATHER

So Antigone, my favorite daughter. I'm glad she's gone. Don't listen to a word that woman says. She avoids everything -- at least everything that's important. This plague will be the death of Thebes and she doesn't care. We need to find out what's wrong. We need to purge ourselves of what we as a society have done wrong, but we can't be sure of what that is without deep, visceral, honest answers. We don't need avoiders like her. Avoiders will be the death of our city one day. An avoider may even be the death of me. Life is so simple, daughter, if only we don't avoid the truth of who we are or of what our life means.

JULIA

It sounds simple, but I don't think it is.

FATHER

Nonsense.

JULIA

No, I mean it, life is so elusive at times.

FATHER

She's been using the flat tire metaphor on you, so you're confused.

JULIA

Ah, well, I --

FATHER

Don't believe the flat tire metaphor. It's the oldest trick in the book. I knew she'd dump it on you.

JULIA

It was a real tire.

FATHER

Daughter, that woman is all nonsense, all smoke and mirrors.

JULIA

I saw the tire with my own eyes.

FATHER

You saw what she told you, you saw, nothing more, nothing less.

JULIA

Are you saying I didn't see it?

FATHER

I'm saying if you listen to her the oracle will come true.

JULIA

I didn't know oracles were real?



FATHER

Of course they're real, at least they appear to be so. She works for the status quo. She supports the status quo. The status quo pays her large amounts of money. The status quo wants things to happen in a particular way -- a particular way that is to their particular advantage, but they don't want you to know the particular way gives them the particular advantage they have, so they pay large, sometimes enormous sums of money, for the smoke and mirrors, because they don't want things to change, no matter what they say.

JULIA

What does that mean?

FATHER

It means you shouldn't listen to oracles.

JULIA

I don't and I never have.

FATHER

If you believe in the flat tire metaphor, you do. Oracles aren't written in stone. The future is fluid, it hasn't happened yet. However, the more you buy into the way they think, the more susceptible you are to believing their way of thinking is the only way of thinking.

JULIA

Are you saying oracles can be changed?

FATHER

Of course they can.

JULIA

How is that possible?

FATHER

You must not avoid, Antigone. Of all my children you are the most like me and you have in you what it requires to seek the truth -- way deep down inside of yourself. It is that part of you, you mustn't avoid. It is that part of you, that holds the key to saving our city, our very existence, to saving all of humanity. You have a soul Antigone, a deep-soul.

JULIA

I can feel something in me.

FATHER

You do. Believe me, I know you do. A deep-soul should not be wasted, hindered or squandered. If you avoid responsibility, you injure your soul. Did you know that?

JULIA

I've never thought of it that way.

FATHER

You'd be wise to learn these things for yourself. Most of the others don't understand these things because they don't want to understand them. Our society is steeped in willful ignorance, but still it's no excuse.

JULIA

But what if --

FATHER

A deep-soul understands right from wrong, a thin-soul only understands profit.

JULIA

That's what Grandpa George always said.

FATHER

Your Grandfather's name was Polybus, not George.

JULIA

Ahhhh ... it's a nickname, yes, a nickname for someone else.

FATHER

He's a wise man, this "Grandpa George" of yours.

JULIA

Yes, I've always thought so. How can you be sure I have a deep-soul?

FATHER

I know you do. I've always known it.

JULIA

I don't think I always know right from wrong. I sometimes --

FATHER

We need someone with a deep-soul to lead us, Antigone. Those who avoid hurt themselves, but they can hurt us and others as well. An avoider can not heal our society. An avoider will not heal this plague. An injured soul or thin soul will not heal this plague. We need someone to heal us, to help us heal. We need someone with the courage to stand up, to see what is going on and to speak the truth. We need someone who is strong enough to speak up and speak out with the truth.

JULIA

How do I know what is truth and what isn't?

FATHER

The answer you seek is deep inside of you.

JULIA

But she said --

FATHER

Our society is full of false prophets. Do not believe them.

JULIA

Can she not be trusted at all?

FATHER

She will tell you things you want to hear, just like a talk show host. They don't care about you. They only care about ratings and their sponsors -- that's where their money comes from, so that's for whom they speak! This is how these false prophets infiltrate your mind and contaminate your soul.

JULIA

She seems to know so much.

FATHER

She wants to distract you, to confuse you. When you're confused you're powerless. When you're powerless you do not act for yourself, nor do you think for yourself. It is their goal to make you powerless and to keep you powerless.

JULIA

I think my sister has a deeper soul than me.

FATHER

Your sister's soul is not shallow, but it too is not deep, not as deep as yours.

JULIA

She can, she has --

FATHER

She has not what you have.

JULIA

She can see things more clearly than me.

FATHER

That is because you avoid.

JULIA

I don't understand this.

FATHER

This is why I'm telling you.

JULIA

She can --

FATHER

Life is unpredictable. Oracles mean nothing. Oracles come true because people do not believe in themselves, so they latch on to oracles and embrace them.

FATHER (cont'd)  
Oracles are false prophets. They're vague. They confuse. They allow you to escape your responsibility to your self and to your society. This is a danger, do not let this happen to you. Oracles squeeze out what is right by making room for what is wrong. They cause you to question your instincts for what you know to be true and to be real. But it is you, only you, who can understand what lies deep within yourself.

JULIA  
This is too much for me.

FATHER  
Nonsense.

JULIA  
It is. I can't do this.

FATHER  
You must do this. Thebes needs you.

JULIA  
I can't --

FATHER  
They'll destroy you, if you don't heed these words.

JULIA  
These words are what will destroy me.

ENTER PROFESSOR (only JULIA is aware  
of Professor)

FATHER  
That is an illusion.

JULIA  
How do I know you're telling me the truth and not her?

FATHER  
You're avoiding everything in your life and you know it.  
(EXIT)

PROFESSOR  
All of literary history knows only one thing -- how determined Oedipus was to find the truth.

JULIA  
Professor Tonebird -- where did you come from?

PROFESSOR  
You're the one who came to class today.

JULIA  
I thought you weren't supposed to say his name.

PROFESSOR  
That's an old wives tale.

JULIA  
Can I believe him Professor?

PROFESSOR  
How would I know?

JULIA  
But you know so much.

PROFESSOR  
Greek drama is full of life, love and death. That isn't so much to know.

JULIA  
Life, love and death is more than most people know.

PROFESSOR  
It may be, if you know it. The Greeks wrote about life, love and death to better understand them, but that doesn't mean they knew all there was to know about them.

JULIA  
I wish I understood all of this better.

PROFESSOR  
Don't we all.

JULIA  
But Professor --

PROFESSOR  
There are no buts in life --

JULIA  
Then why does --

PROFESSOR  
The things I know are specific things, not general things.

JULIA  
Is knowing if I should trust someone a general thing?

PROFESSOR  
It's your choice.

JULIA  
What do you mean exactly?

PROFESSOR  
We make choices everyday, seemingly insignificant choices.

JULIA  
But they aren't, are they?

PROFESSOR  
It depends.

JULIA  
On what?

PROFESSOR  
On you.

JULIA  
Are our choices ever arbitrary, Professor?

PROFESSOR  
What do you think?

JULIA  
I, I just don't know.

PROFESSOR  
They are your choices and so you are free to choose what they mean or don't mean.

JULIA  
That doesn't help much.

PROFESSOR  
In the end, it is your life and you will have to decide how you will live and who you will be in that life.

JULIA  
But Professor --

PROFESSOR  
No matter your choice you will have to live with the results of that choice for the rest of your life.

JULIA  
I wish I had an oracle to tell me.

PROFESSOR  
But if you believe him, could you believe the oracle?

JULIA  
Are we much different than the Greeks?

PROFESSOR  
That depends.

JULIA  
On what?

ENTER DIRECTOR

PROFESSOR  
On whether the flat tire is a metaphor.

JULIA  
But Professor --

PROFESSOR  
Don't forget to read your Homer for next class.  
(EXIT)

JULIA  
Homer? I hate Homer.

DIRECTOR  
You told me you loved Homer.

JULIA  
I never said that.

DIRECTOR  
Yes you did and you told me Antigone knows exactly what she's talking about.

JULIA  
I did not. I don't think she knows anything.

DIRECTOR  
Relax, this is a good role for you. You'll grow into it.

JULIA  
I won't grow into anything. I don't belong here!

DIRECTOR  
Neither do I, but I can't leave, so neither can you.

JULIA  
I'm not apart of this. I'm not supposed to be here.

DIRECTOR  
You belong here. You've done this before.

JULIA  
I haven't done this before. This isn't me. I'm not an actor.  
I don't even like acting!

DIRECTOR  
We've all done this before and we'll do it again. It's the way the world works. You do this every time we work together. And the next time we work together you'll do it again.

JULIA  
I can't --

DIRECTOR  
Does the word arbitrary mean anything to you?

ENTER SISTER (she is unaware of  
Director)

JULIA  
I'm not being arbitrary.

SISTER  
If you're not arbitrary sister, the word doesn't exist.

DIRECTOR  
You said that before.

JULIA  
Again with before? Don't change the context.

DIRECTOR  
I didn't change the context, you did!

JULIA  
I don't belong here!

SISTER  
None of us does, but we're stuck. We're stuck with the life  
we're born into and the family we're born with.

DIRECTOR  
You were born to play this role.

JULIA  
I can't, no, I won't! How do I get out of here?

DIRECTOR  
Your flat tire hasn't been fixed yet, so you can't leave.

JULIA  
I don't believe in the flat tire metaphor anymore.

SISTER  
Beehives and periodontal bobby pins. You're being arbitrary  
again.

DIRECTOR  
What play are you doing?

JULIA  
I'm not sure --

DIRECTOR  
Who wrote this play?