



The Phoenician Women, by Euripides
Recension/translation by David Travis

Fraternal Conflict

Eteokles

Mother, this meeting was a waste of time.
It's too late for words;
Your goodwill has gotten us nowhere; [590]
We will not be reconciled except on my terms:
That I remain in power as King in Thebes.
Now stop your tedious warnings and let me be.
(to *Polyneikes*) And you, get out! Outside the walls, or die!

Polyneikes

Who will kill me?
Where is the man who will draw his sword on me
And not get killed himself? [595]

Eteokles

Open your eyes. He is close.

Polyneikes

I see a coward who clings to life.
With nothing to love but money.

Eteokles

If I'm so worthless,
Why did you come here with so many men?

Polyneikes

A careful captain's better than a rash one.

Eteokles

Keep boasting Polyneikes!
You trust the truce to save your life. [600]

Polyneikes

So do you! I'll ask you one last time, my brother:
I request from you the scepter and my share.



Eteokles

We reject your request.
My house is mine. And so it will remain.

Polyneikes

And keep more than your share?

Eteokles

Yes. Now go!

Polyneikes

O altars of my fathers' gods--

Eteokles

Which you have come to plunder.

Polyneikes

Hear me!

[605]

Eteokles

Which of the gods will listen to you? You come to sack your own city!

Polyneikes

O temples of our gods who ride white horses --

Eteokles

And who hate you.

Polyneikes

He denies me the land of my birth...

Eteokles

Yes! You came to destroy it!

Polyneikes

O gods, give me justice!

Eteokles

Call on the gods at Mycenae, not here.

Polyneikes

You have always been godless!



Eteokles

But I am not my country's enemy.

Polyneikes

No? When you endanger Thebes with your treachery?
You thief! You cheat me of my birthright.

[610]

Eteokles

Yes – and soon I will kill you.

Polyneikes

O father! Hear the wrongs I suffer!

Eteokles

He hears the wrongs you do.

Polyneikes

And you, mother?

Eteokles

You have no right to speak her name.

Polyneikes

O my city!

Eteokles

Go to Argos. Call on her.

Polyneikes

I'm going.

Mother, I thank you...

Eteokles

Get out!

Polyneikes

Let me see my father.

[615]

Eteokles

Impossible.

Polyneikes

Then let me see the girls.



Eteokles

You will never see them again.

Polyneikes

Antigone! Ismene!

Eteokles

Why do you call them? You're their worst enemy.

Polyneikes

Mother, to you, at least, goodbye!

Jokasta

There's nothing good about it, my son!

Polyneikes

I am your son no longer.

Jokasta

O! I was born for sorrow.

Polyneikes

This man insults our nature.

[620]

Eteokles

And you insult me.

Polyneikes

Where will you fight? Which tower?

Eteokles

What do you care?

Polyneikes

I will be there to kill you.

Eteokles

I see we agree for once.

Jokasta

O! My sons! What will you do?



Polyneikes

The event will show.

Jokasta

O! Why won't you stop? Your father's curse! O!
(collapses in a heap, mourning)

Eteokles

Let the house fall to ruin!
(Eteokles withdraws)

Polyneikes

Soon my sword will be plunged in blood, hungry for death. [625]

I call my native land - I call the gods - to witness,

Insulted, dishonored, I am shamefully thrust from my land like a slave,

As if he is more our father's son than I.

O Thebes, my city, if you should suffer,

You must blame him, not me; [630]

For I came here against my will.

Against my will I now am driven out.

Lord Apollo of the crossroads, and you rooftrees of Thebes, my home, farewell!

I do not know if I shall ever speak to you again,

But hope is not asleep; I still believe that with the help of heaven [635]

I will kill him and win my kingdom back.

Eteokles

Get out now. It was a true name our father gave you,
Polyneikes – the name says it all – “Strife.”

Polyneikes exits.