

Antigone // Ismene

(Inspired by Tyehimba Jess's syncopated sonnets, these poems can be read in any order. The right side represents Antigone's voice; the left, Ismene's. Their voices mingle in the center column.)

	have you heard anything yet?	
the king's edict?		since our brothers' deaths?
	since both of us were robbed of both of them?	
he has told the city		I know nothing.
	ever since the Argive army left	
we cannot bury him		and I have been alone
	at night, I have heard nothing	
only bad news		from dusk to dawn.
	I have honored my family	
for my brother		now there is only you, my sister
	but I have no more news	
just the king's edict		bringing me outside the gates:
	I have not heard of better fortunes	
	I have not heard of greater suffering.	

listen to me, give me your voice,
Ismene, my conspirator, Antigone, my sister,
my partner from the start—
it's our brothers, who I cannot lose
we must help each other.
we must stand up to the king's will
for our family and ourselves.
how can you say you must bend
for yourself and for me.
you will not help for the city
to rectify this ruin
in the face of fate in the face of grief
please, work with me
against the horror we've inherited.

I have not heard of greater suffering
than what Zeus has poured on us
unless the king says something more
unless there's something else to mourn.
what is this new rule?
we may not bury Polynices.
we will be the last lament.
we will have our quiet funeral.
I will lay dust on his grave
I will be the one to close his eyes
we are the last remnants of our line
the daughters of Oedipus
I will speak against the king.
I will go to the grave.
against the horror we've inherited,
there is nothing we can do
I will mourn my brothers.
I wish I could help.
even if it brings me sadness.
even if I die for it.
I will stay strong.
we must stand together.

I will go to the grave
battle-ready ill-fated
I will walk to my kin
my head high truth on my tongue
even when Persephone has taken you
I have lost so much I will keep something
I will do what's right
I will admit for you
my only sister
that I did bury him I helped him
my beloved brother
out of love I tell you this
all will be right in the eyes of the gods
once this final deed is done

we must stand together
in our deeds in our grief
we must let our voices sing
in one last lament for our family's fate
we are the last ones left.
I have heard your care I have seen your love
I remember everything.
I have been with you I am complicit
every time we've mourned.
I do not remember as you perform this act
you without me:
despite my hot heart I carry this charge
we have always been two sisters
tossed by the Fates

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 since both of us were robbed of both of them?
 he has told the city I know nothing.
 ever since the Argive army left
 we cannot bury him and I have been alone
 at night, I have heard nothing
 only evil news from dusk to dawn.
 I have honored my family
 for my brother but there is only you, my sister
 but I have no more news
 just the king's edict bringing me outside the gates:
 I have not heard of better fortunes
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