

ECHO. Action.

CALLIOPE. Yeah, you don't have a chance in hell with Narcissus. I'm telling you the truth. But don't you want to find that out? Instead of going around all silent and hung up on him, hoping for something that's never going to happen.

ECHO. Never going to happen?

CALLIOPE. Or maybe he's in love with you and you're sitting in this bathroom wasting your life. You should confront him.

ECHO. Confront him?

CALLIOPE. Open up to him. Meet him in some dark hallway. Grab him.

ECHO. Grab him?

CALLIOPE. Grab him and Kiss him.

ECHO. Kiss him.

CALLIOPE. Yeah, surprise him, why not? Tell him.

ECHO. Why not tell him.

CALLIOPE. Exactly. What's the worst that could happen? If he rejects you so what?

ECHO. So what.

CALLIOPE. Then you can move on. That's life that's how we live.

ECHO. We live.

CALLIOPE. That's right, Echo, we live, we love that's what we do. And if he doesn't love you, maybe there's someone else who will. Someone better. Echo?

(But she's gone.)

ANTIGONE NOW

by Melissa Cooper

inspired by Sophocles' *Antigone*

Characters

ANTIGONE, still a teenager.

ISMENE, her sister, a few years older.

Scene

The city is in chaos following a civil war waged by Polyneices and Eteocles, brothers of Antigone and Ismene. After the brothers kill each other in battle, Creon, the girls' uncle, seizes control of the city and orders that the body of Polyneices remain unburied to show what happens to traitors and rebels. Antigone is determined to bury her brother, even in the face of death, and comes to her sister for help.

(ISMENE is alone inside her apartment, late at night. She puts on headphones or turns on a boom box. Music blasts on, a loud, relentless contemporary sound. Maybe hip-hop or rap. ISMENE dances fiercely, determined to lose herself in the music. ANTIGONE is outside in the street, dodging snipers and explosions as she makes her way to stand outside ISMENE's apartment building.)

ANTIGONE. *(Hollering at Ismene's door as many times as necessary:)* Ismene! Ismene!

(ISMENE finally hears her sister's voice. She snaps off the music, and races to the door to pull ANTIGONE inside to safety.)

ISMENE. Antigone. Get in. What are you doing outside after curfew?

ANTIGONE. Why does suffering never end? It just goes on and on and on...

ISMENE. Calm down. Did something happen?

ANTIGONE. Yes, something happened. Of course, something happened.

ISMENE. Don't snap at me. I didn't do anything.

ANTIGONE. No. You sit inside with your doors and windows sealed, blaring music to drown out the sirens. You have no idea what's going on out there.

ISMENE. I do so.

ANTIGONE. All right, tell me. *(She waits a beat, then goes on.)*

See? You can't say anything, because you don't know. I'm opening your windows, Ismene.

ISMENE. No, no...

ANTIGONE. Let the sounds and smells roll in—

ISMENE. (*Grappling with her sister to keep her from opening the windows:*) Get away from the windows.

ANTIGONE. —so you'll know what I know.

ISMENE. I'll tell you what I know. I know the war is over and our brothers are dead.

ANTIGONE. Old news already.

ISMENE. I know Creon is king—

ANTIGONE. Yesterday's paper.

ISMENE. I know people are hungry—

ANTIGONE. You call that news?

ISMENE. —and Creon's troops are prowling the city—

ANTIGONE. Go on...

ISMENE. (*Pointedly:*) They're rounding up traitors and troublemakers.

ANTIGONE. And—? Is that all you know?

ISMENE. I know you're addicted to suffering. You go looking for trouble, then wail and moan when you find it. Well, I've had enough. The war is over, and I'm going to be happy.

(*ISMENE turns on the music again. Loud. She moves to the beat until ANTIGONE switches it off.*)

ANTIGONE. Saying you've had enough doesn't change what's happening out there. I saw.

I saw with my own eyes. I can't un-see what I saw. I can't un-know—

ISMENE. (*Realizing something really has happened to ANTIGONE:*) What is it you saw, sweetheart?

ANTIGONE. Our brothers.

ISMENE. Our brothers? Where?

ANTIGONE. I saw our brothers, dead in the street. Their arms and legs were all tangled together, like when they were little and they used to wrestle. Except the blood is real, and they don't get up.

I hid behind a gate. Creon's men came and pried apart the bodies. They poured water over Eteocles' wounds, and washed away the dust and blood. They laid him in a cart, and took him away to be buried with honor.

ISMENE. And Polyneices?

ANTIGONE. Lies where he fell, like trash in the street.

ISMENE. They'll come back for him, sweetheart. You wait and see.

ANTIGONE. No, they won't. No, they won't. No one may bury him, no one may touch him. It's against the law.

ISMENE. What are you talking about?

ANTIGONE. Creon has forbidden it.

Poor body, poor brother. Holes in his chest, Ismene, and the birds are so hungry. After the soldiers left, I threw stones at the buzzards, but they wouldn't leave. On my way home, I passed starving dogs, rooting for food. They'll find him soon—

ISMENE. Quiet, love, sshh... You're not thinking right. You misunderstood. They're coming back for Polyneices. When dawn comes, we'll go out together and then you'll see, it was all a mistake.

ANTIGONE. When dawn comes, Creon will be here to tell the whole city—to tell you, Ismene, and me—that anyone who touches the dead man will die.

So, Ismene, that's the way it is. Now, what are you going to do about it?

ISMENE. If everything you say is true, there's nothing I can do.

ANTIGONE. You can help me in my work.

ISMENE. What work?

ANTIGONE. Help me bury our brother.

ISMENE. We can't bury him. You just told me it's against the law.

ANTIGONE. Creon's law. It's nothing.

ISMENE. (*Fiercely:*) It's not nothing. The law's not nothing. You can die for it. That's not nothing.

ANTIGONE. Ismene, our brother is rotting in the street.

ISMENE. Slow down, little one. Stop and think—

ANTIGONE. What's wrong with you? I hear the birds screaming, and the dogs—

ISMENE. You need to rest.

ANTIGONE. No—

ISMENE. Rest for a minute, sweetheart. Just one minute.

ANTIGONE. (*Despite herself, beginning to yield:*) I'm so tired.

ISMENE. I know. You're so tired.

ANTIGONE. For a minute I'll rest. But just for a minute.

ISMENE. Just for a minute. We'll both rest.

(ISMENE holds ANTIGONE in her arms.)

It's been so long since I slept. I mean, really slept.

ANTIGONE. How long?

ISMENE. Long time. Before the war.

ANTIGONE. Before the war. When Mama was alive, and Daddy could see...

ISMENE. Yes.

ANTIGONE. I slept then, too. I slept and slept.

ISMENE. Curl up close, like on Mama's lap. Such soft hair. Such a little package.

ANTIGONE. Mmm. Nice. Tell me a story.

ISMENE. What kind of story?

ANTIGONE. You know. How things used to be. Before.

ISMENE. Before. Once upon a time...

ANTIGONE. Tell me something I never knew.

ISMENE. *(After a moment:)* Mama used to paint my toenails, the palest shade of pink. Then she'd put her face down close to my feet and her hair would tickle my ankles and she'd blow little warm storms of breath on my toes to dry them. We'd put our feet together, side by side, and mine were so small.

ANTIGONE. Where am I in the story?

ISMENE. After you were born, she'd hold you up so your tiny feet dangled next to mine, and then I knew how big I really was. I blew my breath on your toes then, and you pulled at my hair, and laughed. You never knew that before.

ANTIGONE. No, I never knew that before.

ISMENE. Now sleep.

(The sisters sleep. ANTIGONE's eyes fly open. She sees the ghost of Polyneices. He is moving away from her.)

ANTIGONE. *(Awake and on her feet:)* Polyneices!

ISMENE. *(Trying desperately to stay asleep:)* Go back to sleep, baby. Please.

ANTIGONE. My head's exploding. I'm on fire.

(ANTIGONE shakes and prods ISMENE to wake her.)

Ismene, do you believe in ghosts?

ISMENE. *(Still refusing to yield her moment of rest:)* Ghosts are just bad dreams.

ANTIGONE. I can't sleep anymore, but I'm dreaming all the time. The second my eyes close, boom! the dreams start. Sometimes the dreams start while my eyes are closing, and then, for a flash of a second, I'm living in two worlds at once.

ISMENE. You live in the same world as everyone else.

ANTIGONE. I'm going to bury Polyneices.

ISMENE. *(Fully awake and engaged now:)* No.

ANTIGONE. Watch me.

ISMENE. You can't. Look at yourself. You're not strong enough.

ANTIGONE. So I'll do as much as I can, and when I can't do anymore, I'll stop.

ISMENE. Why start something when you know you can't finish? It's just looking for trouble.

ANTIGONE. Trouble doesn't scare me.

ISMENE. You're not the only sister who's lost a brother, you know.

ANTIGONE. But this one is *my* brother.

ISMENE. And mine. All your dead are my dead too.

ANTIGONE. Then how can you just leave him there?

ISMENE. Because he's dead and we're alive.

(She takes ANTIGONE's hand and blows her breath onto it.)

Feel that? Breath. Life. We survived. You and me, Antigone and Ismene. We're alive. We can start again—

ANTIGONE. Oh, yes, we'll start again, we'll work, we'll find lovers, we'll be happy—

ISMENE. It could happen...

ANTIGONE. You know, Ismene, if you come crawling to me now on your hands and knees, *begging* to help, I'll say, "No."

ISMENE. Antigone—

ANTIGONE. No. You don't get it. You can't. For you there's nothing but what you can taste and touch and smell. But there are other worlds than this one, and those worlds have their own laws. I'm going to bury my brother.