**OEDIPUS AND THE SPHINX**

**THESPIAN THREE:**

Once, when the world was young, the city of Thebes was cursed. A terrible beast had made its home on the stony road that led to its gates. The Sphinx.

*The SPHINX, rather like a huge winged cat, enters and sits on a perch. SHE has a purring quality to her voice.*

**SPHINX:**

Mmm…I don’t think of myself as a curse. I just like to sit here and riddle. A game. What’s the harm in a game?

**THESPIAN THREE:**

Every traveler who wished entrance to Thebes had to play her game.

*A HEROIC TRAVELER enters.*

**SPHINX:**

Mmm…And what do you want, my meaty little wanderer?

**HEROIC TRAVELER:**

I’ll solve your riddle, monster.

**SPHINX:**

Really? Do tell.

**HEROIC TRAVELER:**

Riddle away.

**SPHINX:**

What creature has four legs in the morning, two in the afternoon, and three in the evening?

*A beat.*

**HEROIC TRAVELER:**

Uh….

**SPHINX:**

Now just keep this fact in mind, snack pack. If you get it wrong, I get dinner. As in, you.

**HEROIC TRAVELER:**

I…um…..three legs….

**SPHINX:**

In the evening.

**HEROIC TRAVELER:**

And four…

**SPHINX:**

In the morning, my little pancake. No pressure.

**HEROIC TRAVELER:**

I don’t know…A…a….an elephant!

**SPHINX:**

Mmm….Wrong! Thanks for playing!

*The SPHINX devours the HEROIC TRAVELER. Grotesque, prolonged, comic crunching sounds. Perhaps limbs fly in bloody parabolas. The SPHINX gives a satisfied burp and licks her paws.*

**THESPIAN THREE:**

And so it went on.

**SPHINX:**

Mmm….Crunchy skulls with that creamy center.

**THESPIAN THREE:**

For years.

**SPHINX:**

Fingers! I like the fingers best.

**THESPIAN THREE:**

Soon no one would go within ten miles of the City of the Sphinx. The gnawed bones at her feet grew and grew. Until one day…

*OEDIPUS, a taciturn man, enters. He’s had a rough day***.**

**SPHINX:**

Oh ho! Hello, dinner.

**OEDIPUS:**

Hey.

**SPHINX:**

Come to play? I haven’t seen a traveler in days.

**OEDIPUS:**

Maybe it’s the bones.

**SPHINX:**

What do you mean?

**OEDIPUS**:

Most people don’t like to loiter around bloody bone piles.

**SPHINX: (***laughing)*

You have a point there Mr.……I didn’t catch that name.

**OEDIPUS:**

Oedipus.

**SPHINX:**

Nice name. Catchy. Now I assume you want into the city, so you’ll need to play my game.

**OEDIPUS:**

I’m tired. It’s been a long day. Let me pass.

**SPHINX:**

Not till you answer my riddles.

**OEDIPUS:**

Huh. I suppose.

**SPHINX: (** *mocking)*

“Suppose”. “I suppose”. I don’t suppose you could do a little begging. I like it when they beg. It adds a special tang to that first bite.

**THESPIAN THREE:**

Now what the Sphinx didn’t know was that Oedipus was possessed of a quick wit, a keen mind, a sharp imagination…

**OEDIPUS: (** *to**THESPIAN THREE***)**

I’m tired.

*To the SPHINX.*

Let’s get this over with.

**SPHINX:**

You’re taking the fun out of this! Mmm….What has four legs in the morning, two in the afternoon, and three in the evening.

**OEDIPUS:**

Hmm….

**SPHINX:**

Feel free to think it over. Build up that “scared” flavor.

**OEDIPUS:**

Got it.

**SPHINX:**

What? Got what?

**OEDIPUS:**

The answer. It’s simple.

**SPHINX:** *(laughing)*

Look at the bones! It’s not that simple.

**OEDIPUS:**

Really, it is.

**SPHINX:**

What then, my dainty? Pray, inform us.

**OEDIPUS:**

The answer is man. He crawls on four legs as a baby, two legs as an adult, and three when he’s old---a cane being the third leg.

**SPHINX:**

You….how could…no….nobody…ahhhhh!

**THESPIAN THREE:**

And the Sphinx was so angry, so distraught that her riddle has answered that she crumbled away into rubble.

*With a shriek the SPHINX crumbles. THESPIAN TWO and THREE exit.. A beat.*

**THESPIAN ONE:**

She didn’t take disappointment well.