The Story of Oedipus

There are many versions of this tragedy, dating from the 5th century BC. This one is ©Jason Buckley 2010, www.thephilosophyman.com
The story is set in Ancient Greece
Laius & Jocasta were the King and Queen of Thebes
Laius & Jocasta, Thebes

They had a son, which would normally be a time for great rejoicing.
Laius & Jocasta, Thebes

A son!

...but the king had visited the Oracle, a priestess who made a terrible prophecy.
Laius & Jocasta, Thebes

A son!

The prophecy of the Oracle

“The boy will grow up to kill his father and marry his mother!”
Laius & Jocasta, Thebes

Oracle

A son!

So the king had a metal pin hammered through the feet of his own child.

“He will kill his father and marry his mother.”
Laius & Jocasta, Thebes

Oracle

He will kill his father and marry his mother.

A son!

Then he gave the boy to a shepherd.

A metal pin through his feet

He told the shepherd to take him up into the mountains and leave him to die.
Laius & Jocasta, Thebes

A son!

Oracle

He will kill his father and marry his mother.

A metal pin through his feet

But the shepherd took pity on the boy. He gave him to another shepherd, from Corinth on the other side of the mountains.
Laius & Jocasta, Thebes

Oracle

He will kill his father and marry his mother.

A son!

Who gave him to the King of Corinth, who was childless.

A metal pin through his feet
The king named the boy “Oedipus” which means “club foot”.

He raised him as his own son, the Prince of Corinth.
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He raised him as his own son, the Prince of Corinth.

Back in Thebes, King Laius’, the natural father of Oedipus, felt sure that he had escaped the prophecy...
Years later, when Oedipus is a young man, a drunk at a party tells him he is not the king’s son.

So he goes to the oracle to ask if this is true.

Instead of answering his question, the oracle tells him the prophecy.

“You will kill your father and marry your mother!”
Oedipus hears the prophecy

Thinking the King of Corinth is his father, to escape his fate, he flees TO THEBES!
Oedipus hears the prophecy

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At a place where three roads meet, he argues with and kills a man...
Oedipus hears the prophecy

Thinking the King of Corinth is his father, to escape his fate, he flees TO THEBES!

Then he encounters the sphinx, a monster who eats all travellers that cannot solve her riddle.

“What goes on four legs in the morning, two legs in the afternoon, and three legs in the evening?”

At a place where three roads meet, he argues with and kills a man...
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At a place where three roads meet, he argues with and kills a man...

He solves the riddle of the sphinx, she throws herself off a cliff and Thebes is freed from her curse.
Oedipus hears the prophecy. Thinking the King of Corinth is his father, to escape his fate, he flees TO THEBES! At a place where three roads meet, he argues with and kills a man.

In gratitude, QUEEN JOCASTA marries him and he becomes king. They have four children.
Years later, plague strikes Thebes. In his pride, Oedipus promises to save Thebes again and stop the plague.
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The oracle tells Oedipus Laius’ killer must be found and punished.
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Jocasta tells Oedipus that Laius was killed at a place where three roads meet.

Oedipus starts to suspect himself. He sends for an old man who was with Laius when he was killed. Then...
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But the messenger who brings the news is the very same shepherd who brought Oedipus down from the hills.

And the old man who arrives to tell the story of King Laius' death is the very same shepherd who took Oedipus there.
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On finding her body, Oedipus seizes a brooch from her dress, and gouges out his eyes.
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THE END