

EURIPIDES'
“HELEN”

412BCE
(Prize: Unknown)

Translated by
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Dramatis Personae

Helen

(Daughter of Zeus and Leda, wife of Menelaos)

Teukros

(aka Teucer. A Greek warrior who fought at Troy)

Menelaos

(Helen's husband)

Old Woman

(Servant to Theoclymenos)

Theonoe

(Sister of Theoclymenos)

Theoclymenos

(King of Egypt)

Castor and Polydeuces

(The Dioscourai. Helen's twin brothers.)

Messenger

(of Theoclymenos)

Second Servant

(To Menelaos)

Third Servant

(To Theonoe)

Chorus

(Of captive Greek women)

Other male Servants to the Palace

Pharos, Egypt. In the distance may be seen the waters of the Nile.

The palace of Theoclymenos.

To the side (SL) the tomb of Proteas, father of Theoclymenos, in front of which is a makeshift bed of straw. Helen is kneeling upon it as a suppliant.

She rises slowly and moves to centre stage to address the audience.

Helen:

This is where the beautiful virgin streams of the Nile flow and nourish Egypt's fields. Their waters are not delivered by Zeus as rain but by the melting white snow. Proteas ruled this land while he was alive. He had his throne on the isle of Pharos. He took as wife one of the sea nymphs, Psamathe, after she had left Aeacus' bed. Psamathe then bore in his palace two children, a boy whom they called Theoclymenos because he revered the gods all his life and a beautiful girl, whom they called Eido.

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Eido was an absolute delight for her mother while she was a baby but then, when she grew up and was old enough for marriage, they called her Theonoe, a name that reveals that she had a mind that was divinely inspired. She could read all the divine signs, both present and future, a skill handed down to

her by her grandfather, Nereas.

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As for me:

My land is the famous Sparta and my father is Tyndareas, though there's a story that says that one day Zeus disguised himself as a swan that was supposed to be fleeing the clutches of an eagle and, if one is to believe that story, he flew to my mother's bed and, by deception, he made love to her. Leda is my mother's name and mine is Helen.

And now let me tell you the dreadful pains I have suffered.

Three goddesses went to a valley in Ida, to a man called Alexandros -Paris Alexandros- for him to judge which of them was the most beautiful. These three were, Hera, Aphrodite and Zeus' virgin daughter, Pallas Athena.

Aphrodite bribed Alexandros with marriage. A marriage to the most beautiful mortal. Me. Though, I don't know if such ill fortune can be called "beautiful." And so, Aphrodite won and Alexandros, Paris by another name, left his herds in Ida and went down to Sparta to take me as his promised wife.

30

Hera, however, was very angry that she had lost that contest, that she had not defeated the other two goddesses and so she made our marriage void by handing over to Paris, king Priam's son, not me in person but a breathing ghost that looked exactly like me, a phantom she shaped out of ether.

So, Paris thought he had me in his arms but all he had was his imagination.

And then Zeus added to all these problems something of his own making.

40

A plan to lessen Earth's burden of too many mortals and, at the same time, to make known to everyone, once and for all who was the bravest man in the whole of Greece.

So, he concocted a war between the Greeks and the poor Trojans!

My name and not my body was placed as a trophy between the spear of the Greeks and the bravery of the Trojans.

Zeus had not abandoned me and so, Hermes took me and hid me within the folds of a cloud in the sky and brought me here, in the house of Proteas. Zeus had me brought to this house because he considered Proteas to be a man of honour and so my husband's bed would remain undefiled.

But, here I am, safe and sound whereas my poor husband, Menelaos has gathered an army and went off to the high towers of Troy to hunt for me and take me back to Sparta.

51

I am the cause for the many deaths of men around the streams of the river Skamander and though I have suffered so much, men curse me, thinking that I have betrayed my husband and it was I who had brought this dreadful war upon Greece.

Well then, why am I still alive?

Once Hermes told me that I will eventually live with my husband again, in the fair plains of Sparta and he will learn that the reason I had gone to Troy was so that I would not be forced to spread a bed of love for another man.

60

Of that, I was safe while Proteas was still alive, while he could still see the light of the sun. Safe from another marriage. However, now that he is buried in the darkness below the earth, his son is pursuing me, trying to catch me and make me his wife.

But I love my first husband and wish to honour him, so I threw myself at this tomb, Proteas' tomb, as a suppliant, praying that the old king will keep me pure for Menelaos.

My name might be disgraced in Greece but my body shall keep its honour here!

Enter Teukros. He carries a bow and arrows. He admires the palace before he speaks.

Teukros:

Who rules over these fortified halls? Equal in grandeur to those of Plutos, the god of wealth, himself!

Such tall towers, such a grand courtyard!

Suddenly notices Helen and is appalled.

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Great gods! What do I see here? This is the murderous form of a most hateful woman, a woman who has ruined me and who has ruined all the Greeks!

Ah! The gods themselves should hate you, woman, for looking so much like Helen!

If I wasn't a foreigner to these parts, I would have shot you dead with one of these sharp arrows for resembling Zeus' own daughter so much!

Helen:

Whoever you are, poor man, why are you so appalled by what you see?

Why loathe me for the things done to you by that woman?

80

Teukros:

My mistake, lady. Please forgive me for what I said. I was too much in the grips of anger. The whole of Greece hates Helen, the daughter of Zeus!

Helen:

Tell me then, who are you and what has brought you here, to this land?

Teukros:

Lady, I am one of the poor, unfortunate Greeks...

Helen:

Oh, well then, it's no wonder that you hate Helen. But what is your name and what is your country? Whose son shall I call you?

Teukros:

My name is Teukros and I am Telamon's son. Brought up in the land of Salamis.

Helen:

So why turn to this land of the Nile?

90

Teukros:

I have been exiled from my own land.

Helen:

How dreadful. Who exiled you?

Teukros:

The closest relative a man could have: my own father!

Helen:

Such sadness in this story. Why has he done this?

Teukros:

I was destroyed by my brother's death, the death of Ajax at Troy.

Helen:

But how so? He didn't die by your own sword, did he?

Teukros:

No, he died by falling onto his own sword.

Helen:

But was he mad? Surely no sane man falls onto his own sword.

Teukros:

Do you know of a man called Achilles? Peleus' son?

Helen:

Yes, I do.

They say he was one of Helen's suitors.

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Teukros:

When he died his mates fought over his armour.

Helen:

And how did this cause Ajax's death?

Teukros:

He killed himself because another man got Achilles' armour.

Helen:

And so, Ajax's death is causing you this grief?

Teukros:

Yes, lady, because I should have died with him.

Helen:

So, friend, were you one of those who went to that famous city, Troy?

Teukros:

Yes, I helped bring it down but I have also come to grief, myself.

Helen:

Destroyed already? Burnt to the ground, you say?

Teukros:

Not a trace of its walls left.

Helen:

Oh, poor Helen!

For your sake all the Trojans died!

110

Teukros:

And the Greeks! They, too have suffered enormously!

Helen:

How long ago did Troy fall?

Teukros:

Some seven seasons of seed and harvest.

Helen:

And how long were you in Troy before her fall?

Teukros:

Many moons. Ten full years of them!

Helen:

But did you capture that Spartan woman, Helen?

Teukros:

Yes. Menelaos took her. Grabbed her by the hair and took her away.

Helen:

Did you see this happen to the poor woman, yourself or did you just hear about it?

Teukros:

I saw her with my own eyes, just I see you now.

Helen:

But, could you have all been under some divine spell at the time?

120

Teukros:

Enough about her. Change the subject now!

Helen:

So you are absolutely certain of what you saw?

Teukros:

I have eyes and I have a mind. Both saw her!

Helen:

So, is Menelaos back home with her now?

Teukros:

No. He's not in Argos, nor on the banks of Eurotas.

Helen:

What you say is bad news for them.

Teukros:

They say that they have both vanished!

Helen:

But didn't all the Greeks sail off for home together?

Teukros:

Yes but a storm scattered them all into different directions.

Helen:

Where were they when the storm hit them?

130

Teukros:

They were sailing through the middle of the Aegean sea.

Helen:

Has no one seen Menelaos landing anywhere?

Teukros:

No one. In Greece they say he's dead.

Helen:

Oh, no! I am finished! Is Thestias' daughter alive?

Teukros:

You mean Leda? No. She's dead.

Helen:

Oh, no! Don't tell me Helen's shameful fame has claimed the life of this Princess, as well?

Teukros:

Yes, so they say. She has put a noose about her noble neck.

Helen:

And what of Tyndareus' sons? Are they still alive?

Teukros:

There are two stories being told about them. That they are dead and that they are not.

Helen:

But which one is the more credible? What miserable news you bring me!

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Teukros:

The more credible story is the one that says they've been turned into gods and are now stars in the heavens.

Helen:

That is happy news but what is the other story?

Teukros:

That story says that because of their sister's shame, they've killed themselves.

But no more stories! I've no wish to heap one pain upon another.

The reason I came here, to these royal halls is so as to see the famous Theonoe, who reveals the will of the gods.

Make this possible for me so that I may obtain an oracle which will show me how to steer my ship safely to the shores of the island of Cyprus. Apollo prophesied that I must go there to make my new home. Call that island Salamis, in honour of my far-off fatherland.

151

Helen:

The path you seek will be revealed to you by its journey, stranger but you must leave this land quickly now, before Proteus' son, King Theoclymenos, returns and sees you. He is away right now, hunting wild beasts with his trusty hounds and he kills every stranger from Greece he comes across. Don't ask me why. I won't tell you and even if I did it would not help you.

Teukros:

Kind words, from you, lady and may the gods reward you well for them.

You look very like Helen in form, dear lady but you are certainly far different to her in heart. May she die a painful death and never reach her home by the streams of Eurotas!

Good fortune be with you always, lady!

Exit Teukros

164

Helen:

Ah! Such misery! With what sad song, with what groans of despair can I express this? What Muse shall I beg to help me sing it? What tears of grief must I shed?

Ah! Come, then, you winged virgins, daughters of the black Earth!

Come, you Sirens! Bring here your Libyan lyre, your shepherd's flute and help me with my mournful song. Give harmony to my dirge. Sing grief to match my own grief, sing groans to match my own groans, sounds that may reach Persephone's gloomy chambers of the night.

Help me sing the pitiful strains of my tearful lament. A lament bereft of joy for the joyless dead!

Enter the Chorus of female Greek slaves

179

Chorus:

I was spreading my purple robes upon the reeds and upon the dense grasses...

Chorus:

...near the deep-blue waters of the spring, to dry under the golden rays of the sun...

Chorus:

...when, suddenly I heard the pitiful sound of my lady's voice.

Chorus:

A song for tears!

Chorus:

A voice alone!

Chorus:

No lyre kept it company!

Chorus:

A sound of despair, of pain, of anguish.

Chorus:

A wail that some nymph might let out from deep inside the forest.

Chorus:

A cry of loss echoing through the rocky lovers' caves of Pan!

191

Helen:

Dear, dear friends!

Young women of Greece, spoils of some barbarian sailors!

Listen: A young Greek sailor has arrived, baring a message from Troy, a message that has brought yet more tears to my eyes. Troy has fallen to the Greeks, my friends!

Yes, thanks to me, thanks to my name, the name that is the spring of countless sorrows, murderous flames have taken the city! Yes me, my friends, me the murderer of many!

200

Shame has brought my mother, Leda, pains so unbearable that she tied a noose around her neck and hanged herself.

My husband is lost wandering on the ocean's waves and my brother Castor, along with his twin brother Polydeuces, pride and glory of their country have vanished!

Vanished from the plains where the horse roam and from the wrestling grounds by the reedy river Eurotas where the young men train their bodies.

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Chorus:

Ah, poor, poor woman!

Chorus:

How terrible your Fate, my lady!

Chorus:

How miserable your luck!

Chorus:

Destiny delivered you a life of misery my lady, when brilliant Zeus, with the snowy wings of a swan, flew down through the ether and came to your mother's bed!

Chorus:

What sorrow has not visited your life? What pain is there that have you not felt?

Chorus:

Your mother is dead, your beloved brothers, Zeus' twin sons, see no great fortune and your eyes cannot see your own dear land!

221

Chorus:

And – o, dear lady!- a rumour passes through all the cities of Greece that says that you sleep in the bed of a barbarian!

Chorus:

Your husband has perished in the deep ocean, Helen. He shall never again grace the halls of his ancestral Sparta, the home of the bronze goddess, Athena.

Helen:

Oh, gods!

Which Greek, which Trojan cut down the pine that drenched Troy with tears?

The tree from which Priam's son built his cursed ship and with barbarian oars sailed it to my palace.

There he came, wanting to take me and my murderous beauty to his bed. And with him came Aphrodite, the goddess of love, the goddess of treachery, the goddess who murdered countless sons of Greece and of Priam's Troy.

240

Ah, what misery I must endure!

But then, one day, Hera of the golden throne, Hera, Zeus' revered consort, sent Hermes, Maia's swift-footed son to me. I was gathering dew-fresh rose buds into the folds of my robe, at the time, to take as an offering to Athena of the Bronze House. Hermes snatched me and carried up through the heavens to bring me here, to this cursed land and made me the cause of the dreadful conflict between the sons of Greece and those of Troy.

So now my name is falsely slandered around the streams of the Trojan river Simois.

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Chorus:

I know, Helen, I know. Your pain is deep but it is best for you to cope with life's pains as gently as you can.

Helen:

Dear friends! Look at the Fate to which I am yoked: My mother has brought me to this world to be nothing more than a monstrous freak! No woman –neither Greek nor barbarian- has given birth to the egg of a white bird, yet, they say, that this is what my mother has done. Leda, they say, delivered me

inside the shell of a bird's egg. Zeus is my father.

260

And then, my life has become a horrible monstrous curiosity, thanks partly to Hera and partly to my beauty.

If only! If only I could scratch this beauty out, like painters do to their pictures and paint another picture of me, this time an ugly one! If only! If only the Greeks forgot the miserable Fate that pursues me now and, if only, they remembered only the good deeds I've done, instead of the shameful deeds that they remember now!

When a man has a plan in mind but is hindered by the will of the gods, well, that's a hard thing to cope with but it can be endured but I – I have fallen victim to many misfortunes.

270

To begin with, my good reputation has been destroyed though I have done nothing wrong, and there's nothing worse than to be burdened by the shame which one has not earned.

Then, the gods of my land have exiled me to this land of barbarians. I am here, away from my own people and though I am the child of free-born, here I am a slave! Yes, a slave, because in the lands of barbarians, everyone is a slave. Everyone that is, except one man, their ruler!

There was only one anchor to hold me steady in the tempest of my misfortunes: the hope that my husband, Menelaos, would one day come to rescue me from all this. But this hope too, has vanished. But Menelaos is dead. Perished in the ocean.

280

And so is my mother. Dead. Murdered, they say, by me. And they are wrong but still, I must bear that condemnation.

As for the pride and joy of my home, my darling daughter, Hermione, she is an ageing, unmarried virgin.

Dead too are my two brothers, the Dioscuri, who people say are the sons of Zeus.

So much misery! I am breathing but I am dead.

And still one more piece of misery: If I ever manage to return to my land, to Sparta, the gates of my home will be locked against me because people will think that I, Helen, wife of Menelaos, has died at Troy with her husband.

290

If Menelaos were alive, he'd be able to recognise me by some secret signs that only we two know. But he is dead!

He could not possibly have escaped death.

Why go on living then? What does Fate have in store for me now?

Should I try and escape my pains by marrying a barbarian? Always sit by his side at his rich tables?

Never! When a woman marries a man she hates, she will also get to hate her own self. Never! It would be better for her to choose death! Why not? Why would it be a bad thing for me to die?

But how to die nobly?

300

To die by the rope would be unseemly. Even the slaves consider it shameful.

The sword would bring about a more glorious, a more noble death. Body and breath part company quickly.

Ah! Such is the depth of misery into which my beauty has brought me. While beauty makes other women happy, mine is the very implement of my destruction!

Chorus:

Helen, no matter who this stranger is, don't believe everything that he has told you!

Helen:

His message was quite clear: My husband is dead.

Chorus:

Many messages, clearly said are lies.

310

Helen:

And yet, the opposite is also true.

Chorus:

You rush for the bad news, Helen, instead of the good! Destruction rather than joy!

Helen:

Fear grips me, my friends. Terror makes me rush towards destruction.

Chorus:

Helen, do you have any friends inside the palace?

Helen:

Everyone in the palace is my friend. Everyone, that is except the man who hunts me for his wife.

Chorus:

Well then, this is what I think you should do Helen. Leave your seat here at this tomb...

Helen:

What do you mean? What are you telling me?

Chorus:

Go inside and look for Theonoe, the Nereid's daughter. She knows everything.

320

Chorus:

Ask her about your husband. Ask her if he's alive or dead. Then, when you know the truth about him and about your fate you can be sad or happy.

Chorus:

What's the point of feeling miserable before you know the truth of the matter?

Chorus:

Listen to me, Helen. Leave this tomb and go ask Theonoe. She'll tell you everything!

Chorus:

Why bother listening to anyone else when you have her in the house?

Chorus:

I want to come in with you and listen to the girl's oracles. We women must help one another.

330

Helen:

Dear friends, I agree. Come. Come, with me! Let's all go inside so that you too can hear what trials are in store for me.

Chorus:

We're coming, Helen!

Helen:

Ah, poor soul! What words of pain will I hear now? How miserable is my day?

Chorus:

Why prophesy grief, Helen?

Chorus:

Why cry before you have to?

340

Helen:

What has happened to my poor husband? Is he still alive? Does he still see the sun's chariot, the passage of the stars? Or will he suffer the eternal fate of the dead beneath the dark earth?

Chorus:

Look more brightly to the future, Helen, whatever it might be.

348

Helen:

Ah, Eurotas! To you, river, whose moist banks are green with the lush reeds, to you I swear and you I ask if this rumour of my husband's death is true.

Chorus:

What?

Chorus:

What nonsense is this?

Helen:

And if it's true, Eurotas, if my husband is dead, then I shall place a deadly noose around my neck –

Chorus:

Ah!

Helen:

-Or I shall plunge into my flesh the cold steel of a bloody sword with force enough to kill me-

Chorus:

Ah!

Helen:

-To cut my throat and let the blood stream out, a sacrifice to the three goddesses, Aphrodite, Athena and Hera and to Paris himself, Priam's son, who long ago would sit by the caves near where his cattle grazed.

360

Chorus:

Let your misfortune turn away from you Helen and let it go elsewhere!

Helen:

Poor Troy! You have been ruined and you have suffered incurable suffering for a crime you have never committed. The gifts which the goddess Aphrodite has given me have caused the spilling of much blood, of many tears. My beauty has brought you one misery after another, one lot of tears after another.

Mothers have lost their sons and by the waters of the Phrygian river Scamander, the virgin sisters of the slain men have shorn their tresses in mourning.

370

And great shouts of grief were raised throughout Greece where the women beat hard at their heads with their hands and with their nails slashed open bloody gashes on their tender cheeks.

381

And you, Callisto, blessed maid from Arcadia!

A long time ago, you have entered Zeus' bed as a four-legged animal! How much better your fate was to that of my mother's! Because, with the shape of a shaggy beast—a lioness!—and a savage eye, you have shrugged off the unbearable weight of your pain!

And you, too, daughter of Merops, a Titan! You too, are blessed because of your beauty but my own has brought ruin upon Troy's Dardanian walls and death upon the Greeks!

Exit Helen and the chorus into the palace, leaving the stage empty.

Enter Menelaos alone, dishevelled and clad in torn clothes.

Menelaos:

O, grandfather Pelops!

You won a chariot race once, against Oenomaos, in Pisa. How I wish, grandfather, that on that day, on that fateful day when the gods had a feast and they had cooked you and offered your body as their meal, you had died. Died and never married and never had brought to life Atreus, my father!

Atreus then married Aerope and from that union sprung I, Menelaos and my brother Agamemnon.

How I wish you had died before this glorious pair of brothers was born!

390

A glorious pair, indeed, I say not by way of vain boasting but because I led the youth of Greece on a mighty expedition to Troy, not by forcing them but with their own consent.

I can call out the list of those who have perished and of those who have survived the labours on the seas and made their way home bearing the names of their comrades thought to have perished.

400

But I! I, the poor miserable soul, from the day we've captured Troy's tall towers, still I am tossed about in the gray waters of the sea! The more I want to get home the more the gods deprive me of this joy!

I have wandered into every deserted and inhospitable shore of Libya but the winds will not let me approach my own country. My sails are filled with winds that blow me back and away from there, from my own home.

And so, I am now hurled here, onto this land! Shipwrecked and bereft of almost all of my mates, who are lost at sea. My ship is now no more! A million smashed fragments floating about the ocean.

410

Of all its well crafted fittings though, by some unhopd for luck, only its keel was left for me to cling on to. I and Helen, my wife whom I have rescued from Troy.

I have no idea what this land is called and what sort of people live here. I felt too ashamed of my shabby clothes to mingle among them and to ask any questions about them or answer any about my own troubles.

The man who once knew good fortune finds it much more difficult than those who have never known such good fortune to accept misery.

420

My needs are urgent. I have neither food for my mouth nor clothes for my body.

Indicating his clothes

Look at them! It's easy to see what they are: the shredded remnants disgorged by a shipwreck!

The gorgeous clothes and jewels I once wore have been swallowed up by the ocean! I have hidden Helen, my wife, who has caused me all this misery, inside a cave and have forced the last of my surviving mates to watch her. I came here, on my own, looking for provisions for them.

430

Then I saw this enormous house with its huge walls all around it and these... look at these amazing gates! Obviously it belongs to some man of considerable prosperity! And so, I came here because,

well, obviously, it's the men who live in such houses who can give me something for my sailors. No point in going to the poor. The poor, even if they wanted to give us something, they couldn't.

Approaches the gates, bangs at it and shouts

Oi, there!

Can the gatekeeper come out? Come and listen to my needs and then tell the folks inside!

Old Woman: *From within*

Who's banging at this gate? Go away!

The gate opens and through it appears the old female servant.

Don't stand around the front gate of this house! You're bothering my master!

Now, either leave or die! You are a Greek and my master will have nothing to do with Greeks!

440

Menelaos:

That's fine, old lady. Your words make sense but do calm down a little. I'll do as you say.

Old Woman: *Pushes him away threateningly*

Stranger, I said go away! My job here is to see that no Greek comes near this house!

Menelaos:

All right, all right! Keep your hands to yourself, old woman! Stop pushing me!

Old Woman:

It's your fault. Do as you're told and you won't be pushed!

Menelaos:

Go tell your master please...

Old Woman:

If I do that, my guess is that you'll be sorry!

Menelaos:

Go tell your master that there's a foreigner here, shipwrecked and under the protection of the gods.

450

Old Woman:

There are other houses around. Go to one of them!

Menelaos:

Now you listen to me: I'm going in there!

Old Woman:

No, you listen to me! You are being a pain and you'll get yourself thrown out of here!

Menelaos:

Zeus! What of my glorious campaigns?

Old Woman:

Glorious? You're not glorious here! You and your armies must have been glorious at some other place, some other time!

Menelaos: *(In tears)*

Oh, Zeus! What undeserved disdain I must suffer!

Old Woman:

What's with all the tears, what's with all the grief?

Menelaos:

I'm grieving for my former glory!

Old Woman:

Well, then, go to those former friends of yours. Show them your tears!

Menelaos:

What is this land? To whom does this palace belong?

460

Old Woman:

The land is called Egypt and this is Proteas' palace.

Menelaos:

Egypt! What miserable fate drove me here?

Old Woman:

Why? What's wrong with Egypt? What do you have against the glittering waters of the Nile?

Menelaos:

I have nothing at all against the waters of the Nile. It is my own dreadful luck I'm lamenting.

Old Woman:

Ha! You're not the only one there. There are plenty of people lamenting their bad luck.

Menelaos: *(Indicating the temple)*

Is this man you call King, inside?

Old Woman:

No, that there is his burial shrine. His son, Theoclymenos, rules Egypt now.

Menelaos:

So, where's he, then? Is he inside or has he gone out?

Old Woman:

He's not inside. And he hates Greeks!

Menelaos:

He hates the Greeks? I am a Greek! Why does he hate the Greeks?

470

Old Woman:

Because in this house lives Helen, Zeus' daughter!

Menelaos:

What? What did you just say?

Old Woman:

Helen, Tyndareus' daughter. The one who used to live in Sparta a while back.

Menelaos:

What? But how did she get here? What is the meaning of this?

Old Woman:

She's here. Came here from Sparta.

Menelaos:

But when? Do you think someone has stolen her from the cave back there?

Old Woman:

Stranger, Helen came here before the Greeks have left for Troy.

But leave now! Get away from this house because, at the moment it's going through some turmoil.

Something has just happened in there.

This is not the right time for such things and if my master catches you, his gift of hospitality will be your death. Personally, I love the Greeks and the reason I've said all this terrible stuff against them is because I'm afraid of the master...

Exit the Old Woman

482

Menelaos:

Now what do I make of this? What can I say, here?

Of all the horrible troubles I have already suffered, here's another! A huge one, if indeed, the woman I brought with me from Troy, my wife and whom I've got hidden in a cave and guarded by my men... well, now I find out that some other woman with the same name lives in this house here!

(Indicating the old woman)

She said the woman inside is Zeus' daughter!

Zeus' daughter? Would there be, perhaps, another man around here, around Nile's banks, called Zeus?

490

No! There's only one Zeus and he lives up there, in the sky!

And Sparta. Where else would there be another Sparta? There's only the one where the clear waters of the Eurotas flow. Through the lovely reeds. Or Tyndareus. There's only one of them as well!

What other lands are there that can be called Sparta, or Troy?

Really, I have no idea!

Well, it's obvious then. There must be many women around the world with the same name. Many women and many cities. No need to wonder about that.

500

And those terrible thing the servant told me. They won't frighten me away. No mortal has such barbarous heart that he'll refuse me food, once he hears my name.

Troy's fate is known by the whole world. How it was I, Menelaos who set it ablaze.

I shall stay here and wait for the man who rules this palace.

I have two options to save my life: If he shows himself to be brutal, I shall run off and hide where my ship awaits me. If, however, he shows himself to be gentle and welcoming, I shall ask him to help me with my needs.

510

Of all the miserable pains I had to endure, this is the worst: To be a king yourself and to be begging for your food from other kings!

Still, I must bow to necessity. A wise man, not I, once said that there's no mightier force than dire necessity.

Menelaos moves to the side of the tomb and turns his back to the audience
Enter the Chorus. They don't notice Menelaos

Chorus:

I have heard the clear prophesy uttered by our young prophetess, in the palace.

Chorus:

She said that Menelaos has not yet passed through the shining darkness of death and down into the gloomy world below the soil. He is still blown about the world by the ocean's waves, unsettled yet in any familiar harbour.

520

Chorus:

He is still wandering about the oceans on his way from Troy, alone, miserable and tormented, his ship touching on every land except his own.

Enter Helen from the Palace. She is wearing a white robe.

She has yet to see Menelaos

Helen:

I have listened to the pleasant utterances of our omniscient Theone and once again, I have come to take my place by this tomb!

530

She has told me that my husband is still alive. The light of day is still shining upon him and now, after endless suffering over that ocean's waves, is wandering aimlessly and exhausted around our shores. She also said that as soon as his tormenting journey ends he will arrive here but she didn't say if he will make it here alive and I, I was so excited about the fact that he was still alive, I didn't ask her about that.

But she also said that he is already somewhere nearby, cast up, a shipwreck with a few of his mates.

540

Ah, Menelaos! When will you come?

How I have missed you, my husband

Menelaos slowly turns and Helen notices him

Ah! Who's this?

Is this one of the tricks that Proteas' impious son has woven for me?

I shall run behind the tomb for protection as fast as a mare on the race track, or one of Bacchus' followers. This man looks like a savage and he's after me!

She runs towards the tomb but Menelaos blocks her path.

Menelaos:

Hold on, there, woman!

Such a rush to get to the steps and to the tall columns of this tomb where the offerings are burning!

What for?

Ah!

The sight of you has taken my breath away!

The shock has made me speechless!

549

Helen: *To the chorus*

Women, help! He wants to do me harm! He has blocked my path to the tomb. He wants to catch me and deliver me to the king!

Menelaos:

I am neither an abductor nor a servant of evil men!

Helen: *Still trying to run away*

Your clothes! Your whole body is covered in ugly rags!

Menelaos:

Stop! Stop running around! Don't be afraid.

Helen: *Reaches one of the steps of the tomb*

I have stopped. Now that I can touch the tomb.

Menelaos:

Who are you? What woman's face do my eyes see?

Helen:

No! Who are YOU? I am puzzled by the same question.

Menelaos:

I... I have never seen a body that looks so similar... so similar...

560

Helen:

Oh, gods!

Yes! It is through divine will that we recognise our own...

Menelaos:

Are you a Greek or are you from these parts?

Helen:

I am a Greek.

But I want to know who you are as well. Tell me!

Menelaos:

You are identical in looks to Helen!

Helen:

And you! You are in looks, identical to Menelaos! What can I say to this?

Menelaos:

Ah! You have indeed recognised the man most steeped in misery!

Helen: *She tries to embrace him*

It's you! After so many years! After so many years you have returned to your wife's embrace!

Menelaos: *Withdraws repulsed*

Wife? Whose wife? Don't touch my clothes!

Helen:

You wife! The wife which my father, Tyndareus, has given you!

Menelaos:

Oh, goddess Hekate! Bearer of torches! Make your nightly ghosts clearer!

570

Helen:

No! I am no mere apparition of the night. I have not been sent by the Enodian goddess!

Menelaos:

But I am one man. I cannot be the husband of two wives!

Helen:

But to what other woman are you a husband?

Menelaos:

The woman I've got hidden back in the cave. The one I've brought back from Troy.

Helen:

You only have one wife: me!

Menelaos:

But – could it be that it's only my eyes that deceive me and not my mind?

Helen:

Look at me carefully! Do you not see your wife?

Menelaos:

It's true, your form is hers but reality tells me otherwise.

Helen:

Look at me closely. What more proof do you need. Who better than you could judge?

Menelaos:

Yes, I can't deny that you look exactly like her.

580

Helen:

There's no better instructor than your own eyes.

Menelaos:

But the thing still baffles me. I have another wife!

Helen:

That wife was an apparition, a ghost. I have never gone to Troy.

Menelaos:

An ghost? Who can create living ghosts?

Helen:

Ether. The air. It is from that which a god has created for you a wife.

Menelaos:

A god? Which god did this? All these things you're saying, they are unbelievable!

Helen:

Hera has created that ghost. She did it so that Paris would not take me to be his wife.

Menelaos:

So... how could you be in two places at the same time? Here as well as Troy?

Helen:

A name can be in many places but a body cannot.

Menelaos turns away dismissively

Menelaos:

Look, leave me alone. I have enough troubles as it is.

590

Helen:

Are you really going to abandon me here and go away to live with a ghost as a wife?

Menelaos:

My blessings to you, woman, because you look so alike Helen, but good bye!

Helen:

Ah! I am destroyed! Husband, I have just found you, only to lose you again!

Menelaos:

It is the endless troubles I've suffered at Troy that convince me, not your tale.

Helen:

Ah! What woman is more unfortunate than me?

The man I love the most is leaving me and I will never again return to my land in Greece!

Enter a Messenger

Messenger:

Ah, Menelaos! Finally, I have found you! I've been looking for you all over this land of barbarians.

Your friends have sent me to find you, those you've left behind at the cave.

600

Menelaos:

Why, what's wrong? Have these barbarians robbed you?

Messenger:

Something unbelievable! And no words can do justice to the reality of it!

Menelaos:

Speak! It must be important news if you had to rush so much!

Messenger:

The news is... the news is that all your troubles, all your suffering have come to nothing!

Menelaos:

You're grieving about old troubles. Tell me, what is this news?

Messenger:

Your wife, Menelaos! She has vanished! Rose up into the folds of thin air and disappeared!

She has left the sacred cave where we were guarding her and soared into the heavens. And as she was flying she said to us, "Oh, you poor Trojans and all of you, poor men of Greece! You died on the banks of the river Scamander for my sake, a trick devised by Hera.

610

You thought wrongly that Helen was abducted by Paris! But I, I have completed the task set for me and stayed with you while you needed me but now, now I am leaving for the sky, my paternal home. Poor Helen! Poor daughter of Tyndareus! How unjustly she was maligned!!

Messenger notices Helen and is shocked

Helen! Leda's daughter!

You are here!

But – I was just saying how you disappeared into the folds of the starry sky. I had no idea that your body had wings!

620

Ha! I won't let you play such tricks on us again!

What your husband and his friends have suffered back at Troy is more than enough!

Menelaos: *To the messenger*

So, what she said was true, then!

All her words make sense and are proven to be true!

Oh, joyful day! How I longed for the day that would bring you back into my arms!

Helen:

Oh, my darling Menelaos! I have waited for you for such a long time!

Ah, but now, now our day of joy has come!

To the Chorus

Ladies, I have found my husband! Here! Once again I open my arms to embrace him. Once again, after so many endless journeys that the bright sun has made!

630

Menelaos:

And I, I too, found you, Helen!

And I have so much to tell you! So much that I don't know where to start!

Helen:

Oh, such happiness!

A happiness that makes the hair on my head stand on end, the tears stream down from my eyes!

Husband! Let me throw my arms around you, to hold you tight, once more!

Menelaos:

Do so, my wife! Do so, sweet, sweet sight for my eyes, I will not object!

Here, I hold my wife! I hold you, Helen, you the daughter of Zeus and Leda, you, the woman whose brothers brought to me with blazing bridal torches, as a blessed bride, on snow-white steeds.

642

But then, the gods had taken you away from my home!

Ah, but now! Now the gods are taking us into a new life, a life much happier than the last! This new life unites us both, a long-lost husband to his wife!

Oh, gods! May this new fate be a blessing!

Helen:

Blessing, indeed! I make the same wish!

Menelaos:

When two are dear to each other, the one can't suffer alone!

Helen: *To the Chorus*

Dear friends!

I need no longer weep for the suffering I endured in the past. I feel its pain no more.

In my arms now I hold my husband. A husband for whom I have waited for many years to return from Troy.

652

Menelaos:

Your arms hold me and mine hold you, dear wife.

Now, now after so many days, I can see the tricks that the goddess has played on us.

My tears are tears of joy, a joy more immense than the grief I felt in the past.

Helen:

Words fail me! Who, among the mortals could have ever hoped for such joy? How could I have ever hoped to hold you so close to my heart?

Menelaos:

And I! How could I have ever hoped to hold you in my arms when all along I thought you had gone to Ida and the unfortunate towers of Troy!

But, by the gods, Helen, tell me how it was that they took you from my home!

660

Helen:

Ah! How bitter the journey you want me to take, husband! How bitter the words you want to hear!

Menelaos:

Speak, Helen! Speak, so that we can hear all that the gods can deliver to mortals!

Helen:

The tale appals me! The words for it are hideous!

Menelaos:

Speak them, Helen. Say them. It is good for one to hear of the pains that are no more.

Helen:

It was not oars nor wings of love that carried me to the unholy bed of the young barbarian.

Menelaos:

Which god then, or which Fate took you from your country?

670

Helen:

It was the son of Zeus, husband. Hermes himself, who brought me to the banks of the Nile.

Menelaos:

What a strange thing! Who ordered him to do that? How terrible!

Helen:

The tears have never stopped flowing from my eyes, husband. It was Zeus' wife who has destroyed me!

Menelaos:

Hera? But why would she want to torment us like this?

Helen:

Ah! Those torments! Those springs! The springs, the baths, where the goddesses went to make themselves more beautiful and ready for their beauty contests!

Menelaos:

And so... why did Hera go there and why was her judging the cause of your misery?

Helen:

So as to take me away from Paris.

680

Menelaos:

What? How? I don't understand.

Helen:

It was because Aphrodite had promised me to Paris.

Menelaos:

Oh, my poor wife! How terrible for you!

Helen:

Yes, terrible. That's why she brought me here, to Egypt.

Menelaos:

And then, you say, Hera gave Paris a ghost to take with him to Troy.

Helen:

And terrible, too, for my mother back home!

Menelaos:

What? What do you mean?

Helen:

She is no more! The shame of my foul marriage was far too much for her so she hanged herself.

Menelaos:

Oh, no! And our daughter, Hermione? Is she still alive?

Helen:

Bereft of husband and bereft of children, she grieves for my own failed marriage.

690

Menelaos:

Curse you Paris! You have destroyed every corner of my house! And the lives of countless Greeks, all with their bronze armour!

Helen:

And I? The gods have exiled me far from my home, from my city, from you!

I was cursed by all for leaving your home even though I did not.

Cursed with a terrible fate.

Chorus:

If Fate brings you joy in the future, it will erase all this when you look back at it.

Enter Messenger

700

Messenger:

Helen, Menelaos! Share with me your joy. I can see it but I cannot understand it.

Menelaos:

Yes, old friend. Come and join our talk.

Messenger: *Indicating Helen*

But, is she not the cause of all our suffering at Troy?

Menelaos:

No, old friend, it was not her. The gods have deceived us. It was an image, a dismal phantom, made of cloud.

Messenger:

What? You mean, we were fighting in vain? All that for a mere cloud?

Menelaos:

This was all the work of three goddesses, Hera being one of them.

Messenger:

So, this woman I see next to you, is this your real wife?

710

Menelaos:

You may believe my words: it is she. Helen, my wife.

Messenger:

Ah, my daughter! How variable is the nature of gods, ey? How inscrutable! They change the fate of mortals from good to bad, from one minute to the next! No man's fate is certain.

One man suffers during his life. Another does not until the end of it, when utter ruin befalls him.

Both, you and your husband had to endure great suffering; you, because people have spread evil stories about you and he, because of his eagerness to go to war; and, despite all of his efforts there, all of his efforts to bring you back, he achieved nothing. Yet, here he is now, with not even the slightest effort on his part, Fate has brought him the best of blessings.

720

And so, you have brought shame to no one. Not to your old father, nor to your twin brothers, the Dioscuroi. You have committed none of those awful deeds they accuse you of.

Ah! Now I'm reminded of the day of your wedding!

I remember the torches I held as I was running beside your wedding chariot. Drawn by a team of four horses. There you were, a beautiful bride, sitting on that chariot, next to this man, leaving your own, blessed home behind!

Ah! It's a bad slave who doesn't respect his master, who feels neither his master's sorrows nor his joys!

730

I might be born a slave and bear no free man's name, indeed, but I can claim the respect an honest slave deserves. If not my name, then my heart is free! Better that than to be the bearer of twin burdens: that of being a slave to others and a slave to dishonest heart.

Menelaos:

Come, old friend! I know full well what hardship you have suffered, fighting beside my shield.

Now that you know of our joy, go and inform the others we left behind at the cave. Tell them that you have found us and tell them of our newfound luck!

Tell them to wait at the beach and to be ready for the battles which I know will come our way.

740

Tell them that, if I manage to get this woman out of here, to be ready and waiting for us and to join us against the barbarians so that, together, we may all escape from this land.

Messenger:

My King, all this shall be done! But how full of lies, how worthless are the tricks of the prophets, my Lord! How useless are prophecies that emerge out of the flames of sacrificial offerings, or of the chirpings of birds! How stupid it is to believe that birds can help humans!

The seer Calchas uttered nothing as he saw our armies dying for the sake of a mere shadow! Nor did the Trojan seer, Helenus and so, Troy was destroyed for nothing!

750

Well, one might say that it was the will of the gods that these two should say nothing. So why then should we bother running off to them, to these seers? Sacrifices should be done so as to pray to the gods, to beg them for their blessings and we should forget about prophecies. They're traps, foolish inventions! What idle man ever becomes rich by reading the flames of a sacrifice?

Prophecy comes from a wise and prudent mind! These are the best prophets!

Chorus:

I agree with this old friend about seers and prophecies: When mortals have gods on their side, then they have the best seer they can get for their house.

760

Helen:

Well then! So far so good! But tell me, my poor, dear husband, tell me please -though it'll add nothing to the abundance of my joy- tell me how you got here from Troy. Tell me how you have managed to come all the way here, safe and sound. People always want to hear what troubles their friends have suffered.

Menelaos:

Ah, my dear! This one word of yours has asked so many questions!

What is the point of telling you, my dear, about the countless shipwrecks in the Aegean? Or why Nauplios lit the torches at Euboa, to trick us and wreck our fleet, as revenge for the wrongful execution of his son, Palamedes? Why would you need to know about all the places I visited -Crete, for example and all those cities in Libya, or the lookout spots of Perseus?

770

Telling you my tale in full might satisfy you, wife but it would give me pain to remember the torment I have experienced. That torment would return and, with its telling, we would be both suffering together.

Helen:

Your answer was far better than my question, husband. But put aside all things except this one: tell me how long have you been tossed about aimlessly in the seas?

Menelaos:

Seven years. For seven years I've done the rounds of the oceans. But don't forget the ten years we've spent in Troy!

Helen:

Oh! Such a long time, my husband! Such a long time; and yet you've escaped all that only so as to be slaughtered here!

Menelaos:

What? What do you mean? What are you trying to tell me, wife? This has ruined me!

780

Helen:

You must leave immediately, Menelaos! Leave this country now. Get yourself as far away as you can. The master of this house will kill you.

Menelaos:

But what have I done to deserve such treatment?

Helen:

You arrived here unexpectedly and you will hamper my wedding.

Menelaos:

Is this true? Is there someone who wants to marry my own wife?

Helen:

Yes! I have had to endure these insults of his, time and again!

Menelaos:

Is he some wealthy man, a citizen, or is he the King of this land?

Helen:

It is Theoclymenos, Proteas' son and Egypt's King.

Menelaos:

So, this is the meaning of the riddle that the gatekeeper had told me!

Helen:

Which was the barbarian door that you stood in front of?

790

Menelaos:

That one, there. They sent me off as if I were a beggar.

Helen:

Oh, no! You did not beg for food, did you? Oh, no! That's horrible!

Menelaos:

No, not begging, as such...

Helen:

Well, you know about my impending marriage, don't you?

Menelaos:

Yes but I don't know if you've managed to get out of it.

Helen:

Know this then: Our marital bed has not been violated.

Menelaos:

If that is true, then I'm certainly overjoyed. How can I be sure though?

Helen:

Look there, at the tomb. Do you see that awful place?

Menelaos:

I see a miserable bed, made of straw, my poor darling but what has that got to do with you?

Helen:

That's the bed I escaped to. As a suppliant.

800

Menelaos:

But why here? Is there no altar in this city? Or is this some barbarian custom?

Helen:

It saved my life. It worked just as well as an altar.

Menelaos:

Well then, in that case, I can just take you home now, can't I?

Helen:

Alas, my husband, it's not a home that's waiting for you but a sword!

Menelaos:

That would make me the most unfortunate of all mortals.

Helen:

That's why, you shouldn't feel ashamed by running away.

Menelaos:

And leave you behind? After destroying Troy for your sake?

Helen:

Better that, Menelaos, than being killed because I'm your wife.

Menelaos:

Such words are unworthy of a man and even more so of one who was victorious against Troy.

Helen:

If you are thinking of murdering the Theoclymenos, the king of Egypt, husband, forget it. That is something you will not be able to do!

810

Menelaos:

Why not? Cannot his flesh be pierced by an iron sword?

Helen:

That you will find out soon enough but the wise man does not take on impossible fetes.

Menelaos:

Well then, shall I just quietly stretch out my hands for him to tie up?

Helen:

You have arrived at a difficult predicament. Yet we must find some way out of it.

Menelaos:

Then if I am to die let it be that I die fighting.

Helen:

I see only one hope left for us. Only one thing will save us.

Menelaos:

Is it by bribery, spear or words?

Helen:

No. The way out of this is that the King does not find out that you are here.

Menelaos:

But who will tell him about me? He will not know me or anything about me.

Helen:

The king has an ally inside those halls, whose power is equal to that of the gods.

820

Menelaos:

You mean there is some voice hiding in some secret place in the palace?

Helen:

No, not a voice but his sister. Called Theonoe.

Menelaos:

The name seems to be associated to prophesy. What does she really do?

Helen:

She knows all. And she will tell her brother about you.

Menelaos:

Well then I'm dead. If I can't escape her finding out about me, I'm dead!

Helen:

Perhaps we might be able to persuade her not to tell her brother. Beg her not to do so.

Menelaos:

What do I need to do, wife? What sort of hope have you brought me to?

Helen:

You must ask her not to tell her brother that you are here.

Menelaos:

But even if we succeed in this, will we still be able to get out of Egypt?

Helen:

In secret, no but with her help, yes.

830

Menelaos:

Then that would be your job, Helen. A woman can deal better with a woman.

Helen:

Of course. You can be sure, husband, that I shall clasp her very knees in supplication!

Menelaos:

But, what if she will not be persuaded by words?

Helen:

Then it will be death for poor you and a forced marriage for poor me.

Menelaos:

So! You will betray me! That word of yours, “forced” is nothing but a pretext.

Helen:

No, Menelaos! I swear, husband! By your life...

Menelaos:

And what oath will you take, that you will die rather than marry another man?

Helen:

Yes! I shall die by the very same sword they will kill you with. I shall fall by your side!

Menelaos:

Swear then: Touch my right hand!

Helen: *She does so*

Here! I swear that your death will take from me the light of my life.

840

Menelaos:

Me, too. If I lose you, I will also lose the light of my life.

Helen:

How could we die nobly, though?

Menelaos:

On the tomb! I shall kill you first and then kill myself!

But before that, I shall fight an earnest fight to defend you. Let he who dares come at me! I will not turn to shame the glory I have gained at Troy, nor will I allow myself to be ridiculed by the crowd when I return to Greece. I, Menelaos, who has robbed Thetis of her son Achilles! I, Menelaos, who has seen the body of Telamon's son, Ajax, killed by his own hand! I, who has seen the son of Neleus, Nestor, deprived of his own son! Would I, then, not see my own death as being worthy of saving my wife?

850

Of course I would!

The gods, who are wise, will see that a soldier who has died bravely on the battlefield, is buried under soft soil whereas they will cast the coward upon the harshest ground.

Chorus:

Oh, Gods! Grant that the house of Tantalus is one day released from its misery and allowed to feel joy!

Helen: *We hear the noise of the gate's bolts pulled.*

Oh, no! Poor me! Me and my bad luck!

We are lost, Menelaos, we are lost! It is Theonoe coming out from the palace. The whole palace echoes with the noise made by the gate's bolts as they are drawn asunder.

860

Leave, husband, leave now!

But, then, what for? She already knows you're here. Present or absent the prophetess knows about your arrival. Oh, this is the end for me! And you, my husband, you have escaped death by the barbarians of Troy but now, once again you must try to escape the swords of barbarians!

Enter Theonoe with two attendants carrying lit torches

Theonoe: *To one of her servants*

Walk in front me and with the light of the torches and with the burning incense, do as the holy laws decree: Purify the air all around us, that I may receive the pure breath of the heavens untainted.

To the other servant

And, you, cleanse my path by waving the purifying flame of the torch over it, in case some unholy foot polluted it by walking upon it.

870

And when you have done as I have asked and paid the due respects to the gods, carry the hearth's flame back into the palace.

While the servants do as she asks, Theonoe turns to Helen

How are my prophecies coming along, Helen?

There's your husband, Menelaos, standing in front of you!

He has come! His ships and your ghost have disappeared. Lost!

To Menelaos

Poor man! How you have suffered! What troubles you have escaped to get here, yet you still don't know if you'll ever reach your home or be stuck here for ever!

This very day, all the gods will gather around Zeus and raise a battle for your sake.

880

Hera, Zeus' wife, who once was your enemy, is now your ally and wants you and your wife, Helen to return to Greece safely so that the whole of Greece will learn that Aphrodite's wedding gift to Paris Alexandros was not real.

However, Aphrodite, herself is preventing your return so that the truth will not see the light of day and that the world will not know that she bought her beauty prize with a phantom wedding for Helen!

890

So, now it is I who must decide. Should I please Aphrodite by telling my brother that you are here, which means you die, or should I please Hera by disobeying my brother who has ordered me to tell him if you ever get here and thus save you?

Now, who will go and inform my brother that Menelaos is here? I'm afraid I'll jeopardise my safety if I go and tell him myself.

Helen: *Falls to her knees before Theonoe in supplication.*

Dear, Virgin!

I fall before your knees and take on this posture as one who is in deepest supplication!

I beg you, dear Virgin, grant me my safety and the safety of this man. He is my husband whom I've only just seen only to see his life in danger.

I beg you, dear Virgin, do not inform your brother that my husband has come here, into the loving arms of his wife.

900

I beg you, dear Virgin, save us! Save these two lives before you!

Do not betray your divine gifts for your brother's sake! Do not betray for the sake of sinful and unjust tokens of gratitude!

The heavens abhor violence and they demand of mortals to obtain their wealth not by stealing but by just means. Stolen wealth, wealth obtained unjustly, must be treated with disdain.

The heavens are available to all mortals. So is the earth, where mortals can fill their houses with wealth earned not by stealth nor violence but by honest labour.

910

It was good timing that Hermes grabbed me and brought me here, to your father, to keep me safe until my husband would come to take me back. Timely true, but, for me, taken from my home was wrought with misery.

And my husband is here now but how could he take me home if he will be killed? How can one hand the living to the dead?

Think of what the heavens want and think, too, of what your father would want. Would either of them not return goods to their rightful owner? I daresay they would.

920

So it would not be right, then for you, dear Virgin, to respect your disrespectful brother, over and above your respectable father.

You are a prophetess, dear Virgin and a believer in the will of the gods. How could you corrupt your father's just wishes so as to please the unjust wishes of your brother. It would be unjust for one like you, who has full knowledge of the will of the gods, of things of the present and of things of the future and yet you don't know what things are just.

I am in agony, dear Virgin! Rescue me from this misery! Rescue me and add it to the list of your just deeds.

Every single man hates me! They all hate Helen because they believe the rumour, one that is spread throughout Greece that I have betrayed my husband to live in the golden chambers of the Trojan palace!

930

If I get back to Greece, however and set foot on Sparta's soil, people will come to me and ask me questions and when they will hear the true story, how their suffering was the work of the gods and how I have not deceived my loved ones, they will reinstate my good name and my virtue and then I will be able to marry off my poor daughter, Hermione, who, to this day, nobody wants to marry. I shall leave the bitter ways of a vagrant back here in Egypt and enjoy the wealth of my own home.

Had my husband got killed at Troy and his body burnt in the flames of a pyre I would have honoured him with my tears, a man who has died far away. But he's here now and he's alive! He has returned to me. Should I now lose him once more?

Dear Virgin, I beg you, say no to this thought. I beg you, dear Virgin, grant me this request.

940

Follow the ways of your father who was just because this is the greatest glory one may possess: to be born of a good father and to follow his ways.

Chorus:

Words that call for pity from someone who deserves it.

But I would also like to hear how Menelaos will word his plea for his life.

Menelaos:

I will neither bend my knees to you nor fill my eyes with tears; and though they say that it is fitting and proper for a noble soul to weep in time of disaster, for me, it would turn the glory I received at Troy into shame. Noble or not, I will choose bravery over tears.

950

But if you think it is the proper thing to do, to save a stranger who, quite justly, wants to take back his wife, then allow him to do that: let her go with the stranger and let him be saved at the same time. But if however, you think it's not the proper thing to do well then, for me, this will not be the first time that I've ever tasted misery whereas for you, you will be shown to be a nasty woman.

960

Everything that I am justly proud of, things that will most certainly touch your heart, I will tell your father, here, at his tomb.

He approaches the tomb and speaks to it

O, old man! Old man whose home is now this stony tomb!

Give me back my wife, the woman whom Zeus has brought here for you to keep safe.

Give her back to me! I know that you, since you are dead, can't do this yourself but it is in the power of this woman here, your daughter, Theonoe, and she will not deem it proper that her father, whom I now call through the grave, to have his once glorious name tarnished.

969

And you, Hades, Lord of those beneath the earth! You, too, I invoke. Come, help me now. For what I have to ask you, I have paid you already, in full! I have given you many, many dead; slain by my own sword for the sake of Helen. So, now, I ask you to either send all those men back to life or let me have my Helen back! Force this woman, here, Theonoe, to be worthy of her father's virtue. Force her to let me take my wife back.

He turns back to Theonoe

Now, if you are going to steal my wife from me then, Theonoe, you hear from me all those things that Helen has left out when she spoke.

Let me inform you that she and I bound ourselves to an oath. An oath which calls upon me first, to fight your brother to death. Let that be fully understood!

980

And if he refuses to meet me, face-to-face, sword-to-sword and decides, instead, to let us two suppliants to this tomb, to die of starvation, then let him know that I am resolved to first kill my wife and then plunge this double-edged sword into my heart, on top of this grave and covered it with my blood. There, upon this finely carved tombstone our two dead bodies will lie, the one beside the other, an endless grief to you and a stern accusation to your father.

Because no other man, not your brother nor anyone else will marry this woman. She will come with me, either back home or to the grave.

990

And why all this? Because I am not going to behave pitifully, like a crying woman but like a man of action.

Well, then, kill, if you so wish, you will not be killing a coward! But it would be best that you showed yourself to be just and do as I say: let me take my wife back!

Chorus:

Come now, dear Virgin! You must make a judgement upon all that you have heard. Judge so as to please everyone.

Theonoe:

I was born to be respectful to the gods and this, too is my wish.

And I have respect for myself, too and do not wish to besmirch my father's good reputation by obeying my brother's wishes, something which would also stain my own good name.

1000

My father, Nereus, has built a great temple of the goddess Justice, deep into the heart of my Nature.

And so, I will try to save Menelaos, since it is also Hera's wish and she is on your side. It is she who receives my vote and hope that Aphrodite will agree, even though Aphrodite plays no part in my life. I

will endeavour to remain a virgin always.

As for all those accusations you've made to my father, Menelaos, I too, am talking to this grave!

1010

I would, indeed be acting unjustly if I did not let you take back your wife because I know that if that man *indicating the tomb* were alive he would reunite you two. Both, the living and the dead make their payments for the things they've done here, on earth.

It is true, mind of the dead lives no more but their consciousness is immortal, since it is mingled with the immortal ether.

But let me bring my advice to its end. I will do as you have asked of me, Menelaos. I will stay silent and not take part in my brother's reckless whim.

1020

It will be for his own good, though he will not agree, of course, if I could have him turn to the ways of the gods, instead of working against their wishes.

Now, you two, find a way to leave this place and escape. I shall stand quietly stand out of your way.

But first, Helen, pray to the two goddesses. To Aphrodite, to let you get back to your country and to Hera not to change her mind about saving you and your husband.

Turning to the tomb

And you, my dear father! No one will ever say that you are disrespectful to the gods, if I have anything to do with it!

Exit Theonoe into the palace.

1030

Chorus:

The unjust never prosper. Hope is with those who behave justly.

Helen:

Husband, so far as the holy Virgin is concerned we are safe. Now you must tell me your plan for our escape.

Menelaos:

Well, listen, then Helen: You've been living in the palace for a long time now and you have shared many meals with the servants...

Helen:

Yes, so? Husband, you are making me think that you have a plan that will save us both.

1040

Menelaos:

Would you be able to convince one of those servants in charge of the chariots to let us have one?

Helen:

Yes, I could but what would be the point of us running off into a strange, foreign country that we are not well acquainted with?

Menelaos:

Yes, quite right. That would be impossible.

What if, though, what if I hid myself somewhere in the place and used this double edged sword of mine?

Helen:

His sister wouldn't tolerate that and she's know that you're thinking about it and so she'd tell her brother.

Menelaos:

Not even a boat! We don't even have a boat. The sea has taken mine.

Helen:

My husband, if you can believe that even a woman can give wise advice, then listen: Would you allow it to be known that you are dead, even though you are alive?

1051

Menelaos:

It is a bad omen, that one but if some good will come of it, then I have no objection to have people saying that I am dead when I am not.

Helen:

I will be among the mourners who will mourn you in the presence of this godless man. I shall cut my hair short and wail along with all the other women.

Menelaos:

How is that going to help us escape? It's rather an old trick, that one, Helen.

Helen:

I will ask this country's king that you be buried in an empty grave, since you are lost at sea.

1060

Menelaos:

All right, let us assume he agrees on the empty grave. How are we then going to make our escape without a ship?

Helen:

I shall ask him to give us a ship so that we may go and cast funereal adornments into the arms of the ocean.

Menelaos:

That would be a good idea, except, what if he asks you to do the burial ceremony on land? Your plan won't work then.

Helen:

I will tell him that it is not a Greek custom to bury someone who is lost at sea, in graves on land.

Menelaos:

That too sounds good. Well then, I'll be on that ship to help you with the casting of the adornments.

Helen:

Yes, you and all those sailors who have escaped the shipwreck. You should all be on that ship.

1071

Menelaos:

If I can get my hands on a ship, my men will all stand beside me with swords drawn.

Helen:

Well, you organise all that.

I just hope that the winds will be favourable enough to set the ship sailing swiftly!

Menelaos:

Yes, I shall do that. The gods will finally put an end to my troubles.

But how will you say you have learnt that I am dead?

Helen:

From you! You will tell him that you, alone escaped the shipwreck, when you were sailing back home with Atreus' son. You will say that you saw him die.

Menelaos:

These rags covering my body will testify to the shipwreck.

1081

Helen:

These rags have come in handy, though it wasn't such a handy thing for you when they became rags!

Perhaps this misfortune will turn to fortune.

Menelaos:

Should I come into the palace with you, or should I just wait out here, by the tomb?

Helen:

No, you stay here because your sword and this tomb will protect you if the King decides to attack you.

I will go inside and cut my hair short, change my white robe for a black one and with my nails, scratch my cheeks until they bleed.

1090

The battle will be long and I see two possible consequences: Either they will catch me in my efforts and kill me or I will have saved you and we have returned home.

Praying

Oh, reverend Hera, Zeus' partner in bed!

Bring relief to these two tortured souls! With our hands raised up towards the heavens where you live, in the majesty of the stars, we pray to you!

And you too, Aphrodite, daughter of Dione! You have won the prize of beauty by bribing the judge with my marriage to him, I beg you, dear goddess, do not destroy me! You have caused me enough hurt already by delivering my name, though not my body, to the barbarians.

1100

If you do want to kill me, then kill me in my own land.

Why are you cause evil so greedily? All this lust and betrayal, you create, all these tricks of treachery and all the magic spells that flood families with blood!

If the truth were told, reverend goddess, if you acted with some moderation, you would be the best of all the gods!

Helen exits into the palace

Chorus:

I call on you, sad little bird, hiding deep in the leafy hollows, hollows full of your song, a singer among the best!

I call on you, nightingale, singer of sad songs!

Come, help me grieve Helen's bitter fortunes! Accompany me in my dirge with the sad trills that you can compose with your tawny throat.

Chorus:

And help me grieve also for the tearful pains suffered by the daughters of Troy, pains inflicted by the spears of the Greeks, pains suffered when, over the frothing plains of the sea, with a barbarous ship, the sad groom, Paris, brought you, Helen of Sparta, into Priam's race, as the goddess Aphrodite decreed.

1120

Chorus:

Many were the Greeks who fell under the hail of spears and stones and breathed their last breath and joined black Hades. Their poor grieving wives cut off their long tresses and their chambers were left bereft of the joys of love.

Chorus:

But one Greek, acting alone, a certain Nauplius, with his single ship, lit a bogus beacon, on the shores of sea-circled Euboa, his kingdom and that blazing trap sent many homeward bound Greeks crashing onto the rocks of Capheria and the headlands of the Aegean Sea, sore about the murder of his son, Palamedes.

1131

Chorus:

And the slopes of Maleas were inhospitable to Menelaos, who lead the Greeks and so, by the fierce power of a tempest, he drifted far from his homeland, clutching the prize which was no prize but the cause of a war with barbarians, Hera's phantom of Helen.

Chorus:

What mortal can possibly claim what is god, what isn't what's in between?

The most a mortal can do is to understand that whatever the gods deliver will turn this way one minute, the other a minute later, only to turn back this way again, with unfathomable consequences.

1144

Chorus:

Helen, you are Zeus' daughter. He had flown with wings into your mother's, Leda's, folds and sired you.

Chorus:

And yet, Helen, throughout Greece you've been called a traitor, a wife who betrayed her husband, a godless woman! How can I tell which of the mortals' words are true, when they speak of the gods?

Chorus:

Men! What fools they are when they look for glory with spears on the harsh battlefield!

How foolish your efforts to end men's pains through slaughter!

Chorus:

If it is blood you wish to be the judge of right or wrong in the arguments between men, then war will never leave the cities.

Chorus:

War, Helen, brought them their death on Priam's land, when they argued about you, yet they could have resolved their differences about you with words alone.

1160

Chorus:

Now they are in the hands of Hades!

Chorus:

Flames, shot like arrows from Zeus have spread across their towers and upon you, poor Helen, the sorrows fall the one after the other and grief follows more grief!

Enter Theoclymenos with servants carrying hunting implements.

Theoclymenos:

Ah! My father's tomb! Greetings Proteus!

I have buried you here, just outside the palace so that I can greet you and have a word with you every time I step out of the palace and then again when I return.

1170

You, servants! Take my hunting dogs and the nets into the palace!

Exit the servants

I've chastised myself all too often for not putting criminals to death and now look what is going on: I have just learned that some Greek has landed on our shores, slipped past the guards and is now lurking somewhere around here. He's either a spy or he has come here to kidnap Helen!

If I ever catch him, he will certainly be put to death!

He looks around the tomb.

But – Ah! I am too late, I see! It looks like their scheme has already been achieved. Tyndareus' daughter is missing! She has gone from her place at this tomb and has been taken away from our land!

1180

Servants!

Open these gates! Pull back their bars! Let the horses out of their stables and bring me my chariots! I won't let the woman I want to make my wife escape unnoticed without a mighty struggle!

The gates open and Helen appears, dressed in clothes of mourning, eyes wet with tears and her hair cut short.

Ha! Servants, hold on! I can see our prey is still here!

He examines Helen

You! Why have you changed your clothes? Why the black instead of the white?

And your hair? Why take the knife to it? Why cut it so short on your noble head?

And your eyes! Your cheeks are drenched with tears!

1190

What is all this? Have you seen some troublesome dream or have you heard some news from home that made you grieve so deeply?

Helen:

My Lord –there, you see? I am ready to call you “my Lord” from now on.

My Lord, I am lost! All my hopes, my Lord, all my hopes are lost!

Theoclymenos:

Why, what happened to you?

Helen:

My Lord, he died! Gods, how can I utter this? Menelaos is dead!

Theoclymenos:

Your words don't bring me joy but my luck fortune is changing for the better! How do you know this, Helen? Has Theonoe told you?

Helen:

Yes, from her and from someone who was there when he died.

1200

Theoclymenos:

What? Who is that? Has someone come here? Someone who can tell me clearly the whole truth of what has happened?

Helen:

Has, someone has come here to tell me –and how I wish he would go where I would wish him to go!

Theoclymenos:

Where is this man? Who is it? I want to hear the whole story clearly!

Helen:

There he is! That man there, cowering by the side of the tomb!

Theoclymenos:

Great god Apollo! What dreadful rags he's wearing!

Helen:

Ah, poor Menelaos! I fear he, too would be wearing such rags!

Theoclymenos:

Where did he come from? Which country is he from?

Helen:

He is a Greek. One who sailed with my husband.

Theoclymenos:

And how does he say, Menelaos died?

Helen:

Most terribly! By the huge waves of the ocean.

1210

Theoclymenos:

On which savage part of the ocean was he sailing at the time?

Helen:

He was shipwrecked on the hostile rocks of Libya!

Theoclymenos:

So how did this man manage to save himself from the same wreck?

Helen:

Sometimes the meek have better luck than the noble.

Theoclymenos:

So, where has he left the ship's wreckage?

Helen:

The place where I wish he'd be taken. Him, not Menelaos!

Theoclymenos:

Menelaos is dead but which ship brought this man here?

Helen:

He says some sailors found him and rescued him.

Theoclymenos:

And so, what's happened to that cursed phantom that went to Troy in your place?

Helen:

You mean that image of me that was made out of cloud? It disappeared into the ether.

1220

Theoclymenos:

Poor Priam and poor Troy! How pointless was your destruction!

Helen:

I too, share in the misfortunes of those Trojans!

Theoclymenos:

Did this man bury your husband or has he left him there unburied?

Helen:

Unburied! Oh, how miserable is my fate!

Theoclymenos:

So, that's why you've cut so short your beautiful blond hair?

Helen:

A loved one always stays loved! They live on in here, in the heart!

Theoclymenos:

You are right then to grieve for his loss.

Helen:

Oh, gods! I am lost! I am destroyed!

Theoclymenos:

But then, the story about his death might not be true.

Helen:

Is it that easy for your sister to make such mistakes?

Theoclymenos:

Of course not, no. So, will you make this tomb your home now?

Helen:

Why mock me like this? Leave the dead man alone!

1230

Theoclymenos:

You are running away from me to be faithful to your husband?

Helen:

No, I will no longer do that. Make our wedding preparations!

Theoclymenos:

I have waited for this for a long time and now I welcome it, indeed!

Helen:

You know what we must do? We must forget the past!

Theoclymenos:

On what terms? One good deed must be repaid by another.

Helen:

Let us declare peace. Let us be friends.

Theoclymenos:

Fine! I withdraw my anger! Let it take wings and fly away!

Helen: *Kneeling before Theoclymenos and clasping his knees*

Theoclymenos, now that you have withdrawn your anger, I fall at your knees...

Theoclymenos:

What is it? What are you begging me to do for you?

Helen:

I want to bury my dead husband.

1240

Theoclymenos:

But how? Is there such a thing as a grave for those who have died abroad? Will you be burying a shade?

Helen:

There is a Greek custom about people who have died at sea.

Theoclymenos:

And what is this custom? It's true the race of Pelops are very knowledgeable in such matters.

Helen:

We bury them by burying an empty shroud!

Theoclymenos:

By all means, then. Perform the ceremony. Raise the tomb wherever you like on our land.

Helen:

No, that's not how we bury those who died at sea.

Theoclymenos:

How then do you bury them? I don't understand the Greek customs on this at all.

Helen:

We cast into the ocean all those things that are important to the dead.

Theoclymenos:

So, what would you like me to give you for your dead husband?

Helen: *Indicating Menelaos*

This man knows. My previous life was a happy one and so I have no experience in such things.

1250

Theoclymenos: *To Menelaos*

Stranger, you have brought me good news.

Menelaos:

Not for me nor for the dead man.

Theoclymenos:

How do you bury those drowned at sea?

Menelaos:

Each, according to his wealth.

Theoclymenos:

So far as wealth goes, I have no concern. Tell me what you need for this woman's sake.

Menelaos:

The first thing the dead need is a blood offering.

Theoclymenos:

What sort of animal. Tell me and it's yours.

Menelaos:

That's for you to decide. Whatever you offer will be adequate.

Theoclymenos:

Our barbarian customs ask for a horse or a bull.

Menelaos:

Just beware that whatever the animal you offer it must be of the best breed.

1260

Theoclymenos:

We have many such animals in our abundant herds.

Menelaos:

An empty bier is also carried.

Theoclymenos:

You will have that as well. What else?

Menelaos:

A bronze armour. Menelaos loved the war spear.

Theoclymenos:

We shall provide the descendant of Pelops offerings worthy of them.

Menelaos:

And the best of your land's fruits.

Theoclymenos:

And what then? And how do you present these offerings to the waves?

Menelaos:

We will need skilled oarsmen and ships.

Theoclymenos:

What distance from the land must the ship be?

Menelaos:

Far enough that from the ship you can barely see the waves hitting the shore.

1270

Theoclymenos:

Why this far? Why do the Greeks care so much about this custom?

Menelaos:

So as not to let the waves carry the pollution all the way back to the shore.

Theoclymenos:

I shall give you a fast Phoenician ship for that.

Menelaos:

That would be good.

A great honour for Menelaos.

Theoclymenos:

Is it not possible for you do this work alone, without Helen?

Menelaos:

This is work is done by the mother or the wife or the children.

Theoclymenos:

You're right. It's her duty to bury her husband.

Menelaos:

Respect to the gods demands that we do not take away anything of what is owed to the dead.

Theoclymenos:

Fine. She may go then. It is important that I encourage my wife to be respectful of the gods. You may go into the palace and take what offerings for the gods you need.

1280

Then, when you have finished helping Helen with this service, you will not leave our land empty handed.

And for the good news you have brought me, I will replace these rags of yours with good clothes and give you enough provisions to help you until you get home. I can see that you are in a bad state at the moment.

And you, poor woman, don't torture yourself with things that are hopeless. Menelaos has met his Fate and weeping over him will not bring him back to life.

Menelaos:

Your duty, woman, is to love your present husband and to forget the one who is no longer alive. This is the best option for you, in the present circumstances.

1291

If I reach Greece safely, I will stop all these slanderous rumours about you, so long as you prove that you are a good wife to your husband.

Helen:

I promise you, I shall be. My husband will never need to chastise me about anything. You can bear witness to this promise since you are here.

Now go inside, you poor man and have a bath and a change of clothes. I will waste no time to show you my appreciation. You will be more generous with your service to my dear husband, Menelaos, if I reward you with equal generosity for your troubles.

Menelaos, Helen and Theoclymenos exit into the palace.

1300

Chorus:

The mountain goddess, the mother of the gods, once rushed frantically through the wooded meadows, through the rushing rivers and through the roaring waves of the ocean, madly trying to find her lost daughter, the girl whose name no man dares utter.

Chorus:

And when the goddess yoked her team of beasts to her chariot in a frenzied search for her stolen daughter, the clashing cymbals rose shrill cries! A daughter, stolen from the ring of dancing virgins.

1310

Chorus:

Two other goddesses rushed alongside with her: Artemis, with her faultless arrows and the Grim-eyed one, in her full armour.

Chorus:

But Zeus looked down from his heavenly throne and had a different outcome in mind.

1320

Chorus:

The mother ended her frenzied and agonizing wanderings, her search for her stolen daughter, a stealth so deviously executed that it baffled everyone, after she had crossed the snow-fed peaks of Ida, where the nymphs keep watch.

Chorus:

From there, in unbearable grief for her loss, the wretched mother threw herself down onto the snow-covered stony forests below, rendering the land all around there, grassless and infertile for the mortals whose race thus was destroyed.

1330

Chorus:

The fields will grow no fodder for the herds, no flowers will blossom, no leaves will curl lushly and life left the cities. The sacrifices to the gods had stopped and the smoke of burnt offerings had abandoned the altars.

Chorus:

And in her wild grief for her child her need for vengeance made her stop the dew-fed springs of crystal clear water.

Chorus:

But then the tables of gods and men were left bereft of feasts, Zeus, wanting to quell the Mother's rage, made this order:

1340

Chorus:

"Go," he said, "go, you noble Graces! Go and, with your loud cries, drive the raging grief from Demeter's heart, that rage, born from the loss of her virgin daughter. And you, too Muses do the same with your songs and your dances!"

Chorus:

Then, most beautiful of all the blessed goddesses, Aphrodite, picked up her bronze instrument with its crashing sounds and her drum with its tightly-stretched skin.

Chorus:

The Mother laughed at this and she picked up her pipe and delighted in its deep and loud sound.

1350

Chorus: *Referring to Helen*

Oh, my child!

Chorus:

You have burnt wedding offerings in the temples of the gods that neither the laws of the gods nor those of men permit!

Chorus:

And so you have earned the raging wrath of the Great Mother because you have not respected the sacrifices she decrees!

Chorus:

The power of the magnificent adorned cape made of deerskin is mighty!

1360

Chorus:

So is the green ivy that winds itself around the sacred thyrsus!

Chorus:

So is the din of the bull-roarer that spins about the air!

Chorus:

So is that of the Mother's tresses as the wind takes them when she's dancing the all night vigils of Bacchus. All through the night, beneath the radiance of the moon.

Chorus:

You prided yourself only in your own beauty.

Enter Helen from the palace

1369

Helen:

Friends, all is well within the palace.

Theoclymenos spoke to his sister, Theonoe, who is secretly helping us escape but she revealed nothing to him about Menelaos and added, to make things more certain for us, that those dead, beneath the earth see no light.

My husband during a most fantastic bit of good luck, managed to grab all the armour he was supposed to throw into the sea as funeral offerings and he's now wearing it. His mighty left arm is holding tightly onto the shield's straps and with his right he is carrying a spear, all under the pretext that he's doing all this to join the ceremony to my dead husband.

1380

He is now fully ready for the battle against thousands of barbarians if they come while we are aboard the ship. I got rid of his old shipwreck rags and gave him bright new clothes to wear after I gave him a bath with water from the streams, a bath which I have not given him for so many years now.

Ah, I see Theoclymenos is coming out. He thinks he has our marriage all under control and that I will be his wife. I must be silent now and I hope you, too, friends will side with me and say nothing also so that we two may escape; then, perhaps we may be able to come back and rescue you also.

Theoclymenos and Menelaos enter from the palace, followed by servants of the palace who carry the various offerings.

Menelaos is dressed in fine clothes and complete armour.

1390

Theoclymenos:

Servants, go with Menelaos and do as he instructs you. Take those gifts to the ship for the funeral.

Helen, I think you should do as I say and stay here. You will honour your husband just the same, whether you're present at the funeral or remain here.

I am afraid for you Helen. I am afraid that you will be overcome by emotion at the loss of your husband, whom you loved so much and throw yourself into the waves.

I am afraid because, you mourn too much for someone who is longer alive.

Helen:

Theoclymenos, you are my new lord but it is proper that I honour my old husband, with whom I first shared the joys of the marriage bed.

1400

I would die for the husband that I loved but what good would that do him if I did that?

Let me go and give the dead man the proper burial honours, in person.

May the gods grant you all the blessings I wish you and may they do the same to this man who is helping us in all this.

You will have in your palace the wife you deserve since you are helping both, me and Menelaos. All this is heading towards some good fortune.

1410

Please tell someone to bring us a ship to carry these offerings out to sea and your good deed will be complete.

Theoclymenos: *To one of the servants*

You go. Bring them a Sidonian ship, one with fifty oars and the oarsmen that come with it.

Exit Servant

Helen:

Will the captain of the ship also conduct the ceremony?

Theoclymenos:

Of course. The sailors will obey his every order.

Helen:

Repeat this order then, so that they will hear it clearly.

Theoclymenos:

I do so, yes. I will even repeat it three times if you wish.

Helen:

Bless you, my Lord and may my own wishes be fulfilled!

Theoclymenos:

Let not your excessive crying spoil your fine complexion, Helen!

1420

Helen:

Husband, this day will show you just how grateful I am to you.

Theoclymenos:

The dead are of no consequence. We labour over them in vain!

Helen:

Whatever I say about this dead man applies to him whether he is in the world below or here.

Theoclymenos:

And I shall be equal to Menelaos as a husband.

Helen:

I know, my Lord. I find no fault in you whatsoever. I just need some good luck now.

Theoclymenos:

The good luck depends upon you, Helen. Simply be a good wife to me.

Helen:

I need no lessons on how to love those who love me, right now.

Theoclymenos:

Would you like me to be on that ship with you, to help you with everything?

Helen:

No, husband. You would not want to be a servant to your servants.

1429

Theoclymenos:

Very well, then, Helen. I have no interest at all in the funeral customs of Pelops' descendants. In any case, since Menelaos did not leave his last breath here, my house is free of any religious pollution.

Now someone go and tell my servants to decorate the house for the wedding... and make the whole country happy with joyful singing and dancing so that all men might envy me, my marriage to Helen!

A servant bows at Menelaos and exits

To Menelaos:

Now, you, stranger, deliver these gifts to Menelaos, her previous husband, by casting them into the wide arms of the ocean and then hurry back home with Helen for the wedding ceremony. You will be my personal guest at the feast and then, afterwards, you may either go back to your home or stay and enjoy your life here.

Menelaos bows in thanks and Theoclymenos exits into the palace

1440

Menelaos:

Dear Zeus! They call you Father of All and God of Wisdom!

Cast your eye upon us two and rescue us from our misery!

Help us Zeus as we drag our troubles up this steep precipice!

Let but the tip of your finger touch us and we shall achieve all our goals.

The past has delivered us enough suffering!

I know gods, that in the past I have often called on you to share my joys as well as my sorrows but don't let me suffer for ever. Let me now walk free and straight.

Grant me this one prayer, gods and I shall be blessed for the rest of my life!

All but the chorus exits

1451

Chorus:

Welcome, swift Phoenician ship of Sidon!

Mother of the ocean foam!

You lead the dolphins in their joyful dance when the sea is calm and still and when Galineia, grey-eyed daughter of the sea, says, "Sailors, spread your sails and surrender them to the sea's breaths, take up your oars of pine and bring Helen to Perseus' welcoming shores.

1470

Chorus:

There you will find Leukippou's daughters, either by the streams of Eurotas or before the temple of Pallas Athena. They will be gathered in a dance, at long last, or in games, or in all night feasts, in honour of Hyacinth, whom Phoebos Apollo killed during a discus throwing contest.

And after that contest, Zeus' son ordered that there, the day be made sacred in the land of the Lacedaemonians and that they should slaughter bulls in his honour.

Chorus:

And, you, Helen, will find the daughter you have abandoned, Hermione, for whom the wedding torches have not yet been lit.

1478

Chorus:

How I wish!

How I wish I were a bird to fly across the sky to where the birds of Libya gather in their ranks, far from the rains of winter! They obey the loudly whistled commands of the oldest bird among them, the leader of their squadron as they fly over plains that know no rain but bear food in abundance.

Chorus:

With your outstretched necks and your feathered wings, you, companions of speeding clouds fly on!

Fly on until you come to the Pleiads, in the centre of the sky and on to Orion, throned in the night.

1490

Chorus:

And, as you stop by the banks of the Eurotas, call out the news that Menelaos has sacked Dardanos' citadel and is now on his way home.

Chorus:

And you two, sons of Tyndareus, Helen's brother and protector, you whose home is the heavens above the dazzling whirling stars, speed up your winged steeds and rush through the wide firmament's paths to help Helen!

1500

Chorus:

Help her cross safely the wild, foaming waves that bloat over the deep grey sea! Bring Zeus' fair winds to her sailors.

Chorus:

And from your sister's name, erase the ugly rumours that she had slept in a barbarian's bed –a punishment incurred by that contest of beauty between the goddesses, on Mount Ida- since she has never gone to Troy, Apollo's tall castles.

Enter a Messenger from the wings at the same time that Theoclymenos enters from the Palace.

1512

Messenger:

My Lord, my Lord!

Theoclymenos:

What is it, man?

Servant:

My Lord, shocking news! I have just come from the seashore and –

Theoclymenos:

Speak, man, speak! What is it?

Servant:

I will! Helen, my Lord!

You must look for another wife now. She has gone! She has left Egypt!

Theoclymenos:

With wings or by land?

Servant:

Menelaos, the man who came here to announce his death, he ran off with her, taken her out of our land!

Theoclymenos:

This is indeed dreadful news! Unbelievable news! What ship took her away from our shores?

1520

Servant:

The very same one you gave to the stranger, my Lord! My Lord, to put it in few words, he has taken your sailors captive and sailed off with them.

Theoclymenos:

But how did this happen? How could a single man overcome all these sailors? Tell me, you were with them.

Servant:

After she left this palace, Zeus daughter headed for the sea, in dainty steps and acting as if she was truly mourning her dead husband, though, her dead husband was not dead but walking right next to her!

1530

And when we got to the walls of your dock, my Lord, we launched a virgin, Sidonian ship, fully fitted with benches for fifty rowers.

Then the work aboard her began and one task quickly followed another. Some of us set up her mast, others again arranged the oars –the blades ready to be plunged- others folded the white sails and put them away in the hold, the rudders were dropped into the water and secured onto the cross bars.

But, all along, while we were all working hard at these chores, some Greeks, who had come here with Menelaos, were watching us –watching out for just this moment- came rushing out to the beach.

Well built men, though their clothes were the rags of shipwrecked sailors. Unfortunate wretches, to look at.

1540

When Menelaos, Atreas' son saw them, gave us a deceptive act of sympathy for them and said to them, "poor men! I wonder what Greek wreckage brought you to these shores?" And then he asked them, "Would you like to join us in the burial ceremony of Atreas' son, who was lost at sea?"

Tyndareas' daughter, Helen, is conducting his cenotaph."

They began shedding pretend tears and boarded the ship carrying their own offerings, supposedly for Menelaos.

1550

Us, sailors. sensed that there was something suspicious about all of this and spoke to each other. We were worried that we've taken aboard too many passengers but, we didn't say anything to Menelaos because you said that we had to obey him, no matter what. That was a bad command that one, my Lord because it brought about this sorry outcome.

Now all of the other animals for the sacrifice gave us no trouble getting them aboard the ship but the bull simply refused to move along up the plank. He wouldn't let anyone go near him. He kept rolling his eyes around, arching his back, staring viciously through his horns and bellowing most fiercely.

1459

Then, Helen's husband lifted his sword high and yelled, "Come on, you men! You have sacked Troy, so, pick the bull up the way the Greeks do it! By your mighty, young shoulders! Come on, pick him up and put him down here, on the prow! He'll be sacrificed for the dead man!"

Those men then did as he said: picked up the bull and brought him down among the rowing benches. As for the horse, Menelaos simply stroke its neck and brow and calmly persuaded it to get on board.

1570

Then, when all the offerings were aboard, Helen, with her graceful feet, climbed the ladder and went and sat among the rowers' benches. Menelaos who everyone said was dead, went and sat right next to her.

His men, though, spread themselves evenly across the left and the right of the ship, hiding their swords under their clothes and the moment the crier made his call, our shouts overwhelmed the noise of the surging waves.

Then, when we got to a distance, not too far from the shore but also not too close, the helmsman asked Menelaos, "stranger, is this far enough or should we sail on a bit further? It's up to you, you are in charge of this ship."

1580

Menelaos answered, "this is far enough for me" and with his sword in his right hand, he goes and stands at the prow. He stands above the bull's head and, without another word, cuts the beast's throat. Then he preys to Poseidon: "Poseidon," he says, "Poseidon whose abode is the ocean and you, too, Nereas' immaculate daughters save us! Let me and my wife escape from this land and arrive safely home at Nauplia's shores!"

The huge gush of the animal's blood sprouted forth and mingled with the waves. A fair omen for Menelaos.

1589

Then someone shouted, "this voyage is a treacherous trick, take me back! You, helmsman, give the order to the oarsmen on the right and you there, turn that rudder!"

But Atreas' son, raises his head from the killing and yells at his comrades. "You, men, flower of Greece! What's holding you back? Kill these barbarians and toss them overboard into the ocean!"

But the helmsman gave the opposite command to your sailors. He yelled, "men, quick, you lot take up spars, you, smash up all the benches and the rest of you pull up all the oars from their thole! Smash the heads of these foreign enemies!"

1600

Then all the men aboard the ship jumped up, one lot holding oars the other swords and soon the ship was covered in blood.

Helen cheered them on from her seat. "Come on men, show these barbarians why you won glory at Troy!"

The hard battle brought many men down and some managed to get up again but those who staid down, you could see were dead. Menelaos, sword in hand, watched eagerly the ways of the battle and rushed to wherever he thought his men were in danger. We had to jump overboard and swim and so he cleared the benches of oarsmen.

1610

Then he goes up to the steersman and orders him to turn the ship towards Greece.

Then his men raised the mast and the breezes came in their favour.

I managed to escape the slaughter by jumping into the sea near where the ship's anchor was. Finally, some fisherman saw me at my life's edge and lifted me out of the water and brought me to land so that I could come and tell you the news.

Nothing is more useful than a prudent doubt.

Exit Messenger

Chorus:

My Lord, I could have never imagined that Menelaos would come here, my Lord without our knowing about it!

1620

Theoclymenos:

Poor man! I was deceived by a woman's tricks!

My bride has gone! I would do anything to catch that ship and those foreigners, if it were possible.

Instead I must now avenge myself upon this treacherous sister of mine who neglected to tell me that she had seen Menelaos. That will stop her from deceiving others through her gift of prophesy!

Enter a servant from the palace and comes to stand in Theoclymenos' way.

Servant:

Master, where are you going? What murder are you planning?

Theoclymenos:

I am going where Justice has ordered me to go. *The servant grabs Theoclymenos' cloak* Out of my way, servant!

Servant:

No, I won't! I won't let go of your cloak! You're rushing off to commit a dreadful deed!

1630

Theoclymenos:

Are you, a slave, trying to rule your master?

Servant:

Yes, because I have some sense!

Theoclymenos:

I don't think you do. Not if you're going to try and stop me...

Servant:

No, I won't!

Theoclymenos:

...from killing my vile sister!

Servant:

Your sister is a most pious, god-loving woman!

Theoclymenos:

She has betrayed me!

Servant:

Her betrayal was proper because it was just.

Theoclymenos:

Just! She has given my bride to someone else!

Servant:

To someone who had a great claim to her.

Theoclymenos:

Who had a greater claim on her than me?

Servant:

He who had received her as a bride from her own father.

Theoclymenos:

Fate gave her to me.

Servant:

And Justice has taken her back.

Theoclymenos:

You do not have the right to judge my affairs.

Servant:

I do, if what I say is right.

Theoclymenos:

Well then! I am not the master but the servant!

Servant:

Yes, you are the master but only when you do what is just, what is according to the laws of the gods.

Theoclymenos:

I see that you are eager to die!

1640

Servant:

So be it! Kill me but I will never let you to kill your sister!

It is an honour for a noble slave to die in the hands of his masters.

Theoclymenos raises his sword to strike the servant but Castor's voice stops him.

The two brothers appear (Director-permitting) on a deus ex machina.

Castor: *From deus ex machina.*

Halt! Restrain this anger of yours, Theoclymenos, King of this land! It drives you from Justice!

It is we, the Dioskouroi, the twin sons of Zeus and Leda, brothers of Helen, the woman who has abandoned your halls, who have called your name.

Your rage is for a marriage that was not destined to be.

Nor has your sister, Theonoe, daughter of the goddess Nereid has done you any wrong. She respects and heeds the just words of the gods and that of her father.

1650

It was destined that Helen stayed here, in your palace only until now and no longer. She has lent her name to the gods until such time when Troy is destroyed. This has now been done and so she must not live with you any longer but restore her original marriage and return to her home to live with Menelaos, her husband.

Now, you must realise that your sister has acted wisely in all things so, keep your black-hearted sword away from her!

We could have saved our sister a long time ago, since Zeus has made us gods but we were prohibited by Fate and the other gods who are stronger and who made the decisions as to how these things should develop.

1660

These, then are my words to you.

Now let me turn to our sister, Helen:

Continue on your homeward bound journey with your husband. We, your twin brothers, shall be your guides and bring you favourable weather. We shall gallop along beside your ship until you reach your land. Finally, when you come to the last part of your life and die, you will be named a goddess and you will share with us the libations men pour for us and share also the gifts they offer us. This is the wish of Zeus, our father.

1670

Mortals will call Helen that place where Maia's son first took you from Sparta, after he stole an image of you from the halls of Heaven so as to prevent Paris from marrying you; that island that lies like a guard, a rock before Attica. They will name that place after you because it has received you when you were stolen from your home.

As for that wanderer, Menelaos, it is decreed by the gods that he shall make his home on the island of the blessed. The gods do not hate the nobly born because they suffer more pain than do the common men.

1680

Theoclymenos:

Sons of Leda and Zeus, I will abandoned my previous malice against my sister. I will not kill her and, if it is the will of the gods, let Helen return to her home. You should know that you are of the same blood as your sister, who is most virtuous and wise.

Be pleased that you are the brothers of such a woman. There are not many women with a soul like hers.

Chorus:

The deeds of the gods take many forms.

Chorus:

And gods often perform deeds even beyond our hopes.

Chorus:

Our wishes might not be granted but the gods will find ways of achieving what we never thought achievable.

Chorus:

Such was the path of our story.

Exit All
END OF
EURIPIDES'
"HELEN"