

**EURIPIDES’
“HERAKLEIDAE”**
(aka Herakles’ Children)
430-427 BCE
Prize won: unknown

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Dramatis Personae:

Iolaos

(Nephew and close companion of Herakles. An aged man)

Demophon

(King of Athens, Theseus’ son)

Alcmene

(Mother of Herakles)

Makaria

(Daughter of Herakles. Note: Euripides gives her no name and simply uses the title, Parthenos, ie “Maiden”)

Eurystheus

(King of Argos: Mycenae and Tirynth)

Servant

(Of Hyllus, Herakles’ son)

Messenger

(Alcmene’s servant)

Kopreas

(Herald of Eurystheus)

Chorus

(Of 15 old men of Marathon)

Various Attendants

(Akamas, Children of Herakles, servants, Athenian soldiers, silent)

In the distance, the temple of Zeus Agoraios (Zeus, defender of the market place), at Marathon, near Athens.

Nearer, his altar around which lay prostrate, in supplication, Iolaos and the young children of Herakles. They are all wearing garlands, signifying they are suppliants.

The altar is covered in olive branches.

A few seconds after the curtains are raised, Iolaos stands and addresses the audience.

Iolaos:

This I have known for a long time now: The man who is born just is born for the good of his neighbours but the man whose heart charges full speed towards personal profit is useless for his city, difficult to deal with and good only to himself.

This much I have learnt not only by words but by personal experience.

Yes, personal experience.

You see, out of a sense of honour and respect for family ties, instead of having an easy life, sitting by in Argos, I –more than anyone else- have helped Herakles, while he was among us, with his many labours.

10

And now, now that Herakles has gone to live among the rest of the gods, I take care of all of his children. I have taken them all under my wings and protect them, though, now, I, too, am in need of protection. Because, when Herakles was taken to the heavens, Eurystheus, the king of Argos tried to kill us all but we ran away. We ran away and saved our lives but not our country.

We ran off, in exile, always moving from one country to the next because, on top of all the other insults that Eurystheus has delivered upon us he has decide to cast yet one more. He has sent heralds to whatever place he hears we have settled and he would demand from the ruler of that place that he surrendered us to him and drive us of that land.

He would threaten that ruler by saying that Argos was too a powerful city not to make friends with or to make an enemy of and that he, Eurystheus, was enjoying a prosperous fate. The leaders then, seeing how weak I am and how young these children are, preferred to listen to the powerful and so they have always banished us from their land.

So, here I am and here the children are, all of us sharing the same miserable fate.

How could I leave them? People will then say, look at that, now that these poor children are left fatherless, Iolaos, their relative, won't take care of them!

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And so, being banished from the rest of Greece, we have come here, to Marathon and its precincts, to sit by the altars of the gods, as their suppliants, praying that they help us all. We have come here, to the borders of glorious Athens because, it is said, that this land is ruled by the two sons of Theseus, who are related to these children. The two sons received the honour of ruling this land, when lots were drawn among all of Pandion's descendants.

39

Two old people are leading this flight of ours: I, the first, frightened for the safety of these here boys and the young girls, Herakles' daughters, are cared for by Alcmene, his mother. She is in the temple, there, holding them all tightly in her arms because it would be shameful for young girls to be seen by the crowds, standing by altars.

Hyllus and his older brothers have gone to look for another place where we can go and settle, in case we are banished from here as well.

He notices the approaching Kopreas, the herald, in the distance and is alarmed.

He sits down closer to the altar and gathers the children around him for protection.

50

Children, children!

Come close. Quick, take a hold of my cloak!

I can see Eurystheus' herald coming. He is the man who has been pursuing us wherever we wandered in exile.

Enter Kopreas with two attendants

Curse you, curse you, you appalling creature!

Curse you and curse the man who has sent you here! Curse you for all the evil rumours your tongue has uttered against the brave father of these children!

Kopreas:

I suppose you feel this to be a comfortable place for you to be standing around; and I suppose you think you've come to a friendly land. You're a fool, Iolaos, a fool!

Who would rather side with a worthless weakling like you than a powerful man like Eurystheus?

Move on, old man! Get out of here. Why do you even bother? Get up and get out of here! Go to Argos where your punishment awaits you. Stoning, I believe.

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Iolaos:

No, I won't. The god's altar will protect me and so will this land we're in, because it's free.

Kopreas and his attendants begin to brush away the branches of supplication from the altar and the garlands from the heads of the children.

Kopreas: Raises his right fist threateningly.

Do you want to make more work for this hand?

Iolaos:

You will use no force upon me, nor upon these children!

Kopreas: Grabs one of the children

See for yourself. You're not much of a prophet when it comes to such matters!

Iolaos: Jumps to ward off Kopreas

No, you won't! Not while I'm alive, you won't!

They fight, Iolaos falls to the ground

Kopreas:

Get away! Leave, I tell you! And these boys, here, I'm taking them all to Eurystheus because, like it or not, they're his property!

69

Iolaos: *Shouts in all directions*

Men, citizens of ancient Athens, protect us!

We are here, citizens, sitting by the altar of Zeus, protector of the market place, as suppliants to him, yet we are being treated most violently.

Help us, men of Athens!

Our garlands of supplication have been defiled, citizens!

This is a disgrace to the city!

An insult to the gods

Kopreas angrily pushes Iolaos to the ground

The chorus of elders (men who had fought at Marathon), rush in from all directions, in answer to Iolaos' cry for help.

Chorus:

Hey! What's going on?

Chorus:

What screams are these, coming so close from the altar?

Chorus:

What do they mean?

Chorus:

Some horror is about to happen!

Chorus:

Ah! Look there! That poor, frail old man has fallen on the ground!

Chorus: Who did this to you, you poor old creature?

Iolaos: *Indicating Kopreas*

That man there, friends! He has dishonoured your gods!

He wants to drag me away from the steps of Zeus' altar by force!

80

Chorus:

But, you, old man, from which land have you come to this country of four cities?

Chorus:

Did you come by ship from the island of Euboa?

Iolaos:

No, I'm not an islander. I have come here from Mycenae.

Chorus:

By what name do the people of Mycenae address you?

Iolaos:

I am Iolaos. You must have heard of the man who has stood by Herakles' side. I'm not bereft of fame.

90

Chorus:

Yes, I have heard of you.

Chorus:

But, tell me, whose children are these in your arms?

Iolaos:

These are sons of Herakles, friends. They have come to you and to your city as suppliants.

Chorus:

Tell me then, old man, why are you here,?

Chorus:

Do they want to speak to the people of this city?

Iolaos:

What they want is not to be dragged away from the altars of the gods and, by force, taken back to Argos!

Kopreas:

Not good enough! The men who rule you and found you here will not be satisfied by this.

101

Chorus: *To Kopreas*

Stranger, we must respect those who seek refuge in the gods.

Chorus:

These people should not be forced to leave their sanctuary!

Chorus:

We will not allow you to treat the goddess Justice with such disrespect!

Kopreas:

They belong to Eurystheus! Send them off from this land now and I will not lay a hand on them!

Chorus:

It is a godless act to banish strangers who have come here as suppliants.

Kopreas:

But it is a far better thing for someone to keep his foot outside of a place of trouble.

Much better to use wisdom.

111

Chorus:

And what about you?

Shouldn't you have talked with the ruler of this land before you started dragging these poor people away from the sanctuary of the gods?

Chorus:

You should show more respect towards a free land.

Kopreas:

So who then, is the ruler of this land here?

Chorus:

Demophon, the son of noble Theseus.

Kopreas:

So, I must take this war of words with him then. Everything else I've said with you, has been a wasted effort.

The Chorus sees Demophon and Akamas in the distance

Chorus:

Ah! Here's the man himself with his brother, Akamas, hurrying here to hear what you have to say.

Enter Demophon and Akamas.

Behind them follows an armed body guard

120

Demophon: *To the chorus*

Ah! An old man, yet you have managed to outpace the young in getting here, to the altar of Zeus!

So tell us then, what has brought these people here?

Chorus:

These are the sons of Herakles, my lord. Suppliants. Their wreaths of supplication, as you can see, my lord, are placed on the altar of the god. This man is their father, Iolaos.

Demophon:

So why did this event call for cries of help?

Chorus: *Indicating Kopreas*

This man, here, my lord, tried to drag them away from the altar by force. That's why they cried out for help.

Chorus:

He knocked this poor man down to the ground.

Chorus:

I was moved to tears with pity for the old man, my lord!

130

Demophon: *Examining Kopreas*

The way he's dressed tells me he is a Greek but his manner tells me he's a barbarian.

To Kopreas

Explain yourself then and do it without wasting my time. What land are you from?

Kopreas:

Argos. I am an Argive, if that's what you want to know but let me let you why I have come here and under whose orders. I have been sent here by my king, Eurystheus, the king of Mycenae and under orders to take these children back to him. My mission is just, my friend. The deeds I must do and the things I must say are all just.

140

I am an Argive, sir, and I am taking back Argives who have run away, trying to escape their punishment of death, as sentenced by the laws of my country, Argos. All Argives have the right to fix and manage the laws of their own city and apply them upon each other.

We have approached the homes of many other citizens and declared our stand to these principles to them. No one has dared to bring trouble upon himself. Still, these people had obviously come to your land either because they thought that you are a fool or, in utter desperation, they took their chances with you.

150

Because, surely they did not expect that if you had your wits about you, if you were not a fool, you, of all the other rulers of all the many countries they've passed through, you would sympathise with their foolish misfortunes.

Choose then from these two options: either you accept these people into your land or you let us take them away.

The benefits of the second option are these: Your city will become the ally of powerful Argos and that of mighty Eurystheus.

160

If you chose the first option, however and you let your spirits soften by their pitiful tears and begging, then the matter will need to be resolved with spears because don't ever think that we will let it rest without contesting it with steel.

And what reason will you give for engaging in a war with us, then?

What land or what prize will you claim that you were robbed off, that has caused you to go to war against Argos?

Or, when you're burying your fallen soldiers, which allies will you say they were defending?

The condemnations from your citizens will be severe indeed, if you were to let your foot step into such a quagmire for the sake of a group of children and an old man, a totally insignificant man, a man with one foot in the grave, as they say.

What will you say then?

170

The best you could say to plead your case for war would be that you can rest your hopes upon these boys. But, look at them! That hope is far too short from being realistic. Even when they are fully grown up and fully armed they would be no match for the Argives. If that is where you rest your hope, then forget it because there's also the matter of time. The time between now and when these boys will become men is long. Long enough for you to be totally destroyed.

No, sir. You need to give me nothing but what is my own and you will gain mighty Mycenae as your ally.

And don't fall for your usual mistake, that of choosing the weak over the powerful.

179

Chorus:

Who can judge or choose the merits of a case before one hears clearly both sides of it?

Iolaos: *standing up*

My lord, Demophon. What exists here, in your land but not in any other land, is the fact that, just as I have listened, I am also, in turn, able to speak, without being sent away before I have finished saying what I have to say.

Indicating Kopreas

This man, my lord, he and us, we have nothing in common. The laws of his city have banished us. We are exiled from Mycenae, from our native land. Banished from it! So how can he justly call us Myceneans and then take us away, back to that land?

So far as they are concerned, we are now foreigners.

To Kopreas

Or do you think that banishing someone from Mycenae means that they are also banished from the rest of Greece?

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At least, not so from Athens and the Athenians will not send the children of Herakles away from their land because they are afraid of the Argives!

No! This is not Trachis, nor some town in Achaea from which you dragged away these children, even though they were suppliants seeking refuge at the altar of gods.

And you didn't achieve that by pleading a just cause but by bragging about Argos –just like you're doing now! If this happens here, too and they fall for your words, then I will not be able to think of Athens as a free country any more.

No, they won't because I know the mind and nature of these people very well.

200

They would rather die because men of virtue, would much rather die than feel shame.

To Demophon

But enough praise about the city. Too much praise can bore people. I know because I, personally have felt bored when people have praised me too much.

But to you, as the ruler of this land, it is your duty to save these children.

You see, your father is Theseus, who was the son of Aethra, who was the daughter of Pittheus, who, in turn was the son of Pelops.

As for these children, let me tell you of their lineage.

210

Herakles was the son of the god Zeus and Alcmene, who was Pelops' daughter and so, you see, your father and their father are the sons of first cousins.

Therefore, Demophon, you are related to these children but beyond this tie of blood, let me tell you what your obligations are towards them.

Let me tell you, Demophon, that as your father's shield bearer, I once crossed the oceans with Theseus to go and fetch that most murderous girdle that belonged to the queen of the amazons, Hippolyta. After that, Herakles went on to rescue your father from the dark dungeons of Hades. The whole of Greece can attest to that event.

220

And it is by way of recompense for that event that these children now ask from you this one, single thing, which is that you don't hand them over to their enemy. Don't let their enemy use force against them and drag them away from the altars of your gods and away from your land.

He falls to his knees before Demophon and wraps his hands around the king's legs

I beg you, Demophon! I wrap my hands around your knees and touch your beard in supplication!

These children of Herakles have fallen into your care. Do not betray that care and be their true relative.

Be their friend, their father, their brother, their master. All things are preferable to be handed over to the Argives!

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Chorus:

My lord, I have heard their plight and I feel deep pity for them.

Chorus:

This is a true example of how nobility can be toppled by fate.

Chorus:

These children my lord! Though they have been born into a noble home they are now suffering an undeserved misfortune.

Demophon: Raising Iolaos from his knees

Iolaos, there are three thoughts that force me not to reject your words.

The first and most important thought is Zeus at whose altar you and this group of children stand as suppliants.

240

The second is the fact that I am related to them and so I am obliged by that fact to make sure that, for their father's sake, they should be treated well by us.

Finally, it is the fear of shame, a fear that concerns me more than everything else.

Because if I were to allow the violent pollution of this altar by a foreigner, people will think that I no longer rule a land that is free and that I have betrayed its suppliants because I was afraid of the Argives.

That would be a crime almost serious enough for me hang myself.

Of course, I would have much preferred it if a much happier circumstance had brought you here but, nevertheless, have no fear that you and these children will be forcefully removed by anyone from this altar.

To Kopreas

250

Now, you go to Argos and tell your king, Eurystheus what's happened here.

Tell him also that, if he has a lawful charge against these people then he'll be treated lawfully but you won't be dragging these children away from here.

Kopreas:

But what if my cause were just and my words victorious?

Demophon:

What justice is there in abducting suppliants?

Kopreas:

This is easy for you to say. No harm will come to you but I will be disgraced.

Demophon:

I would be disgraced were I to let you drag these children away.

Kopreas:

Well, then, just take them outside the borders of your city and we'll take them away from there.

Demophon:

Only fools think they can outwit the gods!

Kopreas:

It seems to me that this is a place where criminals can find refuge.

260

Demophon:

The precincts of the gods are common refuge for everyone.

Kopreas:

This might not be the view of the Myceneans.

Demophon:

The Myceneans are not in charge here. I am.

Kopreas:

Only if you behave wisely and not offend them.

Demophon: *Angrily*

Be offended all you want! I shall not sin against the gods!

Kopreas:

No, I'd rather you don't go to war against Argos!

Demophon:

Nor would I but I am not going to let these children be taken away!

Kopreas:

Just the same, since they are mine I will take them!

Demophon:

In that case, you shall find your path back to Argos to be very difficult.

Kopreas: *Moves to take the children*

Well, we'll soon see about that.

Demophon and Akamas close in on Kopreas

270

Demophon:

The moment you touch these children will be the moment you'll groan with pain!

Chorus:

No, my lord!

Chorus:

In heaven's name don't strike a messenger!

Demophon:

I shall certainly strike this messenger, if he doesn't learn some sense!

Chorus: *To Kopreas*

You! Go away!

Chorus: *To Demophon*

And you, my lord. Come, don't touch him!

Kopreas:

All right. I will leave.

A single man is weak in a fight but I shall return with a big, fully armed force of Argive soldiers. There are thousands of fully armed men with Eurystheus as their general, waiting for my report about this!

They're just outside the southern borders of your city, at Megara.

280

The moment Eurystheus hears of your insolence, he will pounce with rage upon you and upon your city, your people and your crops.

This is precisely why we have such a large army of young men: to punish people like you!

Demophon:

Go hang yourself, you vulgar creature!

I'm not afraid of you or your Argos! I'm not going to let you abduct this city's suppliants and, in the process, put me to shame!

This is Athens, a city that is free. A city that is ruled by me, not by your Argos!

Exit Kopreas and his guard.

Chorus:

Now, my lord, we must think about our tactics before the Argives come anywhere near our city because those men fight with dreadful fury.

290

Chorus:

And they will fight even more furiously once they've found out what just happened here.

Chorus:

That's how heralds work. They exaggerate their story to double the size of its truth.

Chorus:

The stories he'll tell his masters!

Chorus:

He'll tell them that he suffered horribly and that he just barely managed to save his life and escape!

Iolaos:

What honour is greater for children than to have a father who is brave and noble and then to marry into a noble family? However, I will not praise a man who, overcome by lust, mingles his blood with that of the ignoble and leaves an inheritance of shame to his children.

300

The nobly born can deal with misfortune far better than those born in a humble family.

Look at us, for example. Look how badly we have fallen, look to what depths of utter misery we have fallen! Yet, here, we have found friends, relatives and men who, they alone, in the whole of Greece have come to the defence of these children!

Come now children. Give your right hand to these men and you men, give yours to the children!

Children and chorus obey

So, my children! Now we have experienced the friendship of these men.

310

When you return to your country one day, to live back in your father's homes and there regain your ancestral rights, always remember the rulers of this land. Remember them as your friends and saviours. Never forget this time and never raise a military force against this land. Always think of Athens as your greatest ally.

And the men of Athens, my boys, deserve your greatest respect. They have rescued us from the army of mighty Pelasgian Argos. They have stood bravely against their enemy for our sake, even though we are nothing more than wandering beggars. They did not hand us over to the Argives and they did not banish us from their land.

To Demophon

Demophon, while I'm alive I shall speak of your virtues to everyone and when the time comes for me to die, I shall stand before Theseus and praise you highly and cheer his heart with this story. I will tell him how you, in your kindness, took Herakles' children under your care and protected them and I will tell him how you enjoy a good reputation throughout the whole of Hellas and how kept your father's reputation also in good stead. Though being of noble birth you, yourself, are no less noble than your father.

To the chorus

Only one man, perhaps, among a great many is not inferior to his father.

Chorus:

It has always been the aim of this land to side with justice and to help the weak.

330

Chorus:

This country has endured countless troubles on behalf of friends.

Chorus:

And now, I can see yet another battle coming soon upon us.

Demophon:

Your words are well said, old friend and I'm certain that they will be reflected in the deeds of these young boys. I am certain that they will remember this kindness.

Now, I shall go and gather my people together and discuss tactics about how to meet the Argives with a large force.

I shall send scouts around to spy on them first, in case they suddenly rush us without our knowledge.

They're fast footed those Argives, every one of them!

340

Then, I'll get the prophets together and perform sacrifices.

But, you, old friend, you and the children, leave this altar and go into the palace. There are men, there who'll take good care of you all while I'm away.

Go then, old man. Go to the palace.

Iolaos:

No, my lord! We won't leave the altar. We will stay here and, as suppliants, pray for the city's success.

Then, when it has come out of this battle victorious, we will join you at the palace.
The gods on our side are no worse than the gods allied to the Argives.

350

Their protector is Zeus' wife, Hera and ours is Athena and that's why, I believe we will succeed.
Athena will accept no defeat!

Exit Demophon and Akamas with retinue

Chorus: *Addressed to Kopreas who has left*

Listen, Kopreas!

You are the messenger from Eurystheus! You have come and you have boasted!

Chorus:

You gloated with mighty words about your Argos, stranger! But you shall not frighten our hearts!

Chorus:

We care not! Not now and I pray nor for a long time to come. Not in these great and fair dancing grounds of Athens!

360

Chorus:

You and your king are both fools!

Chorus:

The king of Argos, the son of Sthenelaus, Eurystheus, is a fool!

Chorus:

You have come as a stranger to a city as great as your Argos and yet you wanted to drag away from the altars of her gods by force, her suppliants, mere wanderers, without first approaching her kings to plead the justice of your case.

Chorus:

How can wise men consider such things as honourable?

371

Chorus:

Of course, I love peace myself but you king, let me tell you, you foolish man, Eurystheus, if you come to this city, what you expect will not be what you will find.

Chorus:

You're not the only one who has swords and brass-plated shields!

Chorus:

Keep your war-loving hands to yourself and don't disturb the peace of our graceful city!

Enter Demophon

381

Iolaos:

My son! You have returned to us with a worried face. Why is that, my son?

Some news about the enemy? Are they being slow or are they here already? What have you learnt?

Surely the herald couldn't have been lying.

I'm certain that their General, after all the good luck he's had so far in previous battles, I'm sure he'll come charging at Athens with pride bloating his chest; but when he gets here, he will have to face Zeus, Zeus, the god who punishes severely those whose chests are overly bloated with pride!

389

Demophon:

Yes, Eurystheus and his army of Argives are here.

I was there and saw him with my own eyes. I was there personally because I believe that if someone wants to claim that he's the true leader of an army, he shouldn't examine his enemy by means of heralds.

Eurystheus has not yet let his army run onto Attican soil. He's still out there, sitting upon the brow of a crag checking out, I reckon, the best and safest route by which to send his huge forces to our borders.

As for me, I have everything prepared. The whole city is armed and ready, the sacrificial offerings are at the altars of the gods for whom they are to be slaughtered and the seers are making offerings throughout the city.

400

As well, I've gathered together all the chanters who announce the meanings of oracles and I have examined their utterances -both those that are hidden and those that are made clear- to see how the city may be saved.

These utterances varied greatly on many things but on this one thing they were of one opinion: that, in order to destroy the enemy and save the city, they command me to sacrifice to Demeter's daughter, a virgin who is the daughter of a noble father.

Now, you know very well that I am most eager to help you but I will not kill my own daughter and I will not impose such a thing upon any one of my citizens. Not against their will and, in any case, what father would be insane enough to give away his own, most precious, children?

The city now is divided. You will see two angry crowds gathering. One lot says that I was right to protect suppliant strangers while the other lot say that I was mad to do so.

If I go ahead with this action, the city will break out in a civil war.

420

Come then, let us think about all this and see how we can help you and save the city as well, without my losing my credibility with the people. This is not some barbaric dictatorship I have here and the people will treat me as fairly as I treat them.

Chorus:

But how can it be that, while the city is all too willing to protect strangers, some divine power prohibits it from doing so?

Iolaos:

Ah, my children!

We're like the sailors, my children, the sailors who've just escaped the beatings of wild tempests, who have managed to almost touch safe dry land but then are spun away from it and back into the deep ocean again by the same wild winds.

430

This is how it is with us here, on this land. We have managed to come to its shores safely but then we're now cast away from it again.

Ah, my children!

Ah, cruel Hope!

You gave me all this joy, only to take it away again! A promise which you've left unfulfilled! I can understand this man's position fully. He is unwilling to kill any of his own children nor force any of his people to sacrifice one of their own. And I am even thankful to him for our present situation. It is not your fault, Demophon, if it is the will of the gods that we should suffer this way.

439

My children, how can I help you now? Where shall we turn for help? What god's altar have we not graced with garlands? In what country have we not tried to take shelter?

Ah, my darlings! We are doomed! We shall be delivered to our enemies!

I care not for my own life and I would give it up if only it didn't give pleasure to our enemies but I do care for you, my children. It is for you and for Alcmene, your aged grandmother, that I shed tears of pity.

Poor Alcmene! A long life full of misery!

And poor me! A long life of ill fortune and pain, all for nothing!

This is our Fate, my children!

This is our Fate!

To fall into the hands of our enemy. To die in shame and agony!

451

Turning to Demophon

But I have not lost all hope to save these children yet, Demophon, so here's how I think you can help me: My lord, I want you to hand me over to the Argives. Me, in place of the children. Let these children of mine stay safe and you stay safe as well.

Forget about saving my life. It's improper for me to love my life so much and Eurystheus would be very happy to take me and to throw insults at Herakles' old comrade.

Eurystheus is a vulgar man. Men who are well-bred pray that their enemies are also well-bred, not men totally bereft of any civility. It's only then that men would receive due pity and justice in the hands of their enemy.

461

Chorus:

No, old friend.

You can't lay the blame onto this city, Iolaos!

It would be insulted by the false accusation that it has betrayed strangers.

Demophon:

You've made a noble suggestion, Iolaos but one that's impossible to accomplish.

king Eurystheus has not marched his forces here, simply to capture you but to take away and slaughter these children. Of what use would the death of an old man like you be to him? No it's these children he's after because he knows that the children of nobles will make terrifying enemies when they grow up, still carrying the memory of the outrages committed against their father; and it is this that is

uppermost in the mind of Eurystheus.

470

But do let me know if you have any other, more suitable suggestions because what I have heard from the oracles leave me dumbfounded and full of fear.

Enter Makaria, one of the daughters of Herakles, from the temple.

Makaria:

Dear strangers, please do not consider my coming out here as an act of impudence. Let that be my first request.

I am well aware that, for a woman, it is best that she is silent, modest and remains quietly inside her house.

480

But then, Iolaos, I have heard your anxious words and, though I was not given the charge by my family to do so, I, nevertheless, feel that I am fit to do this and, since I am very concerned about my brothers and about my own self, I have come out to ask you, Iolaos, if there is some new misfortune, on top of all the others, that has come to trouble your mind.

Iolaos:

Dear girl, I have always thought of you as one of the best children that Herakles ever had. And justly so, it seems.

Well, child, we thought that we were on the right track up until now but, here we are, we find that, once more, that we are heading in the wrong direction with no prospects of escape. Because the chanters tell us that, according to the oracles, if we and the city are to survive this, then it's not a bull or a calf that we must sacrifice to Demeter's daughter but the daughter of a noble.

492

And that's where we stuck now. The King, here, says that he will neither sacrifice his own daughter nor force any of his citizens to do so. As well, he also told me, in subtle but clear words that, since he wants to save Athens, we must find some other way out of this difficulty, or else leave here and find some other land to go to.

Makaria:

So it is this prophesy that stops us from being saved?

Iolaos:

Yes, my child, just this prophesy. In all other matters we are fortunate.

500

Makaria:

Then, Iolaos, fear the enemy spear of the Argives no longer!

I am ready, old sir, ready and willing to volunteer to be sacrificed, to die, for this cause.

What reason could we possibly give for trying to save our lives, instead of saving a city that has accepted our call for help and has suffered such pain and danger on our behalf?

No, we can't do that. We would be ridiculed by people if we sit by the altars of gods as suppliants and wail like cowards when we are, in fact, the children of such a great man.

510

What honourable men would see this as proper?

No, far rather the city fell –though may the gods forbid it- and I fell to the enemy with it, then I, the daughter of a splendid man, have to suffer dishonour and then die just the same.

But then, how could I cope with the fate of a wandering exile? Would I not feel shame when people ask me, "Do you love your life so much that you have come here, to our land, bearing the bows of a suppliant? Leave this land. We give no aid to cowards!"

520

As well, I know, many have betrayed their loved ones before me, but not even if my brothers here had died and I had survived, not even then could I ever hope to live a happy life because who would want to marry a single woman like me, one who has no family and to have children with me?

Well then, is it not better for me to die than to endure the terrors of a Fate I do not deserve? No, that Fate is more appropriate for someone who is not born from a family as noble as mine.

Come now, take me to where this body must be slain. Place the garlands on me and, if this is your wish, begin the rites of sacrifice.

530

Defeat the enemy!

I give my life, of my own accord and under no one's compulsion! And I am willing to die not only for the sake of my brothers but also for my own sake because I have discovered this splendid thing: that by not loving my life so much I can die a most glorious death!

Chorus:

Ah! How can one respond to this girl's lofty speech?

Chorus:

She is willing to give her life to save that of her brothers.

Chorus:

What mortal could utter words loftier than those?

539

Iolaos:

O, my child! You are truly of the seed of divine Herakles!

You are truly no one else's daughter but that of that brave hero!

And your words, dear girl, make me feel proud but I also feel sad for your fate.

But let us do this more justly, Makaria. Let us bring out here all of your sisters and let us decide this by lot. Let her who draws the lot die for the family.

It is not right that you die without having drawn lots.

Makaria:

No, old man. Do not even consider such a thing. I will not die by drawing lots!

What value does such a death have?

I will not die by compulsion but, if you approve of me and if you wish to make use of my willingness to die for my brothers, then I will do so.

552

Iolaos:

O, my child!

A speech even more noble than the last, a noble speech itself!

Your new deeds and words become more noble than your last!

I won't force you nor forbid you to die, Makaria but by dying you do your brothers good.

558

Makaria:

Wise words, old man.

Come with me, old man because I want to die by your own hands though you must not fear that my blood will cause you religious pollution. I am dying of my own free will. And when I am dead cover my dead body with my garments.

If I am truly the daughter of the man I'm boasting to be, then I fear not the terror of this sacrifice.

Iolaos:

No, my child. I can't. I do not have the strength to stand there and watch you die.

Makaria: *Indicating Demophon*

Well then, ask this man if I may be allowed to breathe my last in the hands of women, instead of men.

Demophon:

Your wishes, poor girl, will be granted.

It would indeed be shameful of me not to grant you your rightful funeral wishes and that, for many reasons. You are a very brave young woman and it is also just and proper that I grant it. You are indeed the bravest women I have ever seen. The bravest of them all.

Well, then, if you wish, say your words of farewell to your brothers here and to this old man before you go.

574

Makaria:

Farewell, old friend, farewell and teach these boys how to be just like you. Wise in all things, just like you, that would make them adequately wise.

Try your best to save them from death.

We are all your own children, raised by your own hands. and you can see that I, myself am sacrificing my own wedding day for them

580

And you my brothers who are gathered here, all around me, I hope you find happiness in life and gain all the things that my heart will not. Respect and honour this old friend and the old woman inside the temple, Alcmene, my grandmother, as well as these people here who are your hosts. And if you are ever free of all your troubles and the gods let you return home, think of the woman who has saved your lives and consider what burial rites you owe her. Surely they should be the best possible because I did not neglect my family in its hour of need but gave my life for it.

590

And if there is anything beneath the earth then I go there with these thoughts as my dowry and not as a mother or as a woman who gave her virginity. But I hope there's nothing there because if we mortals

must deal with cares even after we die, then where can we go to be free of them? Do not people consider death to be the cure of all care?

Iolaos:

But know this, Makaria!

Both here, on earth and in Hades below, you will be honoured by us as the one with the bravest heart of all the women.

Farewell!

Out of reverence, I won't speak ill of Demeter's daughter, the goddess to whom your body will be delivered.

Exit Makaria and Demophon.

602

My children, we are finished! Grief has undone my limbs!

Help me. Help me go to that seat by the altar and then cover my face with my cloak.

None of this gives me any pleasure and the pain would be all the greater if the oracle is not fulfilled.

My life would be unliveable.

What misery all this is!

Chorus:

No mortal is either blessed or cursed unless the gods will it and no house stands always on the foundations of prosperity but is pursued by one fate after another.

610

Chorus:

Fate will take a man away from his lofty spot and cast him down low, make a nothing out of him.

Chorus:

Or turn a beggar into a mortal blest.

Chorus:

There is no way a man can escape his fate. No wisdom can ward it off and he who tries, tries in vain, no matter how eagerly he tries.

619

Chorus:

And so, Iolaos, don't lie there with a tortured heart, in prayer, in tears about the poor girl's fate.

Chorus:

Accept the will of the gods!

Chorus:

The gods have given this poor girl a death of glory!

A death that saved the life of her brothers and of her land!

A death that will put her name in the lips of men!

Chorus:

Glory marches through toil, Iolaos!

Chorus:

Makaria by her deeds did Herakles, her father, and her noble family proud.

She was truly worthy of them.

Chorus:

If you truly respect the death of the virtuous then so do I.

Enter Servant

630

Servant:

Children greetings.

Where is the old fellow, Iolaos and your grandmother? They are not here at the altar.

Iolaos:

If my presence is worth anything at all, then I am here!

Servant:

Why are you lying down, old man? And why the sad look on your face?

Iolaos:

A great worry has befallen our house. It has made me very sad.

Servant:

Then come, old man! Get up. Raise your head high!

Iolaos:

I am an old man. I do not have the strength to do so.

Servant:

But I have here with great news, old man!

Iolaos rises and examines the servant

Iolaos:

Who are you? I have met you somewhere before but I have forgotten where exactly.

Servant:

I am Hyllus' servant old man. Do you not recognise me?

640

Iolaos:

Ah, my dear man! So you have all arrived here safely then?

Servant:

Yes and not only that but we are also in great luck!

Iolaos: *Turns towards the temple and shouts*

Alcmene! Alcmene, mother of noble Herakles, come out here and listen to the words of our friend! You've been suffering for a long time, Alcmene. Worrying to death about whether your grandchildren here would ever return home.

Enter Alcmene from the temple

Alcmene:

What is it, Iolaos? The whole temple is full with your shouting!

Has another herald come from Argos to hurt you again?

To the Servant

650

I might be an old and weak woman, stranger but you better realise that while I'm still alive you won't be taking away these children or else I'm not the mother of Herakles!

You touch these children and you'll be having a shameful battle with a pair of old folks!

Iolaos:

Courage, old woman and don't be afraid! No, this is no herald from Argos baring angry words!

Alcmene:

Shouts are heralds of fear, Iolaos. Why did raise it if there's nothing to fear?

Iolaos:

Only so that you could come out here and meet this man.

Alcmene:

Yes? I don't understand. Who is this man?

Iolaos:

He has come to let you know that your grandson has returned.

660

Alcmene:

Ah! Then joy to you, friend for the good news you've brought us but – if he's here, then where is he?

Does he not want to see his grandmother?

What's happened to him? Why hasn't he come along with you to gladden my heart?

Servant:

He has come with an army and he's placing it in position.

Alcmene: *Turns to leave*

Ah, this last piece of information does not concern us old folks.

Iolaos:

But it does, old woman! It is my duty to learn more about it.

Servant:

What in particular do you want to know about?

Iolaos:

How large is the force of his allies?

Servant:

Quite large. I can't be more specific than that.

670

Iolaos:

And I suppose the Athenian leaders know this?

Servant:

Yes they do. In fact, his forces are positioned at their left wing.

Iolaos:

And so the army is all ready for the battle, then, is it?

Servant:

Yes, they are. The sacrificial offerings are also ready at the lines.

Iolaos:

How far away from the Argive forces are they?

Servant:

They're close enough to see their General clearly.

Iolaos:

And what is he doing? Getting his enemy ranks in place, I suppose.

Servant:

We couldn't hear him very clearly but that's what we suspected he was doing.

But I better go back now. I'd hate to think that my master charges at the enemy without me.

680

Iolaos:

I'll come with you.

It seems we think the same way. It's only proper that we should stand by our friends and help them.

Servant:

Ah! Never a foolish word from you, old man but this time-

Iolaos:

And nor will I ever shirk from joining friends in battle!

Servant:

Ah, but, my old master, you no longer have the strength you once had!

Iolaos:

So you think that I couldn't pierce my spear through their shield?

Servant:

You could, old man, but first you'd fall over!

Iolaos:

Ha! No enemy would dare stand before me and face me!

Servant:

It's not the face, dear friend that frightens the enemy but the fierce hand!

Iolaos:

Still, I'll take on as many of them as I ever did!

690

Servant:

But the help you'd be to your friends would be slight.

Iolaos:

You're trying to stop me, servant but I'm fully prepared for battle!

Servant:

You only think you are prepared but you are not!

Iolaos:

Talk all you want but I'm not staying here!

Servant:

But look at you!

How will you present yourself to the army with no weapons?

Iolaos:

The temple is full of captured weapons. We'll make use of some of them. Then, if I survive the battle, I'll bring them back and if I don't, the god won't ask me to return them.

Quickly, go in there now and take down from the hooks a suit of armour for me. Hurry. Waiting back here, at home like a coward, while others are fighting battles is utterly shameful!

The Servant exits into the temple.

702

Chorus:

Age has not wearied your soul, Iolaos!

Your body is worn out but your spirit is certainly not. That is still in the blush of youth!

Chorus:

Why take on such painful struggles, Iolaos?

Struggles that will cause you much harm yet be of little help to our city?

Chorus:

You're old enough to be able to control such desires, Iolaos!

Stay out of such impossible struggles.

Chorus:

Iolaos, you'll never be young again!

Alcmene:
Are you out of your mind, Iolaos?
Do you want to leave me all alone with the children?

711

Iolaos:
Yes, Alcmene.
Men must fight. Women must look after children!

Alcmene:
But who will save me, if you die?

Iolaos:
Those of your son's sons who will survive, will take care of you?

Alcmene:
But what if something happens to them –heaven forbid?

Iolaos:
Don't be afraid, woman. Our friends here will not give you up to the enemy.

Alcmene:
And they're my only hope!

Iolaos:
Zeus, too, Alcmene, cares for you and your many pains. I know that.

Alcmene:
Ah! Well, yes, Zeus!
He won't hear me speak ill of his behaviour towards me but he knows himself if that behaviour was appropriate for a god.

Enter Servant from the temple with a full suit of armour.

720

Servant: *To Iolaos*

Here you are. The full works! Now put it on quickly because the battle is fast approaching and Ares, its god, just hates the dawdlers.

Iolaos is struggling with the weight of the armour

Now, look, if you're worried it's heavy, then let's just go there like that and when we get there, at the front line, you can wrap yourself up in it. I'll carry it over there for you.

Iolaos:
Good idea.

You carry the armour, yourself, since you're already carrying it... Now... hand me a spear and... hold onto my left elbow and... just guide my steps...

Servant:
Ah! The soldier needs a nurse!

730

Iolaos:
I just don't want my foot to slip. It's a bad omen if it does!

Servant:
Ha, ha! If only your ability matched your enthusiasm!
They begin to walk but Iolaos is struggling.

Iolaos:
Well, come on then, hurry! I'd hate to miss the battle!

Servant:
It's not me who's slow, old man. It's you. You think you're going but you're not moving!

Iolaos:
Can't you see how fast I'm moving my feet?

Servant:
You think you're moving them, old man but you're not. That's what I can see.

Iolaos:
You won't be talking like that when you see me there!

Servant:
And doing what? I wish you all the joy when you get there!

Iolaos:
You'll see! I'll kill one of the enemy! Kill him by piercing this spear through his shield!

Servant:
That's if we ever get there. That's what I'm worried about!

740

Iolaos: *Talking to his right arm*

Work with me, arm, work with me, damn you!

Work like you worked in the days of our youth, when you and Herakles sacked Sparta!

Oh, you and I could make Eurystheas himself run! Too coward a man to face a spear, that one!

Ha! And then there is this wrong thinking going on about fortune. Fortune and bravery. We think that just because a man is fortunate he's capable of doing whatever he wants!

Exit Servant and Iolaos

Chorus:

O, Earth!

Chorus:

O, Moon of the full night!

750

Chorus:

And you, too, bright rays of the god who brings light to us mortals!

Chorus:

Deliver this message for us!

Chorus:

Deliver it loudly through the heavens to the throne of Zeus...

Chorus:

...and to the chambers of the grey-eyes Athena!

Chorus:

We have taken suppliants into our land, the land of our ancestors, the land of our homes and so we must cut through danger with our gleaming steel.

760

Chorus:

It is a hard thing to bear, that a fortunate city like Mycenae, famous for its military might hold such a deep anger for our land.

Chorus:

But, my dear city, it would be an evil deed if we were to hand over suppliant strangers obeying the commands of Argos.

Chorus: *Indicating the temple*

Zeus is with me.

Chorus:

I am not afraid.

Chorus:

His love for me is justified.

Chorus:

I will never hold men greater than gods.

770

Chorus:

But it is you, Athena that I call upon!

Chorus:

To you, goddess, belongs the soil of this city!

You, goddess, are this city's mother!

You, goddess, are its mistress!

You, goddess, are its protector!

Chorus:

Send this man to some other land, goddess!

This man who has marched his spear loving army from Argos against us!

Chorus:

Our virtue demands that we are not driven from our homes.

Chorus:

We have always honoured you dear goddess, with rich sacrifices...

Chorus:

...and we never forget the waning day of the month...

780

Chorus:

...nor the songs of our youth, nor the sounds of their dances...

Chorus:

...but up there! The wind swept high hills echo with shouts of joy and with the beating of the feet of virgins, as they dance the whole night long.

Enter the Messenger

Messenger:

My lady!

The news I bring you is both, short and sweet for you to hear.

We have beaten your enemies and we have raised their armour as trophies of victory!

Alcmene:

O, my dear friend!

This day and this great message sets you free!

But you have still to free my mind from one more concern: are those I love still alive?

Messenger:

They are alive, my lady and they are enjoying great glory in the army.

Alcmene:

So, is old Iolaos still alive?

Messenger:

Yes, my lady, he is and the gods have granted him great fortune.

Alcmene:

What do you mean? Did he perform some great deed of heroism?

Messenger:

Ha! He might be old but he behaved like a young man at the battle!

Alcmene:

What a wondrous tale!

But first, tell me how our soldiers managed to win.

799

Messenger:

This single report of mine will tell you all you need to know, my lady!

Well then. We set up our line of soldiers directly in front of theirs. One long line facing the other.

Then Hyllus, jumps down off his four-horse chariot and stands between the two armies, turns towards the Argives and calls out:

“General of the Argives, why do we not leave Mycenae alone? In peace? Let Mycenae suffer no pain but the loss of a single man only. Let us two, alone, fight and if you win and kill me, then you can take Herakles’ children and leave. If, however, I kill you, then let me regain my ancestral rights and palaces.”

810

Those words of his were received with gratitude by the army, not only because it would be freed from the pains of the battle but also because they were the words of a brave man.

But Eurystheas showed just what a shameful coward he was. He just didn’t have the courage to face the spear of Hyllus, so he ignored the wishes of the army.

This is the sort of man who has come to make slaves of Herakles’ children!

And so, Hyllus, withdrew back into our lines.

820

Then, all the priests, seeing that peace would not come by a single combat, quickly began to slaughter all the sacrificial sheep and let all the propitious blood gush out through their necks.

Then some jumped onto their chariots while others protected their flanks with the sides of their shields.

Then the Athenian General addressed his men with words that only a brave man could utter:

“My fellow citizens, now is the time for each of you to show your gratitude to the country of your birth, to the land that has nurtured you. Protect her!”

The General of the enemy, pleaded to his allies not to bring disgrace upon Argos and Mycenae.

830

Then the Tuscan trumpet sent out its shrill signal for the battle to start and the two armies clashed into an unimaginable roar of shields and groans and loud cries of agony.

At first, the Argive spears broke through our lines with one mighty clash but then, almost immediately, they turned and retreated. Then, after that, foot linked with foot and man faced man and the battle raged fiercely all around.

838

Men fell dead in great numbers and all around you heard two shouts: “Sons of Athens” and “men who sow the land of Argos, will you let our city suffer disgrace?”

And so, working as hard as we could and with great difficulty, we finally made the Argives turn and

flee.

Then, old Iolaos saw Hyllus rushing off on his chariot, so he stretched out his arm and begged the young man to take him with him. Hyllus lets him onto his chariot and immediately the old man takes the reins and begins to chase Eurystheas' chariot.

So far, what I've said is what I've seen with my own eyes but from here on I'll tell you what I've heard from others.

849

So, as he was chasing Eurystheas, he drove through the sacred precincts of Athena the Pallene. There he prayed to Hebe, the goddess of youth and to Zeus, asking them to make him young again for just one day so that he could exact vengeance from his enemies.

And now listen to this and marvel!

Suddenly two stars came and stood right above the yoke of his chariot and covered the whole chariot with a dark cloud. The men who are wise in such matters said that those two stars were your son, Herakles and Hebe. And there! Through that deep darkness, your Iolaos showed the youthfulness of his arms.

Then, near the Skironian cliffs, our glorious Iolaos captured Eurystheas' four horse chariot.

861

Iolaos tied Eurystheas' hands and returned to us with the glorious first fruits of the battle, that very General who once fortune favoured so much! Fortune! That fortune of Eurystheas tells us that no one should envy those whose fortune favours them, until they see how they die because Fortune's favours last but a moment.

Chorus:

Oh, Zeus! God who makes enemies turn and flee!

Now, Zeus! Now I can see the day when I will be free of the dread of fear!

869

Alcmene:

Oh, Zeus!

You came late in my sufferings but I am grateful for what you've done; and though I once thought that my son did not live with the gods, now I am certain that he does so.

Turning to the children

So now, my children! Now you'll be free from pain and from that miserable Eurystheas!

Now you'll be able to see you father's land and walk upon the soil you've inherited!

Now you'll be able to sacrifice to the gods of your ancestors, something you couldn't do before since you've lived the life of wandering exiles.

879

Turning back to the servant

But, tell me, friend, what clever thing did Iolaos have in mind when he spared Eurystheas' life? In our view, it doesn't sound very wise not to exact vengeance from your enemies once you've captured them.

Messenger:

He did this for your sake, my lady. So that you can see him with your own eyes and treat him with your own hands. Eurystheas wanted none of this. He didn't want to be brought to you alive and be punished by you but Iolaos forced him into the yoke.

But now farewell, dear lady and remember the words you uttered when I first began my speech. You have promised to set me free and, in such matters, promises made by nobles ought to be kept.

Exit Messenger

892

Chorus:

I love the dance and the sweet-voiced song of the flute at the feast...

Chorus:

...and I love the sweet and charming goddess, Aphrodite...

Chorus:

...and to see friends suddenly be granted some unexpected good fortune.

900

Chorus:

Fate, who brings the end to all things and Age, Time's child, grants us many things.

Chorus:

Dear Athens, your path is just. Keep steady upon it. Never leave this course and revere the gods.

Chorus:

Those who say different are in danger of losing their mind. You have made clear the proof of this.

God makes his message clearly: He crushes the schemes of the unjust.

910

Chorus:

Your son has been raised up to the heavens, my lady and it is a lie to say that he has died and after being destroyed by the mighty flame of fire, he descended to the halls of Hades.

Chorus:

He sleeps in Hebe's sweet bed, in the golden palace on Mount Olympus.

Chorus:

Oh, Hymeneas! you have honoured two of Zeus' children!

Chorus:

Many of these things are brought together here.

They say that Pallas Athena has helped the father of these here children and now, these children are saved by Athena's city and people.

Chorus:

And she has cut down the arrogance of Eurystheas, a man who preferred violence to justice!

Chorus:

I hope my soul and my mind never become so insatiable!

Enter the Servant with Eurystheas in fetters and two guards

Servant:

My lady, I know you can see this yourself but I will tell you about it just the same. This is Eurystheas and we've brought him to you.

930

It's an unexpected sight for you and an unexpected stroke of bad luck for him.

When he set out from Mycenae with his well trained soldiers, his chest bloated with excessive pride, to sack Athens, he had never expected that he'd fall into your hands, my Lady. The god, though has cast his vote against him and so altered his fate.

Hyllus and glorious Iolaos have erected a statue in honour of Zeus, the god of victory and they have asked me to bring this man here, before you, to give pleasure to your heart. There is no greater pleasure than that of seeing one's enemy fall from success into misery.

941

Alcmene:

You hateful creature, you! So you have come, have you? Has Justice finally caught up with you? Look at me!

Turn your head this way and have the courage to face me! Turn and face your enemy!

You are not the master now but the servant.

Tell me you miserable creature, tell me because I really want to know: are you the man who dared to heap so many insults upon my son?

950

I don't know where Herakles is right now but was it you who has sent him off alive, to the dark halls of Hades, to kill hydras and lions? Are you the beast who had made him perform all sorts of other insulting labours, too many of them for me to mention now?

Was there any other insult you dared throw at him?

But all that was not enough for you but your arrogance has driven me and these children, sitting here, as suppliants to the gods, from every corner of Greece, elderly and babies alike.

But, here you are, now you've come across men and a free city who are not afraid of you.

Now, you must die a miserable death but even that will be too good for you because after all the dreadful deeds you have performed, you ought not to die only a single death –

Chorus:

No, you cannot kill this man!

Servant:

What? What then was the point of taking him prisoner?

Alcmene:

What law protects him from being put to death?

Chorus:

The city's leaders don't wish it.

Alcmene:

What? Don't they want to kill their enemies?

Chorus:

Not those captured alive in battle.

Alcmene:

But did Hyllus know this? Does he approve?

Chorus:

Should Hyllus disobey the laws of the city?

Alcmene: *Indicating Eurystheas*

Well then, this man ought not to live. He ought not see the light of another day!

Chorus:

That is his punishment: not to die.

970

Alcmene:

But shouldn't he die now?

Chorus:

There's no one who can kill him.

Alcmene:

I can! I am one who can kill him!

Chorus:

If you do you will receive much condemnation!

Alcmene:

I cannot deny it: I love this city!

But this man, here, this man has been delivered into my hands and there's no one who will take him away from me. Let them call me reckless or overly proud for a woman but I will, nevertheless, accomplish this one deed. I shall kill him!

981

Chorus:

Your anger towards this man, old woman, is mighty but just. I understand that well.

Eurystheas:

Woman! Understand this well! I will neither try and flatter you, nor say any words about my life from which people will draw the conclusion that I am a coward.

This hateful affair was not of my own making or will. I know well I am your cousin and a relative of your son, Herakles.

990

Hera sent me ... this illness and, like it or not, I had to go through with it. This was the work of a goddess.

And so I had taken up this battle and from the moment I did, I began to contrive all sorts of terrible deeds against him. I stayed up nights thinking of ways of killing my enemies, of sending them off so that I would not have to spend the rest of my life pursued by fear.

I knew well, woman, that your son was not merely a hollow name but a true man.

An enemy, yes, but a famous one, one with an honourable name, a noble man.

1000

And when he died, since his children had inherited his hatred towards me, what was I supposed to do? Should I not try my best, should I not leave no stone unturned to try and kill them or banish them so as to keep myself and my affairs safe from them?

If you were in my place, if you had such a lion for an enemy, would you let its cubs run around free?

Would you not pursue them frantically till the end? Would you be wise, letting them live in Argos?

No one would believe that!

1010

Well, now that they have not killed me back there, on the battlefield where I was eager to die, the person who will kill me will be polluted.

The city, being far wiser than you, has a greater regard for the god than it has for the hatred towards me, has let me live.

There!

You have spoken and you have heard my response.

From now on, let them call me by two names: Let them say I am both, an avenging spirit, as well as a noble one!

That's how it is with me now: I do not want to die but I will not bemoan abandoning life.

Chorus:

Alcmene, my advice to you is to do as the city decided. Let this man go.

1020

Alcmene:

What if, however, I were to kill him and to obey the city's wishes at the same time?

Chorus:

That would be ideal but how could you achieve that?

Alcmene:

Simply by killing him and handing his corpse over to those of his family who want to come and claim it. Then, so far as his body is concerned, I will be doing as the city wishes and his death will satisfy my own need for justice.

Eurystheas:

Do so! Kill me. I am not going to beg you for my life!

But, since this city has refused to kill me, I will grant it this ancient oracle of Phoebus Apollo.

It would benefit it more than it could ever imagine.

1030

To the chorus

When I die you must bury me where my Fate has declared: In front of the shrine of the virgin goddess, Pallene Athena. Then, I will be a friend and protector to both, the city, as well as to you, its citizens.

I will protect you from the hostile descendants of these children, the children of Herakles, who, in the future, will come here with a great army against you, traitors to the kindness you have shown them today. That's the sort of guests you are defending here.

Knowing all this, then, you may ask, how is it that I was not afraid of the god's words and have come here? The answer is that I thought that Hera was far greater than any oracle and that she would not betray me. But don't let them pour any libations or the blood of sacrificed victims onto my tomb and I shall give them a horrible journey back to their home.

And that will benefit you doubly because with my death I shall harm them and save you.

1050

Alcmene: *To the chorus*

Why wait, men? You have heard what he said! Kill him! It will save both, my children as well as the city.

He is showing us the safest course. He is our enemy now and his death will be our gain.

Go on, take him away! Kill him! Kill him and then throw him to the dogs!

To Eurystheas

And so you won't think that you will live and cast us out of our land again!

Chorus:

Yes, this seems to me to be a better way.

Take him away, servants and so far as our leaders are concerned, they remain free of pollution.

Exit All

END OF

EURIPIDES'

"HERACLEIDAE"

Note: Readers might wish to also read Seneca's "Heracles Oetaeus" Translated by F.J. Miller [here](#)

AND

"Heracles Furens" [here](#)