

**SOPHOCLES’
“PHILOKTETES”**
Produced 409BCE
FIRST PRIZE
City Dionysia

TRANSLATED BY
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Dramatis Personae

Odysseus
(King of Ithaca and one of the Greek generals in Troy)
Neoptolemos
(Son of Achilles)
Philoctetes
(A Greek soldier)
Merchant
Herakles
(The ancient hero, now a demi-god)
Scout
(Silent)
Chorus of the sailors
(Under Neoptolemos’ command)

Day.

Lemnos.

A deserted, rocky part of the island.

The stage has two levels, the upper one being only large enough to contain Philoctetes’ cave and some small ground around it. The cave’s entrance is placed at such angle as not to be too readily obvious.

Enter Odysseus, Neoptolemos, the Scout and some men.

Odysseus is well acquainted with the place but the rest of the men are not.

Odysseus:

Here we are, Neoptolemos! The shore of Lemnos!

A deserted island. Sea all around it. Uninhabited by mortals. In fact, it’s never been trodden by mortal feet.

Yes... it was here!

Neoptolemos, son of Achilles, the most noble among the Greek warriors, it was here where I have abandoned Poeas’ son, Philoctetes the Malian. The commanders had ordered it. You see, his foot was dripping pus from a dreadful sore that was eating away at it and he was screaming and yelling so much from the pain that none of us could find the peace to perform our sacrifices or libations.

10

The whole camp was filled with his curses and groans.

But there’s no point in wasting time talking about all that now. We must hurry with our deeds or he might find out that I’ve come here and that, my boy, will put an end to my plans of catching him.

Come now! Your job here is to help me find a cave around here. It’s a cave with two mouths, so that in winter the sun can get into it from both sides and in summer the breeze can allow sleep enter it from both doors.

To its left, a little below the cave there might be a spring with drinking water –that is, if it hasn’t dried up by now.

20

Now, Neoptolemos, go quietly and see if he still lives in that cave or if he's gone somewhere else. Then, and when you get back, we'll discuss what else I have in mind about getting this job done.

Neoptolemos looks around until he discovers the cave.

Neoptolemos:

Captain Odysseus, I don't think this job will take long. I can already see a cave that looks exactly like the one you've just described.

Odysseus:

Where, uphill or down? I can't see it.

Neoptolemos:

This way, Odysseus. Uphill... I can't hear any footsteps.

30

Odysseus:

Make sure he's not in there somewhere, asleep.

Neoptolemos enters the cave and searches it carefully before he comes out again.

Neoptolemos:

No, Odysseus, the cave is empty. There's no one here.

Odysseus:

Anything at all to suggest that someone lives there?

Neoptolemos:

Yes, I can see a heap of leaves... they look like they're someone's sleeping mat.

Odysseus:

Is that all? Nothing else? Nothing beneath the ceiling?

Neoptolemos:

Only a cup, roughly carved from a single piece of wood... and I can see some flint stones for making fire.

Odysseus:

You've just described the complete wealth of the man!

Neoptolemos:

Oh, look! Here are some rags, spread out to dry in the sun. There are stains all over them... they look like stains from some horrible wound.

40

Odysseus:

Yes, that's his place all right. He must be somewhere nearby.

How could he walk very far with such an awful wound? He's been carrying that wound around for years. Looks like he's gone off looking for something to eat, or perhaps for some herb he thinks will cure his wound.

Send your man to look for him, Neoptolemos, in case he suddenly appears before me.

That man would be more eager to catch me than any other man in the Greek army.

Neoptolemos signals his man to do as Odysseus asked. The man leaves.

Neoptolemos:

Right. My man has gone to watch the path. Tell me if there's anything else you want.

50

Odysseus:

Son of Achilles, to bring this task to its successful completion you must show yourself brave not only in deed but also in mind. Now remember, even if what I tell you is at odds with your thinking you'll still have to be willing to obey me because that's what you're here for. To help me.

Neoptolemos:

What are your orders, commander?

Odysseus:

You've got to trick Philoctetes, my friend. Trick his thinking with your words.

If, for example, he asks you who you are, or whose family you're from, say that you are the son of Achilles. No need to lie there but then, tell him that you've got angry with the Greeks and that you've left them back at Troy.

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Tell him that now you're on your way back home. Say that, first, the Greeks begged you to leave your home and go there because they thought that they couldn't take Troy without you but then, when you did get there, they refused to hand you over your father's weapons.

Tell Philoctetes that when you've rightly and justly asked for your father's arms, the Greeks said they had already given them to Odysseus.

Insult me as much you like. Utter the worst insults you can imagine against me, they won't hurt me in the slightest but it will hurt all the Greeks if you fail to do as I tell you, my friend, because without this man's bow you won't be able to conquer Troy, the land of Dardanus.

70

Now let me explain to you why it is far better for you to talk to him than it is for me. It'll be less dangerous that way and he would trust you more because, when you sailed off to Troy, you were not bound by some oath you'd given to anyone and nor were you a member of the first expedition, whereas I, on the other hand, cannot say "no" to any of this if he asked me. So, if he sees me while he still has his bow, he'll kill me and he'll kill you, too. That's why we must find some way by which you can steal this infallible bow from his hands.

I know, my boy, I know that this sort of thing is not in your character.

80

You don't like uttering such lying language nor do you like plotting against people but you must also know what a delight it is to gain a victory after a struggle.

Just try it! Try it and not before long we'll be seen as having done the proper thing.

Now, for the next few hours put your virtue to one side for me and after that, you can for ever be called the most virtuous of all mortals.

Neoptolemos:

Distressing words make for distressing deeds, Odysseus, son of Laertius and it is not in my nature, nor was it in my father's nature to do treacherous things.

90

Ask me to take the man by using my strength, if you want but don't ask me to take him by trickery.

With the use of only one foot we can beat him. We are many.

I was sent with you, my lord to help you, not to perform treacherous deeds. I'd rather be beaten honestly, Odysseus than win by treachery.

Odysseus:

When I was young, son of a noble man, I too had a slow tongue but a speedy arm but now, when I test the two I find that, with us mortals, it is the tongue and not the arm that rules the deed.

100

Neoptolemos:

But your words, Odysseus, ask of me not to perform deeds but to tell lies.

Odysseus:

My words ask you to take Philoctetes by treachery.

Neoptolemos:

By why use treachery and not reason?

Odysseus:

Because neither reason nor force will beat him.

Neoptolemos:

Is he so terribly confident in his own strength?

Odysseus:

Indeed. He has arrows that shoot out death.

Neoptolemos:

So, can no one approach him then?

Odysseus:

Not unless he takes him by treachery, just as I told you.

Neoptolemos:

But it's a shameful thing to tell lies.

Odysseus:

No, not if the lies bring you salvation.

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Neoptolemos:

How can one look someone straight in the face and tell him such lies?

Odysseus:

When a deed brings some benefit one must not waste any time committing it.

Neoptolemos:

Benefit? What would be my benefit if this man could come to Troy?

Odysseus:

His arrows, Neoptolemos are the only things that will bring down Troy.

Neoptolemos:

So, I am the one who must take them from him? Is that what you mean?

Odysseus:

Yes, Troy cannot be taken without those arrows and those arrows cannot be taken without you.

Neoptolemos:

Well, if that is so, then there's every need for me to get those arrows.

Odysseus:

Quite so, Neoptolemos because with this one single deed you get to win two prizes.

Neoptolemos:

Oh, yes? What prizes are these? Tell me what they are and I'll perform the deed!

Odysseus:

The first prize will be that you will be known as a wise man. The second that you are virtuous.

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Neoptolemos:

Fine. I will do it then. I will put shame to the side and perform the deed.

Odysseus:

But will you remember my instructions, Neoptolemos?

Neoptolemos:

Now that I have decided to do this, I can assure you, I will remember your instructions.

Odysseus:

Fine. Well, then. You stay here and wait for him. I'll be off, so he won't see me when he comes. I'll take the scout back to the ship with me and if I think you're taking too long, I'll send him back here, this time, disguised as a captain so Philoctetes won't recognise him.

130

Now, my son, when Philoctetes begins to tell you his sorry tale, listen to him and grab what parts of it suits your own purpose.

Right! I'm off to the ship now and I'm leaving all this work to you!

May Hermes, the god of trickery, guide us along and be our partner in this and may Athena, the goddess of Victory see us through it.

Exit Odysseus and the scout.

Enter the chorus of Neoptolemos' sailors.

Chorus: *To Neoptolemos*

My lord! What must I say to this stranger, myself a stranger in a strange land?

Chorus:

What must I not say, Lord, to a man who'll cast a suspicious eye at me?

Chorus:

Tell us, my Lord!

140

Chorus:

The wisdom and the knowledge held by the man who, by the grace of Zeus, has the royal sceptre in his hands, is far superior to that of all other men.

Chorus:

...and it is you, my son, who's holding the ancient royal sceptre now.

Chorus:

So, give us your command, my Lord. Tell us how we can serve you!

Neoptolemos:

Now, while he's away, if you like, you can look around this wilderness for his sleeping place. It's safe, so don't be afraid.

But when this dreaded drifter approaches, watch out for my signals to leave his cave and come and stand by me for when the need arises.

Chorus:

My Lord, your safety has always been our concern. Our eyes always have and always will be wide open in case you need us.

Chorus:

Tell me, Neoptolemos. What sort of place is it that he lives in. Where is it? I need to know this so I won't fall into some trap of his.

Chorus:

Where is this place of his? Where is his cave? How do you get to it?

Chorus:

Is he in there now or is he out?

Neoptolemos:

That rocky cave you see up there. That's his place. It has an opening on both sides.

Neoptolemos and his men search the place

Chorus:

I wonder where the poor wretch has gone.

Neoptolemos:

He's obviously gone out looking for food... looks like he's dragged his agonising foot across here... he's taken this path here... That's the sort of life they say he leads. Going out and hunting wild animals with his fast arrows. Poor man. Full of pain and no one goes near him to heal it.

Chorus:

I feel sorry for the poor man.

170

Chorus:

Not a soul around to look after him, no friend by his side...

Chorus:

... what a miserable life! A miserable, dreadful disease with nothing of any use anywhere near the place.

Chorus:

How does the poor creature manage?

Chorus:

What horrible decisions the gods can make!

Chorus:

How unhappy is the lot of mortals!

Chorus:

How boundless the misery of their life!

Chorus:

His family is no lesser than the family of any noble, yet, here he is, bereft of everything in life.

Chorus:

Desolate, abandoned among the wild, rough-skinned, dappled beasts.

Chorus:

Truly worthy of pity!

Chorus:

He has to endure immense pain and hunger...

Chorus:

...incurable disease...

Chorus:

... and no one to help him with it.

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Chorus:

And in the distance, Echo with her ever-chattering mouth repeats his bitter groans!

Neoptolemos:

None of this surprises me.

I think that it was the will of the gods that brought upon him all these pains and, if I'm not mistaken, it was the cruel and embittered goddess, Athena who has made sure that he has no one to look after him.

The gods do not want to have him aiming his faultless arrows in the direction of Troy. At least not until they've decided the time has come for the city to fall by them.

Philoctetes (*In agony, within*):

Ahhh!

201

Chorus:

Shhh! Be quiet, my boy!

Neoptolemos:

What is it?

Chorus:

I think I've heard a noise. A groan. The sort of noise that a man in agony might utter.

It came from over there I think... or maybe there...

Chorus:

I can hear it... I can hear it clearly. The voice of a man who's dragging his feet with great pain... No doubt about it. It's the voice of a man suffering enormously... Even from such a distance, I can hear it clearly.

Chorus:

This is the voice of a man grieving.

But... here, my boy, take care—

211

Neoptolemos:

Take care of what?

More groans from Philoctetes

Chorus:

Take care of how you'll deal with the new twist of events!

Chorus:

The man's not far from here...

Chorus:

Yes, he's nearby and he doesn't sound as if he's some happy shepherd, living in the fields and playing his pipe...

Chorus listens carefully to the noise Philoctetes is making as he is dragging his sore leg.

Chorus:

Shhh! He's shuffling about like a lame man. Pain makes him howl.

Chorus:

Either pain or, perhaps he's just noticed our ship, anchored in this hostile harbour.

Enter Philoctetes, unkempt, dirty, limping badly, agony in his face with his every step.

A badly tied bandage around his foot and ankle.

A bow and a quiver with some arrows hang from his shoulder.

Philoctetes:

Ha! Strangers!

How many of you are there? Who are you? How did you get here, to this harbourless and desolate place?

What country, what race are you from? Your clothes make me think you're from Greece, the country I love the most but let me hear you say something.

The soldiers are repelled by his appearance and the stench emanating from his foot.

No, no, don't! Don't move away from me! Don't be repelled by my wild and dreadful appearance! No, take pity, strangers! Take pity on this miserable and deserted man. Speak to me, my friends, if, indeed, you've come here as friends.

Speak to me!

It would not be proper for us not to exchange speech.

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Neoptolemos:

Let us tell you this first, stranger. You wanted to know if we are Greeks. Yes, we are Greeks.

Philoctetes:

Oh, what a delightful sound this is! What a delight it is to be talking with such a man, after being alone for such a long time!

Tell me, friend, what made you come to these shores? What brought you here? What merciful wind blew you in this direction? Tell me, friend, I must know who you are.

Neoptolemos:

I am Neoptolemos, the son of Achilles. Born on the island of Skyros. A place circled by the sea. I'm sailing back there now. On my way home.

Now you know everything, friend.

Philoctetes:

Oh, my boy! You are the son of a much-loved father, the son of a much-loved land! The grandchild of the old Lycomedes!

But, why here, my son? On these deserted shores? Where are you sailing from?

Neoptolemos:

I've just left Troy.

Philoctetes:

Troy? How can that be? You were certainly not among us when we first sailed there.

Neoptolemos:

So, you were one of that lot then, were you?

Philoctetes:

Yes, my son. Can you guess who stands before you?

Neoptolemos:

How could I guess, if I've never seen you before?

250

Philoctetes:

So, you've never heard my name before? Or the story about me and the miserable agony that is torturing me?

Neoptolemos:

No, you can be certain of that, friend. I don't know any of this.

Philoctetes:

Ah! The miserable pain! Ah! The agony!

The gods! The gods hate me so much that none of my suffering has reached my country. Greece knows nothing about it!

The beasts who have abandoned me here in this disgusting fashion are now laughing at me without a care, while this torture is growing and becoming more intolerable by the day!

260

Neoptolemos, my son! Son of the great Achilles! Perhaps you have heard of me. The man before you is the man who holds the bow and arrows of Heracles. I am Philoctetes, Poias' son. The two sons of Atreus, Menelaos and Agamemnon, leaders of the Greek army and that Cephalonian king, king Odysseus, cruel and shameless men, all three, have dropped me here!

Here, on this desolate island, dying from this horrible wound, inflicted by the tooth of a murderous snake.

270

They've brought their fleet here, my son, on their way from the island of Athena Chryse and here, on this deserted island, they've dropped me and then they left.

Abandoned me here with this unbearable agony.

After so much torture and so many battles with the hurling seas, I was exhausted and so I had fallen asleep in some rocky cavern by the shore. That made them very happy. They tossed some old rags and some crumbs for me and then they left.

May the Heavens repay them in kind!

Ah!

And, so, my son, how do you think I felt when I woke up? When I saw that they have gone and left me here?

Oh, the tears I shed then, my son! The groans! The wails I shouted at them as I saw their ships that brought me here, sailing away! They had all gone! All of them!

280

No one left here to help me with my miserable pains. No one to soften those pains a little. I looked around and I saw and felt nothing but pain! Pain and more pain! Plenty of that, my son!

Time followed Time and after a while I saw that I had to fend for myself, all alone, under that solitary roof there.

As for my belly's needs, they are provided by this bow. Wild birds, which I shoot on the wing and then crawl all the way to where the arrow drops them in order to fetch them.

290

Crawl and drag my miserable foot to where they fall. All on my own.

In winter, when the ground is covered with ice, I must struggle in agony to get myself a drink, or a piece of wood for a fire. All alone and in utter misery, I'd struggle to start a fire. No fire here before I came. With great pain, I scratched one stone onto another until the deeply hidden spark revealed itself.

Fire, my saviour!

There, you see? That cave and that fire, provide me with all my needs. All except a cure for this pain!

300

And now you must learn about this island, my boy!

No one comes to this island of his own free will. There's no harbour here. Nowhere to come and do any trade. No roof to spend the night. No sensible sailor will ever come here.

Of course, it can happen that someone might get here against his will. All sorts of things have happened in the race of mortals over their long history. Well, these sailors come, show a great deal of pity for me and sometimes they may even give me a bit of food or some clothing but, alas, no one but no one will ever listen to my pleas about taking me back home.

310

None of them will take me home!

No, my son. This is the tenth year now that I've been living here. A miserable existence. A slow death by hunger and torture and by this horrible, insatiable disease!

And all this because of that ruffian, Odysseus and those Atreus brothers, Agamemnon and Menelaos!

This is what they've done to me! This is how they've treated me!
May the gods of Olympus give them the same treatment!

Chorus:

I, too, son of Poeas, feel like those merciful strangers who come here. I, too feel sorry for you.

319

Neoptolemos:

I agree with what you say about that ruffian Odysseus and about the Atreus brothers, Philoctetes! I know from personal experience just how evil they all are.

Philoctetes:

So, they've done something to you, too, these Atreides men, have they, my boy? Is that why you're angry at them, too?

Neoptolemos:

May the gods grant me a way to satisfy my anger against them, Philoctetes! Then those two will know that not only Sparta and Mycenae are lands of heroes but so is Skyros, my own land!

Philoctetes:

Quite so, quite so, my son.

What is it they've done to you that made you so angry at them?

Neoptolemos:

Let me tell, you, son of Poeas!

Let me tell you of the insults they made me suffer!

It hurts me to even think of them but when I got to Troy after Fate brought about the death of Achilles...

332

Philoctetes:

Oh, no! Oh, no! Answer me this before you go on, my son: Is Peleus son, Achilles, dead?

Neoptolemos:

Yes, he is dead. Killed not by a mortal but, they say, by the arrows of Phoebus Apollo.

Philoctetes:

Noble the god, noble the man!

I wonder though if I should first ask about your misfortunes or lament the loss of your father.

Neoptolemos:

My friend, I think you have enough misfortunes of your own to lament, without adding those of others.

341

Philoctetes:

You're right, my son.

Tell me then about the insults you've received from those men.

Neoptolemos:

They came looking for me, Philoctetes. They came in a splendid ship. The noble Odysseus, along with my father's tutor. They told me -and I've no way of knowing whether it was truth or fiction- that no one except me, I, my father's son, since he was dead, was allowed by the gods to take down the great towers of Troy.

Hearing this, I wasted no time in jumping aboard a ship and sailing.

350

I longed to see my father before they buried him because I had never seen him while he was alive.

And then, there was also this curious word that if I went, I could take down the Trojan towers.

The oars and the wind had driven me to dreadful Sigeum within two days. The moment I got there, the whole army gathered around to greet me and to tell me that they had seen Achilles alive! They swore on that!

360

But he was not. He lay there dead and I, sat beside him and wept. Then I walked over to the Atreus brothers, naturally thinking they were friends and asked them to let me have my father's weapons and all his other belongings.

But their answer disgusted me!

"Son of Achilles," they said, "you may have all his other belongings but as for his weapons, they now belong to someone else. The new master of your father's arms is Odysseus, the son of Laertes!"

Full of tears I jumped up and angrily shouted bitter words at them:

"Miserable monsters, did you really have the shameless nerve to give my father's arms to someone else without first asking me?"

371

Odysseus, who was standing next to them turned to me and said, "Yes, boy, they have given the arms

to me and rightly so, because I happened to be there when your father was killed and it was I who has saved them and his body.”

In turn, I spared no insult to hurl at him. The thought that this man was to take away from me the armour that belonged to me made me very angry.

Odysseus, even though he does not lose control of his temper very easily, was so hurt by my insults that he said to me, “You were not there at the scene, though you should have been. Instead, you were at a place where you should not have been. We were there, at the right place. And so, now, this insulting tongue of yours has taken away your chance to ever sail back to Skyros with your father’s armour.”

382

After hearing these insults, I left the place and sailed for home. Shameless Odysseus, a man sprung from a shameless race had stolen my rightful property. But the fault was more that of his commanders than his own.

In a city and in the entire army everyone is answerable to their leaders and if these leaders don’t know how to instruct discipline then everyone becomes shameless.

There! I said all I want to say. All those who hate the Atreus brothers I consider my friends and the friends of the gods.

391

Chorus:

O, great mother, Earth!

Mother of Zeus himself!

All are nourished by you!

Chorus:

Goddess of the mountains!

Chorus:

Ruler of the gold-rich river, Pactolus!

Chorus:

I had called upon you then, Rhea, great Mother!

That time when the Atreus brothers, in all their shamelessness, robbed this man of his father’s armour, a thing of honour and glory and handed it to Laertes’ son, Odysseus!

400

Chorus:

Come now, oh blessed Mother!

Chorus:

Come, goddess who sits on a chariot drawn by the bull-slaughtering lions!

Philoctetes:

Friends, you bring me a clear sign of your grief!

You’ve sailed here and told me of a deed that I well recognise to be that of the Atreus brothers and of Odysseus.

I know well that lies are never far from the lips of Odysseus. Lies and mischief. He does nothing without the use of lies and mischief.

None of this is at all surprising to me. None that is, except that the great Ajax could see all that and let it happen.

412

Neoptolemos:

He wasn’t alive then, my friend. Otherwise I would not have been robbed of my father’s armour.

Philoctetes:

What? Are you saying that he, too, is dead?

Neoptolemos:

He is no longer in the world of the light.

Philoctetes:

Oh, how dreadful! How dreadful that the two men who should to be dead are still alive! Odysseus –the son of the sly Sisyphus- and Diomedes, Tydeus’ son!

Neoptolemos:

They are certainly alive! They’re the brightest stars in the Greek army!

420

Philoctetes:

Horrible! What about my old, noble friend, Nestor who comes from Pylos. Isn’t he still alive? He could have used his wise words to put a stop to their disgraceful behaviour.

Neoptolemos:

Nestor is not at all well. He has just lost Antilochus, the son he took with him to Troy.

Philoctetes:

Horrible, horrible! You speak of the death of the two men who I'd much rather they were alive. But then again, what could one expect, when such men are dead and men like Odysseus are alive? It is he who should be dead instead of them!

431

Neoptolemos:

He has the mind of a clever wrestler that one, my friend but even minds as clever as his can be checked.

Philoctetes:

So tell me then, my son, where was your father's dearest friend, Patroclus, at the time?

Neoptolemos:

He, too, was dead, Philoctetes. To put it simply, my friend, war never wants to kill the nasty men – always the noble.

Philoctetes:

I'm of the same opinion –and that's why I want to ask you about this unworthy man, the one who had a terrible tongue and a sly wit. What's he up to?

441

Neoptolemos:

You don't mean Odysseus, surely?

Philoctetes:

No, I didn't mean Odysseus but there was a man called Thersites. No one could shut that man up once he decided to speak. Is he still alive?

Neoptolemos:

I haven't seen him myself but I've been told he's still alive.

Philoctetes:

But of course! Evil never dies. The gods not only protect it but for some reason, they enjoy it.

450

They freely grant it exit from Hades. The devious and the deceitful are brought back up here whereas the pious and the noble are made to stay down there.

Why does that happen and how could we tolerate it?

How could we accept the behaviour of the gods when we can see how appalling it is?

Neoptolemos:

Well, son of an Oetaean man, from now on, I, personally will keep a distance between myself and Troy and the Atreus brothers and listen to their stories with some caution. I have no time for those who judge evil to be good and who allow virtue to die while they give the triumph of victory to cowards. I cannot and will not endure such men.

I much prefer Skyros. That stone covered island is my home and I feel happy there.

460

There I will spend my future.

I'm off!

Son of Poetas, I'm going back to my ship now and so, I bid you good bye and may god grant you your every wish and release you from your pain.

To his scout

Come! Let us go to the ship and be ready whenever the god decides to let us sail.

Philoctetes:

Are you leaving already, my son?

Neoptolemos:

Yes, Philoctetes. If we want to set sail we can't be too far away from the ship. We must be there, ready when the opportunity comes.

Philoctetes:

Oh, my son!

By your father and by your mother and by anything you hold dear back home, I beg you! I implore you!

470

Please! Please, have pity on me and don't leave me here all alone and desolate! Don't leave me here with no one around except all these pains of mine.

You can see them yourself and there are many more of them that I'm sure you've heard about.

Let me come with you. I'll be your labourer. I know what a nuisance it is to take someone like me on board but do put up with it for a while.

For virtuous men like you, it is a shame to be mean. But your generosity will be made well known to

the world. It's your duty, my son. A duty which if you do not fulfil, your name will be sullied but if you do act on it, you'll be crowned with glory once I reach Oeta alive.

480

The whole thing will be over in a day. Come, my boy! Make the effort.

Put me up wherever you like. Anywhere on the ship. In the bilge, if you like, or the stern, the prow – anywhere where I will cause the least trouble to the shipmates.

Come, do it, Neoptolemos. In the name of Zeus the protector of suppliants, I beg you, do it for me!

Look! I fall upon my lame and helpless knees before you!

489

Please, don't leave me here on this deserted island, all alone in this miserable state of agony. All alone, on this deserted island. Either take me to your home or to the home of Chalcodon, in Euboa. The high peak of Trachis, near the banks of flowing Spercheius, is not far from Oeta. Take me there and hand me back to my father... though I fear he might be long dead by now. I have sent many messages to him through sailors who have come by here, begging him to come over here, himself and take me back home but, either the poor man is dead or the messengers have taken no notice of me, a natural enough thing for them to do and so they simply hurried on to their own homes.

500

But now, my son, now you are able to be both, my messenger as well as my deliverer!

Help me then! Please! Have pity on me! Save me!

Think, my son: Man lives in constant fear and danger. Even when he's happy, Fate can bring about disaster for him, so mortals must prepare for fear even when they are free of it. During times of prosperity, they must be fully prepared to face new and unexpected disasters.

Chorus:

My Lord, have pity on this man!

Chorus:

He has told you what horrible misfortune and such unbearable toil he has suffered!

Chorus:

May the gods stop such troubles from visiting my friends.

510

Chorus:

And since you hate the odious sons of Atreus so much, my Lord, I'd turn all their dreadful deeds into something that will be of benefit to this man.

Chorus:

Take him aboard your splendid ships and deliver him to his home where he longs to be. That way, I'd escape the wrath of the gods.

519

Neoptolemos: *To the chorus*

Take care that you don't change your benevolent attitude once you've been in contact with his disease long enough!

Chorus:

No, have no fear of that, my Lord!

Chorus:

That's one accusation you'll never have the right to level against me!

Neoptolemos:

In that case I'd feel ashamed to be seen less willing than you to help this stranger.

Well then quickly, if you all agree, let's all sail now.

Come stranger, hurry up. The ship won't refuse you the trip and may the gods take us safely away from here and on to wherever we want to go.

530

Philoctetes:

Oh, beloved day!

Oh dearest of all mortals!

Dearest sailors! How could I possibly show you – by what deed could I show you – what a friend you've made of me?

Come my son, come with me. Before we sail off let me say good bye to my home! A homeless home!

Let me show you, my boy, how I've managed to live here all this time and with what courage I've endured it all!

Everyone is turning to walk to Philoctetes' cave but are stopped by the chorus.

539

Chorus:

Hang on, men! I can see two men approaching.

Chorus:

One is a sailor, Neoptolemos. From your ship.

Chorus:

The other is a foreigner. Let's hear what they've got to say before we go inside.

Enter a merchant, accompanied by a sailor.

Merchant:

Son of Achilles, I've asked this sailor here, who was guarding your ship with a couple of other men, to tell me where you were. I came across him quite by chance. Luck drove me to anchor my ship near your ship.

I am the captain of a ship, myself and I'm heading home from Troy with my few sailors. My land is Peparethus, rich in grape vines.

550

When your men told me that they were all members of your crew I thought it best to delay my journey and come and speak with you, to warn you – for a small price.

I don't think you're aware of what the Greeks have in store for you, Neoptolemos. Not only in plans but in deeds also, deeds which are in motion.

Neoptolemos:

Friend, since I was brought up to be just, I will repay you generously for your kindness. Please tell us what new plans the Greeks have made for me.

561

Merchant:

The sons of Theseus and the old man, Phoenix are after you.

Neoptolemos:

For what reason? Do they want to take me back to Troy? By force or by words?

Merchant:

That I don't know. All I've heard is that they're after you and so I'm here to report this to you.

Neoptolemos:

And this Phoenix and his friends, are they after me because they are anxious to please the sons of Atreus?

Merchant:

All I can tell you is that these things are taking place right now. They are not mere plans for some action in the distant future.

Neoptolemos:

So why did not Odysseus deliver the message himself? Is he afraid of something?

570

Merchant:

When I was leaving he was sailing off in pursuit of someone else.

Neoptolemos:

In pursuit of whom?

Merchant:

It was... someone! (*Indicating Philoctetes*) First tell me who is this man, here. Speak softly though.

Neoptolemos: *Bending to the merchant's ear*

Friend, this is the famous Philoctetes!

Merchant:

Enough, enough! Ask me no more questions! Get to your ship immediately and sail off away from here!

Philoctetes:

What? What is he saying to you, my son? What sort of sneaky deal is this sailor trying to strike with you in secret?

580

Neoptolemos:

I don't know what he's trying to say but whatever it is he must say it openly so that you and I and everyone else must hear it clearly.

Merchant:

Son of Achilles, do not denounce me to the soldiers of the Greek army for uttering things I ought not utter. I am a poor man and they pay me for what I do for them.

Neoptolemos:

I am the Greek army's enemy and this man's friend because he too, hates the sons of Atreus. And you, too, have come to me as a friend so you should hide nothing of what you know from us.

Merchant:

Be careful, my son! Watch what you're doing!

Neoptolemos:

I have always done so.

590

Merchant:

I'll hold you responsible for all this.

Neoptolemos:

By all means. Now speak!

Merchant:

All right, I will!

The two men I'm talking about are after this man here. Mighty Odysseus and Tydeus' son are after him. They have sailed off after they swore an oath to bring him back, one way or another. The whole Greek army heard Odysseus make that oath loud and clear. He was more confident than all the others in seeing this through.

Neoptolemos:

But why are the sons of Atreus going to so much trouble to bring this man back after having abandoned him here so long ago, now?

601

Why do they want him back? Are they afraid of some divine anger?

Perhaps they're afraid they might get punished for some evil deeds they've committed?

Merchant:

It seems you've heard nothing about this. Let me explain it to you.

One of noble Priam's sons, Helenus, is a prophet. Well, Odysseus about whom they say all sorts of shameful and dreadful things, went out alone, one night, ambushed Helenus and dragged him to the camp of the Greeks and proudly presented him to the crowd as if he was some splendid huntsman's prize.

610

Well, Helenus began to utter all sorts of prophesies, one of which was that the Greeks would never take Troy's tall towers unless they managed to persuade Philoctetes to leave his island and go there. The moment Odysseus heard this, he jumped up and promised the army that he, himself would go. He'd come here, capture Philoctetes and take him there, before them.

He said that first, he'd try to persuade the man to come of his own free will, with words but if he failed to do that, then he'd use force to capture him and bring him round against his will; and if he failed with that method, too, then he'd allow anyone who wanted to, to cut his head off.

Well, that's it, son. You've heard everything now.

I suggest that you and your friends get out of here as quickly as you can.

622

Philoctetes:

Damn!

That miserable creature! Did he really swear an oath to do that? Did he swear to take me back to the Greeks?

I'd sooner do as his father, Sisyphus, did: be persuaded to come back to the light from Hades, once I died, than go to troy!

Merchant:

I don't know anything about that stuff. I'm going back to my ship now and may god do his best for you.

Exit the Merchant

628

Philoctetes:

Isn't this horrible my son?

That stinking son of Laertius hopes to sweet-talk me into going back there and have me displayed to all the Greeks!

Ha! I'd sooner be sweet-talked by that snake, that hateful thing that has destroyed my foot!

But that man will say anything and do anything. No shame in him at all! Now I know for certain he's on his way here.

Come, my son! Let us leave now! Straight away so that we can put a great distance between us and his

ship.

Come! Move fast when a task needs to be done and sleep and rest when the task is over!

639

Neoptolemos:

All right. We shall sail as soon as the breeze favours our prow. For the moment though, it is against us.

Philoctetes:

My son, the wind is always right when one is sailing to escape evils.

Neoptolemos:

Yes, I know but the wind is also against Odysseus as well.

Philoctetes:

No such thing, my son. There's no such thing as a wind that doesn't favour pirates after theft and kidnap.

Neoptolemos:

Fine, if that's your wish, then we'll go.

Go to your house and get what belongings you need and hold dear.

Philoctetes:

There are a couple of things, yes.

Neoptolemos:

What might they be, that you won't find aboard my ship?

Philoctetes:

I have a herb in there. Something that softens the awful pain of this wound a bit.

I use it every now and then.

651

Neoptolemos:

By all means then, go and take it. What else?

Philoctetes:

I'll need to check that I haven't left any of these arrows behind. I wouldn't like it if they fell into the wrong hands.

Neoptolemos:

Is that the famous bow you're holding there?

Philoctetes:

Yes, it's the only one I have. This is it, here.

Neoptolemos:

Please let me hold it. Let me see it up close. I shall kiss it as if it were a god!

Philoctetes:

For you, my son, of course.

Here! Take it and take anything else that I have.

660

Neoptolemos:

I'd certainly love to do that but only if it's proper for me to do so, otherwise don't worry about it.

Philoctetes: *Handing him the bow and quiver*

Your words show respect for Justice, my son.

Here, take them. Hold them in your hands. You have Justice on your side, since you are the only one who gave me the chance to enjoy the light of this sun again; to see my own land, Oeta, my old father and all my friends. You, alone, my son, lifted me from beneath the feet of my enemies and made me even stronger than them.

Here! Fear not, my son. Take the bow into your hands, hold it and then give it back to me. Then, my son, you may feel proud in the fact that you are the only other mortal to have touched these weapons and you have done so because you have done an act of kindness to me, the same sort of kindness that I have done to its first owner, Heracles.

Neoptolemos handles the bow and arrow, is impressed by them and returns them to Philoctetes.

671

Neoptolemos:

I'm not at all sorry to have met you and to have gained your friendship, Philoctetes.

The man who knows how to return kindness is a precious friend, indeed.

Come, let's go inside.

Philoctetes:

You come with me, please, my boy. This rotten foot of mine... I might need you to help me.

Philoctetes leads Neoptolemos into the cave.

Chorus:

I've not seen this with my own eyes but I have heard that the Almighty son of Cronos, Zeus, had tied Ixion up onto a spinning wheel of fire as a punishment for approaching the god's marriage bed.

680

Chorus:

I've neither heard nor seen a mortal whose Fate was more deplorable than that of this man, here, Philoctetes.

Chorus:

He has done no wrong!

Chorus:

He has murdered no one!

Chorus:

A mortal as just as any other!

Chorus:

Yet, he's suffering!

Chorus:

He's dying!

Chorus:

A death and suffering he does not deserve.

Chorus:

But this amazes me!

How did he manage to survive here all alone, listening to the waves pounding at these shores, all around him, day after day.

690

Chorus:

A life full of tears.

Chorus:

Not a soul next to him. Not a neighbour near him.

No one to hear the groans of his agony and come to him for comfort.

Chorus:

No one to cry with him, to see the cruel suffering that's killing him.

No one to gather healing herbs to ease the dreadful burning pain from his plagued foot.

Chorus:

Pus-ridden, pus-rotting, maggot-eaten foot.

No one to pluck some herb from the nurturing earth to give him when his body is shocked by the spasms of torture.

Chorus:

And how the poor man moved, lifting his weight from one leg to the other.

701

Chorus:

The moment his murdering pain eased a little he crawled and writhed this way and that, looking for some comfort, like a baby missing his loving nurse.

Chorus:

He gathered no food that he has himself sown in the nourishing bosom of the sacred earth, none of the stuff that we receive by toil.

710

Chorus:

He eases the pangs of his belly only when his feathered arrows, shot by the flashing bow, bring him the food he needs.

Chorus:

Poor tormented soul!

Chorus:

Never the pleasure of a sip of wine!

Chorus:

His eyes searching the ground all day, looking for a stagnant pool of water where he can drag his aching foot.

Chorus:

His troubles are over now, though. Today he met the son of a virtuous and noble race and they will help him regain his strength and glory.

720

Chorus:

He will be happy again.

Chorus:

Our captain's speedy ship will take him, after many months, to his native soil.

Chorus:

To the playgrounds of the Melian nymphs and beyond the hills of Oeta to the banks of the river Spercheius, where Heracles, the man of the bronze shield, passed through the sacred fire to become a god among gods.

Philoctetes and Neoptolemos come out of the cave. Philoctetes suddenly stops at the front of the cave.

730

Neoptolemos:

Come! What's up? Why are you standing there dumb-founded?

Come, say something!

Philoctetes: *In pain*

Ah! Ahhhh!

Neoptolemos:

What is it? What's wrong?

Philoctetes: *Trying to conceal his pain.*

Ahhh! No... no... it's all right. Nothing serious. Come my son, let's go.

Neoptolemos:

Is it your foot? Painful?

Philoctetes:

No, no... I think it's easing a bit... ahhhh! Gods help me!

Neoptolemos:

I see! So, why groan and call on the gods then?

Philoctetes:

Ah! I... I'm calling on them to come to me, to save me, to soften my pain... ahhh!

740

Neoptolemos:

Come, on tell me. What is it, exactly? Tell me! You're in quite some agony, that's for sure.

Philoctetes:

It's killing me, my boy! I can't hide this agony from you any longer!

Ahhh! Ah, miserable creature! The pain tears through me! Right through me!

Ahhh! Oh, my boy, it's killing me! It's eating me all up!

Ahhh! Gods! Ahhh! Gods, save me!

I beg you, my boy, I beg you, if you've got a sword handy cut my foot off! Hurry! Cut it off! Come, my son, don't spare my life! Ahhh!

751

Neoptolemos:

What's this new agony suddenly? All these groans and sighs, what is it, Philoctetes?

Philoctetes:

Ahhh! You know what it is, my boy. You know!

Neoptolemos:

I know what? What is it?

Philoctetes:

You know what it is, you know. Ahhh!

Neoptolemos:

No, old man. I don't know. What is it?

Philoctetes:

Of course you know. How could you not know?

Neoptolemos:

Your pain! It must be unbearable!

Philoctetes:

Unbearable, yes! Awful! Ahhh! Mercy!

Come, my boy take pity on me!

Neoptolemos:

What do you want me to do for you?

Philoctetes:

Don't betray me, my boy! Don't feel frightened by this pain and leave me behind, my boy. It comes and goes and then, when it's tired of wandering about it comes back again. A dreadful pain!

759

Neoptolemos:

You poor wretch! A thousand pains torture you!

Here, do you want me to hold you somehow?

Philoctetes:

No, no. Not me, this. *Hands him the bow and the quiver*

It's... it's this bow and arrows. Take them, my son. You've asked for them earlier. Here, then take them. Hold on to them, guard them until this pain goes away. When it does, I will fall asleep. You must let me do that. I will sleep peacefully for a while. Guard them through that and, I beg you, my boy, if those people come don't let them take them.

772

Whatever way they try, don't let them have these arrows and this bow, because if they take a hold of them, you'll become your own murderer and mine.

You would have murdered me, my boy, me who has come to you as a suppliant.

Neoptolemos:

Rest assured, friend. I'll take good care of them. They'll be held by no one else but me and you. Give them to me!

Neoptolemos takes the bow and arrows

May they bring us luck!

Philoctetes:

Take them, my boy and kiss them to keep away from you the curse that haunted me and its previous owner.

779

Neoptolemos: *Raises the bow and quiver to the sky*

Oh, gods! Grant us both that wish and make prosperous and fast our voyage, wherever it is the God wishes us to go, wherever our mission takes us.

Philoctetes:

Ahhh! Ahhhh! No! The pain, the pain is unbearable!

My boy! I don't think your prayers will be heard!

Ahhh! Here it is again! Here's that black blood again! Ahhh! The wound is oozing again. The blood is coming out from deep inside it.

Ahhh!

And more will come!

Ahhh! Rotting foot! The pains you're causing me! Ahhh!

Here it is! Here! It's raising! It's raising!

Ah, my boy, now you can see what is wrong.

Neoptolemos, shocked, retreats a step or two

No! No, don't run away! I beg you, son!

Delirious. He turns and writhes away from Neoptolemos

Ahhh!

790

Shouts into the sky

Odysseus! Ahhh! Despicable man from Cephalonia! Ahhh!

How I wish this horrible pain drove itself right through your nasty chest!

Ahhh! Oh, no! Here it is again! Ahhh! Again!

Agamemnon! Menelaos! Generals of the army!

How I wish you, instead of me felt this horrible pain! Felt it for as long as I have!

Ahhh!

Death! Hades! I call for you every day and yet you do not come! Come now, Death! Come!

My boy! Oh, my boy! My noble soul! Come!

800

Come, pick me up and take me to that fire they call Lemnian. Throw me upon it and let me burn! Burn me, my son!

I once agreed to do the same with Heracles, Zeus' son, for the price of those arrows you're holding in your hands.

Speak, my boy! Say something! Why are you silent?

Where are you, my son?

Neoptolemos:

Here! Here I am, my friend, suffering your pain, crying for your misery!

Philoctetes:

Courage, my boy! Have courage.

This agony comes with a vengeance but leaves again quickly.

But I implore you, my boy! Please, please don't leave me here alone!

810

Neoptolemos:

Have no fear, Philoctetes. We will stay here with you.

Philoctetes:

Will you? Truly?

Neoptolemos:

Be absolutely certain of that.

Philoctetes:

Good, because I don't think it would be proper for me to make you swear an oath like one does with any common man.

Neoptolemos:

It wouldn't be proper for me to leave without you.

Philoctetes:

Give me your hand on it.

Neoptolemos:

Here, take it!

As they shake hands Philoctetes suddenly stares into the sky

Philoctetes:

There, now... up there... that way...

Neoptolemos:

What? Where do you mean?

Philoctetes:

Up there...

Neoptolemos:

Are you delirious again? Why are you staring into the sky?

Philoctetes: *Shouts*

Let me go! Let me go!

Neoptolemos:

Let you go where?

Philoctetes:

Let me go, I say!

Neoptolemos:

And I say I won't!

Philoctetes:

Your touch will kill me!

After a few seconds of tussle, Philoctetes seems to regain his mind

Neoptolemos:

All right. I can see you're back in your right mind now so I'll let you go.

Philoctetes: *Tries to get up*

Oh, Earth!

Earth take me! Take me as if I'm dead! This agony will not let me stand up!

He sinks to the ground and slowly falls asleep

821

Neoptolemos:

Ah! It looks like sleep will take him soon. Look how his head is falling back, the sweat drenching his body. Look there! Black blood is bursting out of a vein on his heel.

Come friends, let's leave him in peace. Let him sleep.

Chorus:

O, dear Sleep!

You know no pain!

You know no suffering!

Chorus:

Come to us, Sleep!

Come Sleep, with your sweet breath!

Come Sleep and bring us tranquillity!
Come Sleep and bring us tranquillity!

830

Chorus:

Lord! Now Sleep, hold that serenity above his eyes!

Come, Healer, come!

Chorus: *To Neoptolemos*

My boy, watch out!

Watch where you stand!

Watch where you go!

Watch what you think!

Already you can see...

Chorus:

But why delay it? Why not act now?

Chorus:

This is the right moment.

He is asleep!

Chorus:

The right act at the right moment brings victory.

An act done quickly.

839

Neoptolemos:

He can hear nothing now.

But I think it would be a vain act to sail away without him.

The god told us to bring him back. The victory garland belongs to him.

To boast falsely about a job not done is a shameful thing. A disgrace.

Chorus:

But, my son, that part is for the gods to decide.

Chorus:

But tell us your plan, my son, quietly and softly!

Whisper it because the sleep that comes to a suffering man is never heavy. They can hear everything.

850

Chorus:

But there's a job that needs to be done! A most important job! Think about it carefully. Think how you can see it through... You know the job I mean...

Chorus:

Do it while he's asleep or else there'll be trouble!

The sound of a slight wind rising

Chorus:

Look! The wind is ours, my son!

Chorus:

His eyes are shut!

860

Chorus:

Deep in darkness. Helpless. Can't stir a foot or a hand!

Chorus:

As if he's in Hades.

Chorus:

Make your move fit the moment, my son.

Chorus:

Best to act quickly, boldly, my son!

Neoptolemos:

Quiet!

And watch yourselves!

The man is beginning to stir. He's raising his head now.

Philoctetes:

O, sweet light! Light that follows sleep!

O, and you, my friends who kept watch over me, an act I never thought was possible!

871

O, my boy! I never thought you would have the patience and the pity to see me through this ordeal and

to help me like this! The Atreus brothers never did have your patience for it. Such brave generals! But you're a noble man, the son of a noble man and so, my screams and the stench of my rotting wound did not daunt you! Ah! It's easing now! This dreadful pain is easing. Ah, it's giving me a bit of a rest.

Come, my boy. Help me get up. Help me straighten my legs and when I'm fully awake we can walk over to the ship and set sail as soon as possible.

882

Neoptolemos:

It is an unbelievable joy to see you're still alive and breathing freely, old man!

All these signs of life were absent from you before.

Offers him his hand

Well then, come. Get up. Or would you rather these men carried you.

They would not refuse the effort, if we asked them.

889

Philoctetes:

Thank you, my boy.

Help me any way you like but don't bother the men. Don't let them be repulsed by the stench before they have to.

Neoptolemos:

As you wish. Come, hold on to me and stand up.

Philoctetes:

Ah, don't worry, the force of habit will set me straight.

Neoptolemos: *Turns away ashamed*

Ah! What do I do now?

Philoctetes: *Surprised at Neoptolemos' distress*

What? What is it, my boy? What do you mean?

Neoptolemos:

I don't know what I mean! I am confused!

Philoctetes:

Confused, my boy? Confused about what? Don't talk like that, my boy!

Neoptolemos:

This is it! This is the very moment of my confusion!

900

Philoctetes:

It's not my foot, is it? You're disgusted by it, I know it! You can't cope with it any more and you don't want to take me on board. Is that it?

Neoptolemos:

Disgusted? I am disgusted with someone who has abandoned his very nature and acting against it.

Philoctetes:

But you're not, my son! You're not doing anything that's against your nature. You are your father's son. A noble man, doing a noble deed to a noble man.

Neoptolemos:

What disgusts me is the fact that I will be found to be a traitor.

Philoctetes:

Traitor? Not by your deed. Your words, though, they disturb me...

Neoptolemos:

Oh, Zeus! What shall I do?

Shall I be condemned for committing a double wrong?

Erring by shameful silence and erring by shameful speech?

910

Philoctetes: *To the chorus*

If I'm not mistaken, this man is about to betray me! I think he's about to sail off without me.

Neoptolemos:

No, what worries me is not leaving you behind but taking you on a journey that will harm you!

Philoctetes:

What are you trying to say, my boy? I can't understand you at all.

Neoptolemos:

No, I will hide nothing from you, old man.

You are to go to Troy, to join the Greek expedition under the Atreus brothers!

Philoctetes:

Gods! What?

What did you just say? Oh no!

Neoptolemos:

Grieve not until you've heard the full story, old friend!

Philoctetes:

The full story? What are you going to do with me?

Neoptolemos:

First to cure your sickness and then take you with me to Troy and take down her walls.

921

Philoctetes:

Is that your real intention?

Neoptolemos:

It cannot be avoided.

Listen to the reason but do not get angry at me.

Philoctetes:

Oh, gods! He has lied to me!

Stranger, what have you done to me? Give me back the bow and arrows!

Neoptolemos:

But I can't. I have done what I have done because I had to obey those in command.

Justice and duty forced me.

Philoctetes:

You monstrous blaze of evil! Hateful architect of deceit!

What horror have you worked upon me! Deceitful creature!

Do you not feel any shame, doing this to me? Me, who have come to you begging for your help?

930

You hateful beast!

You stole my bow and with it you stole my livelihood!

Give it back!

Come, my boy, I beg you, I implore you, give it back to me!

By the gods of your ancestors, my boy, give me back my livelihood!

Neoptolemos turns away

Oh! Now he turns away! Now he will not speak to me! Now he will not give me back the bow!

Addresses Nature

Oh, harbours of Lemnos!

Oh, headlands of this island!

Rocks and crags that house the mountain beasts!

939

To you I speak! You are my only constant companions. You I call as witnesses to the misfortune I am suffering in the hands of the son of Achilles.

He has sworn an oath to me that he would take me home, yet he's taking me to Troy!

He has given me his right hand, swearing also to give me back the sacred bow and arrows that belong to Zeus' son, Heracles but he's now keeping them for himself!

He's taking me back to Troy with him to parade me before the Greeks as if I were some strong man whom he had captured by his might! Can he not see that what he's doing is only destroying a corpse, a mere shadow of a puff of smoke, a hollow ghost?

Ah, Neoptolemos! You'd never be able to take me had I the use of my own strength. And even as I am, even as sick as I am, you still had to use treachery!

Miserable treachery! That's how you've deceived me and took those weapons away from me!

950

What now? What am I to do now?

Give them back to me!

Look, even now it's not too late. Regain your dignity!

Come, my boy! What do you say?

Nothing?

And now I am nothing also! I am finished! I am destroyed!

Turns to address his cave

Oh, cave, made of rocks! Cave with two entrances! Again, I will come to you, this time empty handed and without my arrows, without my means of survival.

There, in your hollows I will stay alone and in pain, without the ability to kill with my bow some bird

in flight or some mountain beast.

No! Now, I will become the food for other beasts.

Beasts who died to give me food will now feast upon my own carcass.

959

The beasts I had once hunted will now be hunting me and I will pay for the blood they've lost with my own blood. And this, because of this man, here, who I thought was a noble man, a man who knew no evil.

Death to you! Death to you, unless you tell me you've changed your mind. Death to you if you have not! Misery and death to you, if you have not changed your mind!

Chorus:

My lord, what should we do now? Sail off or do as he says? Tell us!

Neoptolemos:

Personally, I have felt a curious sympathy for this man's dreadful plight. Not just now but from much earlier on.

Philoctetes:

Oh, mercy, my son! Have mercy on me, I beg you, my son and don't let people reproach you later for having deceived someone like me!

970

Neoptolemos:

By Zeus! What am I to do now? What a mess I'm in!

How I wish I've never left my island, Skyros!

Philoctetes:

My son! You're not a bad man! You've come here because you were persuaded by the foul stories of foul men. Leave those men to their stories and give me back my weapons before you sail away.

Neoptolemos: *To the chorus*

What do you say, men? What should we do?

Odysseus: *From within*

You rotten man! What are you up to?

Give me those arrows immediately and go away!

Philoctetes:

Oh, Zeus! Who is that man? Did I hear the voice of Odysseus?

Enter Odysseus with two of his men

Odysseus:

Yes, it is Odysseus! You can trust your eyes!

Philoctetes:

Ah! Sold and lost! I am destroyed!

So, this then is really the man who has captured me and who took my weapons off me.

980

Odysseus:

Yes. I admit it. It was me and no one else.

Philoctetes: *To Neoptolemos*

Quickly, my son. Let me have the bow now.

Odysseus:

He could never do that even if he wanted to.

And you, too! You must come along with it, or else these men will bring you by force.

Philoctetes:

You would dare do that? You evil thug! The most evil of them all! You'll take me by force?

Odysseus:

Yes, by force, if you won't come quietly.

Philoctetes:

Oh, Lemnos!

Oh, Almighty fire, child of Hephaistos!

Will you allow this man to take me away from you by force?

989

Odysseus:

Zeus! It is Zeus!

Understand this, it is Zeus who rules this place and it is Zeus' decision that I am obeying!

Philoctetes:

Abomination!

There is no end to the trickery of your brain!
Now you're turning gods into common liars and hiding behind them!

Odysseus:

No, I'm turning them into tellers of truth.
As for the journey to Troy, it will be made!

Philoctetes:

No, I say, it won't!

Odysseus:

But I say "yes" and it is you who must obey me.

Philoctetes:

Obey?

Has my father given life to a slave or to a free man?

Odysseus:

Neither. He has given life to a man, equal to the generals in Troy, a man who should work with them to destroy it!

Philoctetes:

Never!

Moves towards the edge of a steep cliff

Never! Not even if I have to suffer every nasty experience in life! Not while I can stand here at the edge of this cliff!

1001

Odysseus:

What? What do you think you're doing?

Philoctetes:

One leap from this rock and the blood of my smashed head will cover the rocks below.

Odysseus:

Grab him, men! Let his death not be decided by him!

Two sailors rush over and seize Philoctetes

Philoctetes:

Oh, dear hands! How you suffer without your friends, the bow and the arrows!

Ah! You are both caught and bound by this man's orders!

To Odysseus

You there! You evil, shameless man! Once again with your sly tricks, once again you've taken me by deceit! Hiding behind this innocent young boy, this boy I've never met before! He's far too good a man for your type. No, he's my sort of man. He's a boy who respects and obeys orders and he obeyed yours and now you can see how much he's suffering because of it. Suffering because of this crime you've made him commit and aching because of my own suffering.

1012

That boy didn't know how to commit evil. He was an unwilling and clumsy student to your evil teachings but with your brain, a brain that is expert in evil trickery and deception, has taught him all about being evil and deceitful himself.

And now, now you dreadful creature, now you want to tie me up and drag me away from these shores.

From this island upon which you, yourself have hurled me in the first place. You have abandoned here, all alone, without a friend, without a city, without a life, a dead man among the living.

Ah! Curse you! A horrible death to you!

Ah, how many times have I cursed you like that!

1020

But the gods will not grant me these curses. They grant me no joy yet they grant you life and strength. They give me this implacable pain to suffer all through my life. They give me the pain of this disease and the mocking that I have to endure from those generals, the Atreus brothers and from you, their obedient little servant!

They've deceived you into sailing with them and you did, against your will, whereas I, I went willingly with seven of my own ships, at least until I was dumped disgracefully, out here. You say it was they who did this but they say it was you.

1029

And now? Why is it you're taking me with you now? Why drag me off like this? For what purpose? I am a nobody to you. As far as you're concerned, I do not exist. In your head, I've been dead for a long time.

And why you? Why is it you who must perform this deed? You, who is hated by all the gods, you! Am I no longer a foul smelling cripple to you? You used to complain that you couldn't carry out your

prayers or perform your sacrifices or your libations because of my foul smell. Well then, how can you perform those deeds this time, if I sail back with you?

May the gods grant you a nasty death! And if the gods care about justice then they will certainly grant you a miserable death for all the misery you've made me suffer!

But I can see they must care after all!

The gods do care about justice, otherwise why would you have made this journey here? Here, to me, the most unworthy of all mortals? Obviously some divine prod has pricked you!

1040

Oh, land of my fathers!

And you gods that look down upon that land!

If you feel any pity for me then punish them! Punish them all! Even now. Even though so late. I have a pitiful life now but I would feel that I had escaped this sickness if I saw them all punished.

Chorus:

Heavy words from a man with a heavy heart, Odysseus.

His misery has not conquered him.

Odysseus:

Had I the time, I'd respond to his speech with a full answer but I don't, so I'll only say this one thing: I am a man who fits the occasion, whatever that may be.

1050

When an honest and virtuous man is needed then you'll find no one more honest or virtuous than me. I was born to seek victory. Always!

But I won't seek it this time. At least not over you. This victory I hand to you.

To his men

Let him be!

Back to Philoctetes

We don't need you any more. We have the weapons now and we have the archer Teucer –and me. Both well versed in the art. I don't think I'd be any worse at it than you and my aim would be just as good.

1060

What do we need you for?

So, go ahead, stroll about this island. Enjoy it. Enjoy Lemnos!

Men, let's go! Perhaps these weapons will give me the honour that they would have given you, old man, if you had kept them.

Philoctetes:

Ah! Miserable creature! Foul man! You will go to the Greeks adorned with my weapons? Ah, what am I to do?

Odysseus:

Speak to me no more. I am leaving.

Philoctetes: *To Neoptolemos*

And you, son of Achilles? Will you not talk to me? Will you leave me like this?

Odysseus: *Also to Neoptolemos*

You! You come with me now. You are a noble man but don't even look his way, or you will bring us bad luck!

1070

Philoctetes: *Pleading with the soldiers*

My friends, will you, also, abandon me here? Are you, too just as heartless as him?

Chorus: *Indicating Neoptolemos*

That man is our captain. We will do as he says.

Neoptolemos: *To his sailors*

That man, there, Odysseus, will accuse me of being soft-hearted but, since Philoctetes wishes it, you might as well stay here with him, until the sailors prepare the ship and perform all the religious rites to the gods. Perhaps, in the meantime, he, too might come to his senses. *To Odysseus*. Right, well then, let us two now go to the ships and you, men, make sure you're ready to come when I call for you.

Exit Neoptolemos and Odysseus

1081

Philoctetes: *Addresses his cave*

Oh, dear cave! Hollow cave! Cave of rock!

Cave that knows the icy cold of Winter and the scorching heat of the Summer!

It was not meant to be then! It was not meant for me to leave you for ever, poor mate! No, we will stay together until death takes me away.

Ah! Such misery!

My cave, my home, the home of all my pains! Its every nook and cranny is clogged with the sounds of my agony.

1090

What now? Where will my next mouthful come from? Without my bow and arrows what hope do I have of getting a bite to eat now? And from where?

Ah, you poor, unlucky man!

Come now, birds of the sky. Come, you poor timid creatures! You used to be afraid of me once. Now you can fly through the whistling breeze freely. I can no longer catch you.

Chorus:

It was all your own fault, you poor, miserable man!

Chorus:

It was your own choice!

Chorus:

No force stronger than you has forced this upon you, Philoctetes!

Chorus:

You could have taken the wise path but, no, you chose that of a fool.

Chorus:

You were the one who chose the worse fate of the two offered to you.

Philoctetes:

Pitiful man! Miserable man, beaten by despair!

Now I must live alone and friendless. Now I must die here!

No more will I be bringing home food.

1110

No longer will my powerful hands be able to use my flying arrows.

I was tricked, betrayed by the deceitful words uttered by a man I've never suspected.

How I wish to see the man who conjured up this plot, suffer my suffering for as long as I have!

Chorus:

That man was not I. The treachery was not mine.

1120

Chorus:

Your fate is the will of the gods. Be angry at them, Philoctetes and let me not lose your friendship.

Philoctetes:

What a terrible insult!

I can see him now!

That shameful man, sitting by the shore of the sea's grey waters, laughing at me as he arrogantly brandishes about my bow, my poor bow, my livelihood, the bow that no other man has ever held in his hands!

Oh, my beloved bow! You were torn out of the hands that loved you!

1130

Dear bow! If you could feel, you would feel the sadness that Heracles' old friend feels because he'll never be able to use you again!

Now you will be in the hands of another master, a sly man, a man cursed by all the gods and there you will see true evil, true treachery.

There, my bow, you will see the man who has spun a thousand shameful deeds, deeds of deceit, deeds of torture. A brutal enemy!

1140

Chorus:

It is proper that a man should defend his rights but he should do so without his tongue spitting out bitter insults and hatred. That man, Odysseus, is simply like any one of many men other who will do what they are ordered to do by others...

Chorus:

...for the good of all of the rest of the men.

Philoctetes:

Oh, you winged birds!

Oh, you tribes of joyful beasts, inhabitants of this island's rocky mountains!

You'll never need to rush away from your lairs in fear of me again!

The bow and arrows that once protected me are no longer in my own hands.

Oh, misery!

Come, all you beasts, come when you feel like it. Come and take your revenge! Come and stuff your mouths full of my trembling flesh. No need for you to fear me any more. See? I am lame.

Come! I shall abandon life very soon. How could I possibly live like this?

1160

Who will feed me? The wind? Who can live off the wind? Who can live bereft of things that the nurturing Earth provides?

Chorus:

In Heavens' name, Philoctetes! If you have any respect for strangers, go to him, approach him! He has come to you with kindness, approach him and listen to him!

Chorus:

Listen to him, Philoctetes!

Chorus:

Believe him when he says that you can escape your miserable fate.

Chorus:

This disease sucks your life away, Philoctetes.

Chorus:

Impossible for anyone to bear it...

Chorus:

To bear its endless agony!

1169

Philoctetes:

Ah! Ah! You have reminded me of my pain again!

Ah!

Why bring this endless pain up again?

Ah!

You, you who are the kindest of all those that came here.

Why destroy me like this? Why torture me so much?

Chorus:

What are you talking about?

Philoctetes:

You thought you'd take me back to that hateful city! To Troy!

Chorus:

I think it would best for you!

Philoctetes:

Get away from me!

Chorus:

Delighted to obey your orders, sir!

Men, let's go! Back to our jobs on the ship, men!

1181

Philoctetes: *Pleading*

Hang on, hang on! Don't go! In the name of Zeus, don't leave!

Chorus:

All right, all right, calm down!

Philoctetes:

My friends, stay! Stay, please!

Chorus:

What's up?

Philoctetes:

Oh, miserable, miserable Fate! Miserable foot! What am I to do with you?

How can I live with you for the rest of my life? Oh, miserable Fate!

Strangers, please, please come back to me!

1191

Chorus:

What is it you want us to do now? One minute go, the next stay...

Philoctetes:

Insane speech comes with intense storms of pain, my friends.

Please bear with me.

Chorus:

Come, then! Come with us, you poor creature!

Philoctetes:

Never! No, never!

Of that you can be certain! Not even if the Lord of Lightning, not even if Zeus himself, came down

with his blazing thunderbolts and burned me whole!

1200

Troy be damned! Her and all those heartless men beneath her soil who've abandoned me here with this tormenting foot! Friends, grant me this one wish!

Chorus:

Tell us!

Philoctetes:

Hand me a sword, or an axe, or an arrow, if you have one!

Chorus:

To do what with it?

Philoctetes:

To cut off my head with it! My head and every limb on my body!

To kill myself. To die! That is my only wish now!

1210

Chorus:

But why?

Philoctetes:

So I can look for my father!

Chorus:

Look for your father? Where?

Philoctetes:

In Hades, friends. My father is longer in the world where the Sun lights the day.

Oh, my dear city! My homeland! I wish I could see you again!

Miserable Fate! I have left your sacred streams behind to go and help those Greeks.

I am nothing now.

Chorus:

Men, we should have gone back to our ship a long time ago!

Chorus:

Ah! Here come Odysseus and the son of Achilles!

Enter Odysseus and Neoptolemos with their personal guards. Neoptolemos seems to be hurrying.

Philoctetes sees them and goes back into his cave.

1218

Odysseus: *To Neoptolemos*

Tell me why you're rushing back here.

Neoptolemos:

To fix the mistake I've made before.

Odysseus:

Must be something terrible! What mistake is that?

Neoptolemos:

The mistake that I've made was to listen to you and to the rest of the army!

Odysseus:

But what do you think you did that was wrong?

Neoptolemos:

I have done something treacherous! I have deceived a man in a most shameful and treacherous way!

Odysseus:

What man are you talking about, son?

Oh, no! What new shock are you planning to give me now?

1230

Neoptolemos:

Nothing shocking but I think the son of Poetas must –

Odysseus:

By Zeus!

What about him? What are you going to do, son? Now I'm beginning to worry.

Neoptolemos: *Shakes the bow at him*

I have taken this bow from him, that's what! And now, again –

Odysseus:

What? What about it? What are you saying?

Oh, no! By Zeus, you're not going to give it back to him, are you?

Neoptolemos:

Yes, I'm giving it back to him because I took it from him by shameful treachery! I had no right to do that.

Odysseus:

Please! Please, son! In Heaven's name! Tell me you're playing games with me!

Neoptolemos:

Yes, if by that you mean I'm telling the truth!

Odysseus:

Son of Achilles! Speak clearly! The things that come out of your mouth...

Neoptolemos:

Do you want me to repeat these words over and over again?

Odysseus:

No, I didn't even want to hear them the first time.

1240

Neoptolemos:

Well, you've now heard them and you've heard them all!

Odysseus:

There is someone...

There is someone who can stop you doing this!

Neoptolemos:

What are you saying?

Stop me? Who'll do that?

Odysseus:

To begin with, I and the whole of the Greek army!

Neoptolemos:

So much wisdom, Odysseus, yet your words are stupid!

Odysseus:

And you, neither your words nor your deed are wise.

Neoptolemos:

No need for them to be wise if they are just.

Odysseus:

Just? Is it just that you give back what you've taken with the help of my wisdom?

Neoptolemos:

Yes, it is. It is just that I should correct a shameful deed that I have committed.

1250

Odysseus:

Aren't you afraid of the Greek army, to do a thing like this?

Neoptolemos:

Justice is on my side, so I'm not afraid of you or your army.

Odysseus:

Fear it! (*Only the word "fear" is legible in this line of the manuscript*)

Neoptolemos:

Your threats won't stop me!

Odysseus:

In that case, we will stop fighting against the Trojans and start fighting against you!

Neoptolemos:

I'll worry about that when it happens.

Odysseus: *Reaches for his sword*

Boy, watch my right hand! It's moving towards my sword!

Neoptolemos: *Also reaches for his sword. All the guards reach out for theirs.*

And you watch my hand as it does the same and just as fast.

Odysseus: *Retreating cowardly*

All right! I'll let it go for now. I'm off to tell the whole army about this.

They'll be the ones who'll apply your punishment.

Neoptolemos:

Wise move. More wise moves like this and, perhaps you won't be stepping into any more trouble in the future!

Exit Odysseus. Neoptolemos calls out to Philoctetes

Philoctetes!

Son of Poetas! Come out! Come out of this rock cave of yours!

Enter Philoctetes

1263

Philoctetes:

What is it now? What's all this noise outside my cave?

Who's calling me? What is it you want strangers?

Something awful, no doubt.

Sees Neoptolemos

Ah! It's you! And you're here to add even more misery to the misery you've already given me!

Neoptolemos:

No, friend. Don't be afraid. Listen to what I have to tell you first.

Philoctetes:

Afraid? Of course I am afraid! You've tricked me once with your pretty words and you're going to trick me again. Misery upon misery!

1270

Neoptolemos:

Is it not possible for someone to change his mind?

Philoctetes:

That's how you were talking the last time and that's how you stole my bow!

Fancy words hiding a treacherous deed!

Neoptolemos:

Not any more, my friend but first, I want to hear if you've decided to stay here or to come with us.

Philoctetes:

Enough! No more words from you!

Whatever you say will be said in vain!

Neoptolemos:

Are you sure about that?

Philoctetes:

Absolutely sure!

Neoptolemos:

I'd rather you weren't. I'd rather I could persuade you to change your mind but if that can't be done, well, then, I'll shut up about it right now.

1281

Philoctetes:

You're wasting your time talking to me.

My ears are not for the likes of someone who has stolen my livelihood with treachery and tricks! How dare you give me advice? You, the ignoble son of a most noble father!

Curses to you all! Curses to the Atreus brothers and to Laertes' son and to you!

Neoptolemos:

Enough with your curses! Here!

Come and take your bow from my own hand!

Philoctetes:

What? What did you say? Is this another foul trick?

Neoptolemos:

I swear by the most sacred majesty of Almighty Zeus!

1290

Philoctetes:

Oh, the welcoming words you utter!

If only they were true!

Neoptolemos:

Let the deed convince you!

Here, come! Give me your right hand and take it. Be the master of your own bow again!

Neoptolemos hands the bow and arrows to Philoctetes who handles them with affection.

Odysseus suddenly appears.

Odysseus:

No! I forbid it! May the gods be my witness! In the name of the Atreus brothers and of the whole fleet, I forbid it!

Philoctetes:

Whose voice is that, my boy? Was it Odysseus I heard?

Odysseus: *Runs closer to Philoctetes*

Correct! And here I am, closer to you now.

It is I who'll drag you to Troy by force, whatever Achilles' son says.

Philoctetes: *Quickly puts an arrow to the bow and aims at Odysseus*

Not so easily, you won't. Not if this arrow flies straight!

1300

Neoptolemos: *Grabs Philoctetes' arm*

No, no, old man! Please! In Heaven's name, don't shoot!

Philoctetes:

Let go of my arm, dear boy!

Neoptolemos:

No, no! I won't let go!

Exit Odysseus in disgust and cowardice.

Philoctetes: *Relaxes his grip on the bow after Odysseus leaves*

Ah! Why did you stop me from killing that miserable enemy of mine? My bow would have done the trick.

Neoptolemos:

But that would not be good for either of us.

Philoctetes:

One thing is certain, though, my boy! These leaders of the army, these false ambassadors of the Greeks are only brave with words. In battle they are nothing but cowards!

Neoptolemos:

So, then, old man! Now that you have the bow and the arrows, you have no reason to blame me for anything or to be angry with me.

1310

Philoctetes:

Yes, that is true.

You've shown your true nature now, my boy. You are truly the son of Achilles and not of Sisyphus. Achilles whose fame was the greatest of all men while alive and is still great now, even though he's dead.

Neoptolemos:

Your praises of me and my father please me but please listen to what I want from you. All mortals, old man, are obliged to put up with the fortunes that the gods impose upon them but those mortals who are the victims of their own, self-inflicted pains, like the one you're suffering, well, it would be wrong for anyone to sympathise with you or to feel sorry for you.

1320

You've become like a wild savage. You listen to no one's advice, even if that advice is genuine and is given for your own good. You turn your back on everyone who wants to help you and treat them as though they're your personal enemy, as if they want to harm you in some way.

But I'll tell you something just the same, my friend and I'll call on Zeus, the protector of oaths to be my witness so that you will listen carefully and remember it well!

This tormenting pain that you have has been inflicted upon you by the gods as a punishment. You've accidentally walked far too close to the guard of the roofless temple of Athena Chryse, her hidden snake. Therefore, and you better believe this, you'll never get relief from this pain. For as long as the sun rises on one side of the Earth and sets on the other you will have to endure it.

1331

Your only remedy lies in your coming over to Troy -of your own free will- to meet with the sons of the god of healing, Asclepius. They are on our side and they will be able to cure you. Then, with the help of that bow and with my help, you'll be discovered to be the destroyer of Troy's tall towers.

But let me first tell you how I know all this.

In our camp, we have a famous Trojan prophet, the best of them all, called Helenus. It is he who said, with the utmost certainty, that all this will definitely happen. He also said that Troy's fate is that the whole city will fall this very summer and that if he is wrong about this, then he gives us his permission to kill him.

1342

So, Philoctetes! Now that you know this, change your mind!

Imagine the glory of being the best of all the Greeks!

And then, you'll be in the hands of healers! Not only that but, by taking Troy, you'll become famous.

Troy, Philoctetes! Troy, the cause of all our pains!

Philoctetes:

Hateful life!

Why keep me above the ground, alive still? Why not let me go down to Hades?

Miserable man!

1350

What should I do now? How can I not listen to this man's words when he so kindly gives me such good advice?

I must relent. But then, how could I hold my head high in the daylight after behaving like this? Who will ever turn to me and speak with me?

And you, eyes of mine: After witnessing all that's happened to me, how could you endure seeing me next to the Atreus brothers, the men who caused my destruction? Or with that other hateful man, Odysseus, the son of Laertes?

No, what tortures me is not the pains of the past but the pains that I see coming to me in the future, at their evil hands.

1360

Minds that spawn evil deeds will continue to spawn evil deeds and that's why I'm worried about you, my boy. You should not go back to Troy and you should also try to keep me away from that place, as well.

These men have insulted you by stealing from you your father's treasure. Will you go and fight alongside them after that and force me to do the same as well?

No, my boy, I'll never do that!

Instead, you should do what you swore to do: take me home and take yourself to Skyros. Stay there and leave these miserable creatures to die miserably!

1370

That way you'll gain the gratitude of two people: me and your father.

Also, people will not think that you, yourself, are like those evil creatures you'd be helping.

Neoptolemos:

Wise words, Philoctetes but I still want you to have some faith in the gods and in my words and let us sail away from here, together, as friends.

Philoctetes:

Sail to Troy? With this lousy foot? To that cursed son of Atreus?

Neoptolemos:

No, to those who'll save you from your disease and stop the agony of this rotting foot of yours!

1380

Philoctetes:

What a dreadful tale you tell! What are you talking about?

Neoptolemos:

As I see it, if this were to happen, this would be good for both of us.

Philoctetes:

Aren't you ashamed of the gods by saying such things?

Neoptolemos:

Ashamed? Why be ashamed of helping friends?

Philoctetes:

And you're saying all this, not to help the Atreus men but to help me, is that right?

Neoptolemos:

I am your friend, so I am saying it to help you, yes!

Philoctetes:

How can that be, if you're trying to hand me over to my enemies?

Neoptolemos:

My friend, learn not to be so proud when you're in the grips of such misery!

Philoctetes:

You'll ruin me with your talk. That much I have already learnt!

Neoptolemos:

No, not me. I won't be ruining you. I just don't think you understand.

1390

Philoctetes:

I understand that it was Atreus' sons who dumped me out here!

Neoptolemos:

Well, then. Let's see if, after dumping you out here they're not going to save you.

Philoctetes:

No! Never. I'll never go to Troy, not if I can help it!

Neoptolemos:

So what should I do now? Nothing I say can convince you.

Very well, then. Now, I'll shut up and let you go on with your life, just as before, with no hope of being saved.

Philoctetes:

My boy, let me suffer what I must suffer but deliver what you've promised me when you shook my right hand: Take me back to my country! Come on, son, hurry and don't keep reminding me of Troy. I've spilled enough tears over her.

1402

Neoptolemos:

All right then! If that's what you want, let's go!

Philoctetes:

Oh! The words of a noble soul!

Neoptolemos: *Stretching his hand out to him*

Come then. Steady now. Walk carefully behind me.

Philoctetes:

I'll do my best.

After a couple of steps, Neoptolemos stops.

Neoptolemos:

But, how will I ever manage to escape the anger of the Atreus brothers?

Philoctetes:

Don't worry about that.

Neoptolemos:

What if they come and destroy my country?

Philoctetes:

I'll be there, on the scene...

Neoptolemos:

What help can you give?

Philoctetes:

Heracles' arrows will...

Neoptolemos:

What about them?

Philoctetes:

They will stop the brothers from coming anywhere near the borders of your land.

Neoptolemos:

But if your deeds reflect your words... All right. Come, kiss this ground and let us go!

As Philoctetes begins to do so, the ghost of Heracles appears

1409

Heracles:

Not yet, son of Poëas! Not until you've heard my words and not until you can say that your ears have heard and your eyes have seen this vision of Heracles.

I have left my home in Heaven, Philoctetes, to come here and tell you what Zeus plans for you and to stop you from embarking on this voyage to your home.

So listen carefully to what I have to tell you!

First, though, let me tell you of my life's turns of fortune. Let me tell you of all the labours I had to perform and survive before I earned this immortal glory you see now.

1421

Your own destiny, too, Philoctetes, is the same. Of that you can be certain.

After these tormenting labours you are enduring now, you, too, will gain a life of glory.

You will follow this man to the city of Troy where you will be cured of this dreadful disease. After that, you will be declared the bravest in the army since you will have killed Paris, the cause of these troubles and destroyed Troy. The taking of that city, an act that will let you bring the greatest spoils of war to the highest meadows of Oeta, your home, your father, Poëas.

1430

As for those spoils that the army awards you, you will take those and burn them on my sacred pyre, in honour of my bow.

And to you too, Neoptolemos, I must give some advice. You, alone, without this man's help cannot take Troy. Nor can he without your help, so you must look after each other like a pair of lions in the

wild.

Philoctetes, I will send Asclepius down to Troy to heal your disease and end your agony.

1440

It is fated that Troy will be taken once again with the aid of that bow.

Take care, though, that when you're destroying the city you pay due reverence to the gods because that, above anything else, is what Zeus, my father, considers important. To him, all else takes second place to the reverence of gods.

Reverence for the gods does not die when the mortals die but it goes on eternally, whether man is alive or dead.

Philoctetes:

Heracles! You have brought to me the voice I've longed to hear!

You have appeared before me, at last! I will not disobey you, Heracles!

Neoptolemos:

I, too will obey your commands!

The sound of winds slowly raising

Heracles:

Well, then. There's no time to delay the act. The winds are up and the time for sailing is now.

1451

Philoctetes:

Well then, now that I am leaving, let me say a few final words to this land!

Farewell to you, my cave, my haven!

Farewell to you, nymphs of the wet meadows!

Farewell to you, shores upon which the thunderous ocean crashes and whose waters, driven by the North wind, often drenched my head!

Farewell to you, too, Hermes' mountain, who so often sent back to me the echo of the groans I made as I was battered by the storms!

Farewell to you, too, Springs and you, too, Lycian well!

Now we leave you all, a hope that I never dared hope it would be realised.

Farewell to you, too, Lemnos, a land, surrounded by the sea!

Send me, Lemnos, with well-meaning breezes, to wherever Almighty Fate, the wisdom of friends and the will of the Heavens declared that I must go.

The sound of the winds raises.

1469

Chorus:

Come, let us all go with a prayer to the nymphs of the sea, to help us get home safely.

Exit all

**END OF SOPHOCLES'
"PHILOCTETES"**