

EURIPIDES

HERACLES AND OTHER PLAYS

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PENGUIN BOOKS

PREFACE TO *HELEN*

Helen, the beautiful daughter of Zeus and the mortal woman Leda, was the cause of the Trojan war, according to the version of the myth presupposed by the *Iliad* and most later versions. The Trojan Paris, who judged Aphrodite the fairest of the goddesses competing for the title, was not an impartial judge, for Aphrodite had bribed him with the promise that she would reward him with the most beautiful of all mortal women. Since Helen was already the wife to the Greek Menelaus, the result was war between the Greeks and the Trojans. Ultimately Paris was killed, the Greeks won the war and Menelaus took Helen away with him back to Sparta, though they only reached home after lengthy wanderings. According to the fourth book of the *Odyssey*, those wanderings did involve journeyings almost as far as Egypt, and Menelaus had to consult Proteus, the old man of the sea, in order to find his way home again.

This is the familiar version, the version which with some variations is central to the Greek tradition. Among the variables is Helen's own personality: she could be presented as a victim of Aphrodite, constantly regretting her fate (as in the *Iliad*), or as a shallow, vain adulteress (as in Euripides' own *Trojan Women*). But a different tradition is attested in the poetry (now lost) of Stesichorus, a lyric poet of the sixth century B.C. In a famous passage which survives in later quotations, Stesichorus addressed Helen saying, 'It is not true, the tale. You did not go in the well-benched ships; you did not come to Pergama of Troy.' According to these later sources, Stesichorus is the source from whom Euripides drew the tale that a phantom went to Troy in Helen's place. The historian Herodotus also discusses Helen, from the point of view of a sceptic who is reluctant to accept that a ten-year war was fought and a

city destroyed for the sake of a woman. According to his account, Helen was detained in Egypt and the Trojans had no choice but to fight on, for they could not return the woman when the Greeks demanded her (Herodotus 2.112-20). This is a rationalizing version, eliminating the phantom but retaining the notion that Helen in fact did not go to Troy.

Euripides had alluded to the alternative tradition in passing, near the end of his *Electra* (1280-83), which is probably a few years earlier than *Helen*. In this play he adopts it whole-heartedly, and takes obvious pleasure in developing the paradoxes of the situation, as when Menelaus ponders in bewilderment whether there can be a man called Zeus in Egypt who could be father to a different Helen (483ff.). There are advantages of characterization: Helen makes a more intriguing central figure if she is no simple adulteress but a woman fraught with undeserved guilt and undesired responsibility for the futile war. Euripides had put Helen on stage before, but only in minor roles; here she is central, but a misunderstood and virtuous woman. There are advantages in the unfolding of the plot: before Helen and Menelaus can be reunited, he has to be freed from his delusion and induced to recognize her for who she really is. There is ingenious new use of familiar plot-motifs: the story of the woman imprisoned in a foreign land, longing for rescue but unable to return to Greece or to send a message there, closely resembles the plot of *Iphigenia among the Taurians*. Other elements of the play are also part of Euripides' stock in trade: the suppliant's refuge, the recognition duet, the plot to escape, the naïve barbarian. *Helen* shows a remarkable self-consciousness in its bold redeployment of literary devices which were already well known as typically Euripidean. It is not surprising that Aristophanes took the opportunity the following year to parody the play mercilessly in his own *Women at the Thesmophoria*. The Euripidean drama had already gone some way towards parodying a 'typical' Euripidean escape-plot: did Aristophanes feel that tragedy was beginning to poach on comedy's territory?

The alternative tradition raises worrying questions which may feed back into reflection on the more orthodox mythology of the war, and indeed on contemporary life. 'Then we sweated away for no reason to win a phantom?' asks Menelaus' subordinate in aggrieved incredulity

at line 705 of this play. Why did the Greeks fight the Trojan war? What did they gain in the end? What indeed are the Greeks fighting for centuries later, in the Peloponnesian war which was still in progress when *Helen* was produced? These questions are implicit in the play, sometimes aired explicitly. They are not explored with the intensity that might have been expected, in this genre or from the poet of the *Trojan Women*; rather, they are presented through a witty and ingenious, innovative plot which charms and entertains the audience without entirely obscuring the darker implications of the dramatic situation.

Helen has often puzzled modern audiences and critics, poised as it is between the serious and the comical. Some have sought to solve the critical issue by labels: melodrama, tragi-comedy, escapist drama. But although *Helen* undoubtedly has many humorous touches (not least the confrontation of the self-important Menelaus, dressed in rags, with the bad-tempered door-keeper who sends him packing), it would be an unsatisfying reading that excluded the play's more serious aspects. Absurd the premises of the play may be, but it remains the case that many men have died and a whole society has been wiped out for no good reason; the discovery of the truth about the phantom cannot restore Teucer's brother or Helen's mother. The glamour of the war is reduced: Menelaus seems ridiculous in his boastfulness about his achievements on the Trojan plain. When the chorus, near the end of the play, lament the folly of warfare in general, this is suited to their character and situation, but it is difficult not to suppose that these lines spoke powerfully to a war-wearied generation (1151-64). Different members of the Athenian audience might enjoy the play as a delightful entertainment which offered a welcome distraction from their troubles, or they might ponder the serious point that seems to be hinted at in the myth of the phantom Helen – that all such goals are illusion, and that the profits of human ambition dissolve when gained. Euripides allows them, and us, to stress whichever side we find more congenial.

CHARACTERS

HELEN

TEUCER, *a Greek survivor of the Trojan war*

CHORUS *of captive Spartan women*

MENELAUS, *husband of Helen*

OLD WOMAN, *keeper of the palace gates*

SERVANT, *an elderly member of Menelaus' crew*

THEONOE, *a prophetess, sister of Theoclymenus*

THEOCLYMENUS, *king of Egypt and successor of Proteus*

MESSENGER, *servant of Theoclymenus*

DIOSCURI, *the gods Castor and Pollux, sons of Zeus and
brothers of Helen*

[The scene is an unspecified settlement in northern Egypt, near the mouth of the Nile. In front stand the palace of the king and, to the left of the central double-doors, the tomb of Proteus, where HELEN has taken sanctuary.]

HELEN: Here flow the lovely virgin streams of the Nile. When the white snows melt, he slakes the soil of Egypt's plain, bringing to the land the water that heaven's rain withholds.¹ While he lived, the king of this land was Proteus, who married one of the sea-nymphs, Psamathe, one-time bride of Aeacus. In this palace she gave birth to two children, a boy, Theoclymenus, and a noble maid, called Eido in her childhood, her mother's pride and joy. But when she grew to womanhood and was ripe for marriage, they gave her the name Theonoe, as she possessed divine knowledge of all things present and to come, a gift she inherited from her grandfather Nereus.²

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My homeland, one of no less renown, is not here; it is Sparta, and my father was Tyndareus.³ It is true there is a story that Zeus assumed the form of a swan and, being pursued by an eagle, flew for refuge into my mother Leda's lap, where he stole, together with her trust, her maidenhood. Such is my origin, if the tale be true. Helen is my name. I will now share with you the story of my misfortunes.

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Rivals in beauty, they came to Ida's glen to the home of Paris, the three goddesses – Hera, the Cyprian and the maiden daughter of Zeus – each one wishing to be judged first in the contest.⁴ The Cyprian won; she lured Paris with the bait of my beauty – if there is any beauty in misfortune – and the prospect

of my hand in marriage. And so Paris of Ida quit his cattle-shed⁵
 and came to Sparta to claim me as his bride. But Hera was
 30 vexed at not defeating the other goddesses. She turned my
 marriage to Paris to thin air and presented to King Priam's son
 not me but a living image she had made in my likeness,
 fashioned from the air of heaven.⁶ He idly fancied that he held
 me in his arms, but he did not: what he held was an empty
 illusion.

Again the plans of Zeus work to reinforce these sorrows.⁷
 He caused the land of Greece to clash in war with the wretched
 40 Trojans, to lighten Mother Earth's vast burden of mortals, and
 to bring fame to the greatest warrior of Greece. When Trojans
 laboured in the field of battle and Greeks competed for the
 prize, it was not for me they fought, but my name alone.
 Hermes took me up, wrapped in a cloud, and, transporting me
 amid the hidden vaults of aether – Zeus had not forgotten me
 – he set me down here in the palace of Proteus, judging him
 to be the most virtuous of all mortals, so that I might keep my
 honour as Menelaus' wife unsullied. Here, then, I have lived,
 50 while my unfortunate husband mustered an army and sailed
 off to Troy's walled town to hunt down his stolen wife. Many
 a warrior met his end by Scamander's streams on my account;
 and I, who have suffered so much, have curses heaped on me,
 while men think I betrayed my husband and involved Greeks
 in a costly war.

Why, then, am I still living? Because I have been given this
 assurance by the god Hermes: once my husband learns that I
 did not go to Troy, I will yet live at his side in Sparta's famous
 60 land, provided that I do not take a lover. While Proteus saw
 the sunlight, my honour was unsullied; but now that he lies
 dead, wrapped in Earth's darkness, his son Theoclymenus
 desires my hand in marriage with a hunter's passion. Because I
 honour my husband of all these years, I lie here as a suppliant⁸
 at the tomb of Proteus, asking that he keep me chaste for my
 wedded lord; in Greece my name may be reviled but here I
 will not have my body so disgraced.

[TEUCER enters from the sea-coast to the spectator's right. At first he is unaware of HELEN.]

TEUCER: This is an impressive palace – who is its master? That royal circuit and corniced architecture make it a residence to compare with Plutus' own!⁹

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[He sees HELEN at the tomb.] Ah! You gods, what sight is this? It is that loathsome woman, her very image, the murderous creature who brought ruin on me and all the Greeks! How like Helen you are – oh, may the gods detest you for it! If this were not foreign soil I was standing on, this fine arrow of mine would have taken your life in payment for your resemblance to the daughter of Zeus!

HELEN: My misguided fellow, who are you? Why do you turn away from me and hate me because of that woman's misfortunes?

TEUCER: I made a mistake; I should not have allowed my anger to get the better of me like that. All Greece feels hatred for the daughter of Zeus. Please excuse my words, lady.

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HELEN: Who are you? What land have you left to voyage to this country?

TEUCER: I am one of the wretched Greeks, lady . . .

HELEN: Ah, no wonder, then, that you hate Helen!

TEUCER: . . . and I am an exile, banished from my native soil.

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HELEN: Poor man! Who has driven you from your country?

TEUCER: Telamon, my father; can any man be closer to me in blood?

HELEN: What reason had he? Something terrible must lie behind his action.

TEUCER: Ajax my brother died at Troy and so brought ruin on me.

HELEN: How? It wasn't your sword, surely, that robbed him of life?

TEUCER: It was his own sword and his own action that killed him.

HELEN: Had he lost his senses? No sane man would have dared such a deed!

TEUCER: You have heard of Achilles, Peleus' son?

HELEN: Yes; he came once as one of Helen's suitors, I am told.

100 TEUCER: He died and became the cause of a dispute between his fellow warriors over his armour.¹⁰

HELEN: And how did that prove harmful to Ajax?

TEUCER: Another man was awarded the armour, and so he ended his life.

HELEN: So your own troubles stem from his misfortune?

TEUCER: Yes; because I was not at his side to share his death.

HELEN: Then you too went to Troy's glorious city, stranger?

TEUCER: Yes, and I played my part in its sacking, though the price was my own ruin.

HELEN: Is it now burnt and levelled?

TEUCER: Aye; you cannot make out even a trace of where the walls stood.

HELEN: O Helen, you wretch, you are the cause of the Trojans' ruin!

110 TEUCER: And the Greeks' too; she is disaster's architect.

HELEN: How long is it since the city was laid waste?

TEUCER: Nearly seven years have come round and passed on their way.

HELEN: And before that how long did you spend at Troy?

TEUCER: Moon upon moon, ten long years in all.

HELEN: And did you capture her, the woman of Sparta?

TEUCER: Menelaus took her and dragged her off by the hair.

HELEN: Did you set eyes on the wretched woman or do you speak from hearsay?

TEUCER: I saw her as clearly as my eyes see you now.

HELEN: But consider: could she have been something that the gods made you all imagine?

120 TEUCER: Enough of her; talk on another subject.

HELEN: Is Menelaus now in his home, with his wife?

TEUCER: He is not in Argos or by Eurotas' stream.

HELEN: Ah, that is unwelcome news for those it affects.

TEUCER: In fact, he is reported as having vanished, and his wife with him.

HELEN: Not all the Greeks sailed home together, then?

TEUCER: They did, but a storm drove them all in different directions.¹¹

HELEN: What waters were they sailing when it broke?

TEUCER: They were in mid-Aegean, halfway in their crossing. 130

HELEN: And since that time no one knows if Menelaus has made land?

TEUCER: No one; but the word throughout Greece is that he is dead.

HELEN [*aside*]: I am ruined! [*To TEUCER again*] And the daughter of Thestios, is she alive?

TEUCER: Leda, you mean? No, she is dead and gone.

HELEN: It wasn't Helen's infamy, was it, that drove her to death?

TEUCER: Yes; the story is that the noble lady hanged herself.

HELEN: And her sons by Tyndareus, are they alive or not?

TEUCER: They are dead and not dead; two accounts exist.¹²

HELEN: Which is the more reliable? [*Aside*] Oh, this tale of woe breaks my heart!

TEUCER: Men say they have been translated to the stars and are gods. 140

HELEN: That is welcome news! But what is the other version?

TEUCER: That their sister's conduct made them end their lives with the sword. But enough of these stories; I have no wish to weep twice over. It was my desire to see the prophetess Theonoe that brought me to this royal dwelling. Will you act as my intermediary? I wish to gain her inspired guidance on how to steer a favourable course to the isle of Cyprus, for there, Apollo's oracle has said, I am to settle and give the name of Salamis to my new home, in remembrance of the island of my birth.¹³ 150

HELEN: The voyage will make this clear to you, sir, without help. But you must leave this land and take flight before its ruler, the son of Proteus, sees you. For the present he is away, hunting wild beasts with the help of his hounds, keen for blood. He executes any Greek stranger¹⁴ who falls into his

hands. As to why he does this, do not try to find out; you will hear nothing from my lips. What good would it do you?

160 TEUCER: Good advice, my lady, and thank you. I pray the gods may reward you for your generous spirit. You may resemble Helen in appearance but in heart you are not like her, indeed very different. May she never reach the waters of Eurotas but come to a foul end! But for you, my lady, my prayer is unending prosperity!

[TEUCER exits in haste. HELEN now sings of her sorrow and is joined after the first stanza by the CHORUS in a lyric exchange.¹⁵]

HELEN: Oh, these are great sorrows I launch upon and great is the pity they merit! What manner of lamentation should I utter, what inspiration seek for my tears, my dirge, my anguish? Ah, me!

170 [Strophe:] Come, you Sirens,¹⁶ winged maids, virgin daughters of Earth, come, I pray, bearing the Libyan flute or pipes or lyres to blend with my lament, with tears to suit my cries of sorrow, grief matching grief, song matching song! Oh, send me your music to harmonize with my laments, music of death, so that down in her palace of night Persephone may receive from me as my tribute a tearful hymn for the dead and departed!

[Enter CHORUS.]

180 CHORUS [Antistrophe]: By the pool's dark surface, on the curling spring grass, it happened I was spreading¹⁷ my crimson robes to dry them in the warmth of the sun's golden rays, hard by the young reeds. From there it was I heard a piteous sound, a song of sorrow not fit for any lyre, a cry of grief and pain such as some river-nymph might utter when, caught in the depths of a rocky cavern, she succumbs, screaming, to the lust of Pan.

190 HELEN [Strophe]: Daughters of Greece, captives of a foreign fleet, a Greek sailor has come, has come,¹⁸ bringing with him tears to crown my tears. Troy lies in ruins, consigned to enemy fire, and blame falls on me, the death of warriors past number, and on my name, author of untold woe. Leda is dead by her own hands; she hanged herself in
200 anguish at my shame. My husband, after all his wanderings on the deep, has perished and is gone. Castor and his brother, twin glory of

my homeland, have vanished, vanished, leaving the plain that echoed to their horses' hoofs and the wrestling ground by reedy Eurotas where their fellows exercised their young limbs.

210

CHORUS [Antistrophe]: *Ah, lady, I pity you for your fate and woeful destiny! A life not worth the living fell to you that day when, gleaming through the aether, Zeus, clothed in the snow-white feathers of a swan, cast his seed in your mother's womb! What misery has not afflicted you? What have you not endured all through your life? Your mother is no more; good fortune has deserted your two brothers, beloved children of Zeus; the land of your birth is denied your sight; the talk of every town is that you, my lady, have been given in marriage to a foreigner; your own husband's life is lost at sea among the ocean waves, and never again will you bring joy to your father's palace and the Lady of the Bronze Temple.¹⁹*

HELEN [Epode]: *Ah, who on earth was he, Trojan or son of Greece, whose hand felled the pine whose timbers would bring tears to Troy?²⁰ From these was fashioned the accursed ship that Priam's son with his eastern oarsmen sailed to my home, and sharing the voyage came the Cyprian, murderous goddess, full of wiles, bringing death to the sons of Danaus. Oh, how wretched, how unfortunate am I!*

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Then Hera who sits on her throne of gold, august bedfellow of Zeus, dispatched the swift-footed son of Maia,²¹ who found me gathering fresh rose petals in my dress to take as an offering to Athena of the Bronze House in her temple. Seizing me, he carried me through the air to this unhappy land, and so established discord, miserable discord, between Greece and the sons of Priam. But my name, lingering by Simois' water, is falsely slandered.

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CHORUS-LEADER: *Your lot is a miserable one, I know, but your best course lies in bearing life's burdens as lightly as possible.*

HELEN: *Good women, friends, what fate am I chained to? Did my mother bring me into the world for people to stare at as a freak? My life has certainly been grotesque, and the troubles I have, partly thanks to Hera, partly to my beauty. Oh, if only I could be wiped out like a painted picture and start afresh with a plainer look instead of this beauty! Then the Greeks could*

260

forget the ill fate I now labour under and recall what does me credit, as they now remember what does not!

When you set your sights on one ambition and then are cheated of this by the gods, it is hard to bear but must be endured. Yet I am weighed down by sorrows in battalions. 270 Firstly, I have done nothing wrong and yet my name is reviled. When someone is punished though innocent of crime, it is a worse affliction than getting his just deserts. Then, the gods have transplanted me from my homeland to an exotic race, where I live bereft of friends, a free woman no longer but instead a slave; for in a land of this sort everyone is a slave apart from one man.²² There was one anchor alone which secured my fortunes, the hope that my husband would one day return and free me from my troubles. But he is dead and so that hope 280 is no more. My mother has perished, and men say I am her murderer; this guilt does, however guiltlessly, belong to me. As for my daughter, the pride and joy of her home and her mother, she has no husband and grows grey in virginity.²³ The two Dioscuri, Zeus' sons, as men call them, are gone. Since my life is so utterly wretched, I am as good as dead, though I [290] still live.

Why, then, should I continue with life? What fate remains for me? To exchange this misery for marriage and live with a man of foreign birth, sitting at a bountiful table? No; when a woman finds her husband offensive, her own looks offend her [300] as well. This is how low I have sunk in my desperation: other women find their beauty a blessing, but mine has only brought ruin!

CHORUS-LEADER: Helen, it may be wrong to think that the stranger who has come, whoever he may be, has spoken the whole truth.

HELEN: Well, he was clear enough in saying my husband is dead.

CHORUS-LEADER: Many things could be expressed clearly and yet be false.

310 HELEN: Yes, and not so clearly and still be true.

CHORUS-LEADER: You have a fair prospect before you but veer off towards disaster.

HELEN: Fear has me in his net and drives me on to what I dread.

CHORUS-LEADER: Whose goodwill can you count on in the palace here?

HELEN: All of them are my friends, except the one who wants to ensnare me in marriage.

CHORUS-LEADER: This is what you must do: leave the sanctuary of the tomb . . .

HELEN: What are you going to say? What will you advise?

CHORUS-LEADER: . . . and go to the house of Theonoe the all-knowing, daughter of the ocean Nereid, and enquire of her whether your husband still lives or is no more; and when you have clear knowledge of this, then let your tears – of joy or sorrow – flow accordingly. Before you know anything for certain, what will you gain from grief? Do as I advise. I, too, wish to enter her house with you²⁴ and to learn the maid's holy words; women should support one another.

320

[HELEN and the CHORUS now sing in a lyric dialogue that culminates in a monody from HELEN, lamenting Troy's fate and her own.]

HELEN: *Friends, I accept your words of counsel; onward, on into the palace to learn what trials await me within.*

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CHORUS: *I am ready to act; no need for further prompting.*

HELEN: *O wretched day! I shudder – whatever doleful answer will I hear?*

CHORUS: *Dear lady, do not prophesy sorrow yet nor weep too soon!*

HELEN: *My poor husband, what cruel fate has overtaken him? Do his eyes behold the sun's bright course through the heavens and the journeying stars, or does he dwell in endless exile below the earth, companioned by the dead?*

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CHORUS: *Accept the future, whatever may befall, and turn it to your advantage.*

HELEN [not heeding]: *On you I call, Eurotas, swirling green between your reedy banks, by you I swear this oath, if report of my lord's death*

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be true — what can they mean, these veiled tidings? — I will take my own life,²⁵ my neck in a choking noose, swinging high, or else I will drive a sword into myself, its murderous blade eager to make the blood leap forth in slaughter, a swift thrust through the flesh to offer myself as a sacrifice to the three goddesses, and to Priam's son who dwelt once in a cavern on Ida where he kept his cows.

360 CHORUS: *May such horrors fall upon other heads and your own fortunes prosper!*

HELEN: *O Troy, city of sorrow, for deeds never committed you have perished and suffered a piteous end! I was the Cyprian's gift to you, a gift that engendered so much blood, so many tears, anguish and woe past telling, as mothers lost their sons and sisters unweid cut off their hair in honour of the dead, by Phrygian Scamander's stream.*

370 *Throughout the land of Hellas, too, the cry of grief rings loud and shrill, as hands descend on prostrate heads and soft-skinned cheeks grow bloody from raking nails.²⁶*

[*The CHORUS by now has withdrawn into the palace.*]

380 *O blessed Callisto, Arcadian maid, who long ago was loved by Zeus, how much kinder was your fate than mine, though your two limbs became four!²⁷ You took on the guise of a shaggy-limbed creature of the wild, a fierce-eyed beast in shape, a lioness, and thus shed the burden of your grief. And blessed, too, in time gone by was the Titan maid, Merops' child, whose beauty made Artemis drive her from her company, transformed into a hind with horns of gold. But my beauty has brought ruin, ruin to the towers of Troy and the Greeks who perished there!*

[*HELEN, head bowed with anguish, enters the palace.*

MENELAUS enters in rags.]

390 *MENELAUS: O Pelops,²⁸ who raced with Oenomaus once at Pisa in the famous chariot-race, I wish you had died that day, before siring my father Atreus, who in turn sired by his wife Aerope Agamemnon and myself, Menelaus, famous pair! In my view — and I say this in no boastful vein²⁹ — I transported the greatest part of our troops in ships to Troy, no despot leading an army by force but a ruler commanding as his willing followers the young warriors of Greece.*

Some of these men the roll-call can number as dead, others as having returned to their homes, happy survivors of the sea, whose loved ones had given them up for dead. But my case is different; ever since I sacked Troy's towered walls, I have wandered in misery over the grey sea's swollen depths, longing to reach my homeland but deemed unworthy of this by the gods. Every desolate landfall, every inhospitable anchorage on Libya's coast has seen my vessel. And each time I draw near to my country's shores, strong winds drive me away; no favourable breeze ever swells my sails to bring me back to Greece. 400

And now I find myself driven on to this shore, a miserable castaway who has lost his friends, my ship shattered in a hundred pieces on the rocks. Of all its sections so skilfully constructed only the keel survived, and on this, with much difficulty, and greatly to my surprise, I reached safety, and with me Helen, who is in my possession, after I dragged her out of Troy. I do not know the name of this land or of its inhabitants; it would have been embarrassing to meet ordinary people and so, out of respect for my own feelings, I am not revealing my predicament. When misfortune strikes a man in high position, its unfamiliarity hits him harder than one long accustomed to ill luck. My beggar's state drains me; I have neither food nor clothes for my back; you could mistake these rags I'm wearing for remnants of my ship's canvas. The clothes I wore of old, splendid and costly robes, the ocean has plundered.³⁰ As for my wife, the source of all my woes, I hid her away in the depths of a cave before coming here, with strict instructions to my surviving friends to keep watch on her. I have come here on my own, looking for any provisions for them I may be able to get my hands on. 410 420

When I saw this building with its imposing entrance and walls with surrounding cornices, indicating a man of means, I approached it; seafarers may hope to gain something from a wealthy house, but we could get nothing from those with nothing to live on, however willing they may be to help. [MENELAUS *knocks hard on the central door.*] Hey! Doorkeeper!³¹ 430

Come out here, will you? I want you to tell your master I need his assistance.

[*An OLD WOMAN answers from inside, on a higher level.*]

OLD WOMAN: Who's at the door? Get away from the palace! You'd better not stand there in the entrance, making trouble for the master! Else it'll be death for you, Greek as you are; no
440 Greeks allowed in here!

MENELAUS: Old woman, I'm sure these words can be spoken in a different tone; I won't be difficult; but not so angry, please!

[*The OLD WOMAN opens the door and shows herself.*]

OLD WOMAN: Be off with you! It's my job, see, stranger, to keep any Greeks away from these doors.

MENELAUS: Hang on! Don't wag your finger at me or try pushing me away!

OLD WOMAN: It's your fault for not taking a blind bit of notice of what I say!

MENELAUS: Then take this message inside to your master: . . .

OLD WOMAN: I don't think a message from you would do me much good.

MENELAUS: . . . I've come to his land, a stranger and a castaway; no one dares harm me.

450 OLD WOMAN: Then find another house to go to, not this one!

MENELAUS: I will not. I'm coming in. Don't try to stop me!

OLD WOMAN: You're a right nuisance, make no mistake! Any minute now you'll find yourself out on your ear!

MENELAUS: Oh dear! Where is that glorious army of mine?

OLD WOMAN: You may have cut a fine figure in front of them, but you don't in front of me!

MENELAUS: O you gods, what indignity to suffer!

OLD WOMAN: What's this? Tears in your eyes! Who's going to feel sorry for you?

MENELAUS: The gods once looked on me with favour.

OLD WOMAN: Then go and cry in front of your friends.

MENELAUS: What country is this? Whose is this palace?

460 OLD WOMAN: This is Proteus' palace; the land is Egypt.

MENELAUS: Egypt? Heaven help me, what a place to have come to!

OLD WOMAN: And just what's wrong with the gleaming Nile, I'd like to know?

MENELAUS: I find nothing wrong; I was lamenting my own misfortunes.

OLD WOMAN: Bad luck comes to many people; you're not the only one.

MENELAUS: Is he at home, then, this king, whatever you called him?

OLD WOMAN: This is his tomb. His son is king now.

MENELAUS: And where would he be? Away from home or in the palace?

OLD WOMAN: He is not at home. And he really hates Greeks.

MENELAUS: Tell me so that I may benefit.

OLD WOMAN: Helen resides in this palace, the daughter of Zeus. 470

MENELAUS: What? What did you say? Tell me again!

OLD WOMAN: The child of Tyndareus, who once lived in Sparta.

MENELAUS: But where did she come from? This makes no sense!

OLD WOMAN: Why, she came here from Lacedaemon's land.

MENELAUS: When? [*Aside*] I haven't had my wife stolen from that cave, have I?

OLD WOMAN: It was before the Greeks went to Troy, stranger.

Now be off, please. We've had a real to-do in here; it's turning the palace upside down. This is a very bad time for you to arrive; if the master catches you, you'll be killed – that's the welcome he'd give! I quite like Greeks, you see, for all my harsh words earlier; it was because I'm afraid of the master. 480
[*The OLD WOMAN goes back into the palace, shutting the door against MENELAUS.*]

MENELAUS: I don't understand. What am I to make of it? This new turn of events I'm hearing of makes things even more wretched than before. Can it be that I captured my wife in Troy, brought her here with me and put her in a cave for safe-keeping, and now I find another woman, with the same name as my wife, living in this palace? And, according to the

490 old woman, she is the daughter of Zeus! Can there be some
 man with the name of Zeus living on the banks of the Nile?
 There's only one Zeus, the one in heaven. And where on earth
 does Sparta exist, if not where fair Eurotas' reed-fringed waters
 flow? Are there two men called by the name of Tyndareus? Is
 there another land called Lacedaemon, another Troy? I just
 don't know what to say! Well, the world is a big place, after
 all, and many men no doubt have the same names – many
 women, too, and many cities. There's little to wonder at in this.
 500 And I'm not going to be put off by a servant's scaremongering.
 There's not a man so uncivilized as to refuse me food once he
 has heard my name.³² It was a famous fire that Troy saw and
 famous too am I who kindled it, Menelaus, a name the world
 knows well. I will wait for the king of this palace. There are
 two ways I have of protecting myself: if he is a man of savage
 temperament, I'll hide and make my way back to my wrecked
 ship; if he shows any clemency, I'll ask for the sort of help my
 510 present troubles require. This, then, is the final humiliation
 waiting for me in my misery, that I, a king myself, should beg
 a fellow king for bread to live by! But there is no alternative.
 It is not my own saying, but a wise man's none the less, that
nothing is as strong as stern necessity.

[MENELAUS *withdraws into a temporary hiding place. The
 CHORUS emerges from the palace.*]

CHORUS: *I heard the prophetic maid utter the response I went eagerly
 to the royal palace to learn. She said that Menelaus has not yet passed
 from sight to the gloomy shades of the nether world but continues to be
 520 tossed on the high seas and has not yet made port in his native land.
 He leads a wanderer's life, sick at heart, bereft of friends, and scarce a
 land exists between here and Troy that has not seen his ship draw near
 its coast.*

[HELEN *also comes out of the palace.*]

HELEN: Back I come again to my sanctuary at this tomb, after
 hearing Theonoe's welcome words! [HELEN *starts back as*

MENELAUS *steps forward to intercept her.*] Ah! Who is this? Surely [530]
 Proteus' godless son is not scheming to have me ambushed? [540]
 I'll make a dash for the tomb like some filly at the gallop or
 worshipper of Bacchus! Oh, he's a wild-looking sort of man,
 this fellow bent on catching me!

MENELAUS: Why this desperate urge to get to the base of the
 tomb with its smoke-blackened uprights? Wait! Why do you
 run away from me? Oh, that face! You amaze me – I cannot
 speak!

HELEN [*as MENELAUS continues to block her path*]: Good women, 550
 this is an outrage! This fellow is keeping me from the tomb;
 he means to catch me and deliver me to the king whose
 marriage I shun!

MENELAUS [*stepping back indignantly*]: I am no criminal – no one
 has pressed me into doing wrong!

HELEN: Well, that's hardly a gentleman's clothing you're
 wearing.

MENELAUS: Don't be afraid, stop darting back and forth!

HELEN [*skipping past him at last*]: I'll stop all right, now I've got
 my hands on this tomb!

MENELAUS: Who are you? That face of yours . . . who am I
 looking at, lady?

HELEN: And who are you? I might well ask you the same
 question!

MENELAUS: Never have I seen anyone so close in looks . . .

HELEN: O you gods! Yes, there is something godlike in recogniz- 560
 ing loved ones.

MENELAUS: Are you Greek or a woman of this country?

HELEN: I am Greek; but I want to know your background
 also.

MENELAUS: You look so like Helen, lady.

HELEN: And you so like Menelaus; I am lost for words.

MENELAUS: You have recognized me correctly, a man detested
 by fortune.

HELEN [*trying to embrace him*]: Oh, how long it has been! Embrace
 your wife!

MENELAUS [*shocked*]: What do you mean, *wife*? Hands off my clothes!

HELEN: I was given to you by my father Tyndareus.

MENELAUS: O torch-bearing Hecate,³³ send me no evil dreams!

570 HELEN: This is no ghostly night-vision you are looking at, sent by the Lady of the Cross-ways!

MENELAUS: But I can't be married to two wives!

HELEN: Another wife? No! Who is she?

MENELAUS: The one I left hidden in a cave after bringing her back from Troy.

HELEN: You have no other wife, just myself.

MENELAUS: Perhaps I have not lost my wits but my eyes are failing.

HELEN: When you look at me, don't you think I'm your wife?

MENELAUS: You have her appearance, certainly, but I am not yet sure.

HELEN: Look at me: what clearer proof do you need?

MENELAUS: You are like her; that I won't deny.

580 HELEN: What better instructor could you have than your own eyes? *Thine words; teachers*

MENELAUS: My difficulty is this: I already have a wife.

HELEN: I did not go to the land of Troy; it was my phantom.

MENELAUS: And who can create a living, breathing phantom?

HELEN: The gods; they fashioned a wife for you from the air itself!

MENELAUS: Which of the gods was her maker? What you say defies belief.

HELEN: Hera fashioned her as a substitute so that Paris would not get his hands on me.

MENELAUS: What? Then you were at one and the same time here and at Troy?

* HELEN: A name might exist anywhere but its owner can only be in one place.

MENELAUS [*shaking his head*]: Let me go; I have come here with grief enough for cargo.

HELEN: What? You are going to leave me for a wife who does not exist? 590

MENE LAUS: I am, but you have my blessing for your resemblance to Helen.

HELEN: This is the end! I win you back, my husband, only to lose you again!

MENE LAUS: You do not convince me as much as the thought of all the sufferings I knew at Troy.

HELEN [*breaking down*]: Oh, how wretched I am! Was any woman more to be pitied? The love of my life is leaving me and never shall I live in my own land again, or see my fellow-Greeks!

[*As MENE LAUS leaves, he is intercepted by an old SERVANT, one of his men.*]

SERVANT: Menelaus, sir, I find you at last! I've wandered all over this god-forsaken place in search of you, sent by the crew you left behind.

MENE LAUS: What's happened? You haven't been robbed by the natives, I take it? 600

SERVANT: A miracle, though miracle doesn't do justice to what happened.

MENE LAUS: Speak up; this emphasis suggests strange news indeed.

SERVANT: I say you went through all your sufferings to no purpose.

MENE LAUS: They are over now and in the past; what is your news?

SERVANT: Your wife has gone, vanished into the air! Up she went and disappeared from sight! The heavens opened and she was gone; the haunted cave where we had kept our watch held her no more, and this is what she said: 'You wretched men of Troy, and all you poor Greeks, it was thanks to Hera and her scheming that you met your deaths for my sake by Scamander's banks; you thought that Paris possessed Helen but he did not! Now that I have stayed for the appointed length of time and obeyed the plan of destiny, I am returning to my father, the sky. They were all undeserved, the foul words heaped on the 610

head of Tyndareus' miserable child; she was not to blame.' [*He suddenly sees HELEN.*] Ah, greetings, daughter of Leda! Here you were all along! There I was, making my report that you had vanished among the stars, and I never knew you had wings to make you airborne! [*He steps forward to grasp HELEN by the arm.*] Now I won't let you make fools of us like that again; you gave your husband quite enough trouble at Troy, him and the men who fought at his side!

620

MENELAUS [*raising his arm to forestall the SERVANT*]: I see it now; it's true, what she said earlier, true! [*Embracing Helen*] Oh, how I have longed for this day that lets me fold you in my arms!

[*Husband and wife now engage in a duet in which the former mainly speaks, the latter mainly sings.*³⁴]

HELEN: O Menelaus, dearest love, how slowly the years passed, but now what joy, for you are here! [*To the CHORUS*] See, ladies, I have my husband, after so many dawns lighting the sky with fire, I have my arms around his neck!

630

MENELAUS: And you are in my arms. But so much has happened and there are so many things I want to know; I don't know where my questioning should begin!

HELEN: Oh, what happiness! My hair shivers with joy [*tossing her head*], it has wings to make it fly! My eyes brim with tears as I discover anew, dear husband, the pleasure of holding you close!

MENELAUS: No vision could please me more; all pain is cancelled. I hold my wife, the child of Zeus and Leda.

640

HELEN: Whom her brothers, Heaven's Twins, once hailed as happy, happy, as, torches in hand, they rode their white horses . . .

MENELAUS: Yes, in those days; and now the goddess who took you from my home steers us on a different course, better than this.

HELEN: It was a happy misfortune that brought us together, you and me, my husband, apart for so long but together at last! May I live to enjoy what the gods have granted!

MENELAUS: May you indeed; I join you in voicing the same prayer! Where we two are concerned, there is no unhappiness that is not shared.

HELEN [to the CHORUS]: *My friends, my friends, no longer do we grieve for sorrows past, or give way to anguish. I have him, my husband, my husband, the one for whom I waited, waited so many years, to return from Troy!* 650

MENELAUS: You have him, and I have you! So many days of hardship I endured, but now I understand the purpose of the goddess.

HELEN: *My joy makes these tears more happy than sorrowful.*

MENELAUS: What can I say? Who on earth could have hoped for this?

HELEN: *I clasp you to my heart, the person I never looked to see!*

MENELAUS: And I clasp you, the woman I thought had gone to Ida's town and Ilium's ill-fated towers! But in heaven's name how did you make your escape from my home? 660

HELEN: *Ah, it is a painful beginning you seek to return to, a painful story you would have me narrate.*

MENELAUS: Speak, for I must hear it; all things are in the giving of the gods.

HELEN: *It disgusts me, the tale I shall be bound to tell!*

MENELAUS: Tell it just the same! Hearing of sufferings can bring pleasure.

HELEN: *Not to the beat of oars did the barbarian youth come, to win a bride, but to satisfy a beating heart's desire for a lawless marriage!*

MENELAUS: Which god or fate stole you from your homeland?

HELEN: *The son of Zeus, of Zeus and Maia, my husband, brought me to the Nile.* 670

MENELAUS: Remarkable! Who sent you on your way? It is a strange tale.

HELEN: *I weep at the memory, my eyes grow wet with tears; the wife of Zeus was my destroyer.*

MENELAUS: Hera? What further harm did she want to heap on us?

HELEN: *Oh, the pain of remembering that spring, the bathing place where the goddesses shone in their beauty, that day they came to be judged!*

MENELAUS: Then did Hera punish you for the indignity of that judgement?

680 HELEN: *Her aim was to take me from Paris . . .*

MENELAUS: How? Tell me!

HELEN: . . . *to whom the Cyprian had promised me.*

MENELAUS: Oh, a cruel fate!

HELEN: *Cruel it was, cruel, when I was thus brought to Egypt.*

MENELAUS: Then, she substituted a phantom in your place, as you tell the story.

HELEN: *O my mother, what misery, what misery your house suffered!*

MENELAUS: What do you mean?

HELEN: *My mother is no more; she hanged herself in a swinging noose in shame at my infamous marriage.*

MENELAUS: Monstrous! What report is there of our daughter Hermione?

690 HELEN: *A stranger to marriage and to children herself, my husband, she laments my shameful union, itself no true marriage.*

MENELAUS: O Paris, how utterly you have brought ruin on my house!

HELEN: *These things have destroyed not you alone but countless men of Greece in their armour of bronze. But I was driven by the goddess from my homeland, driven ill-fated and accursed from my city and from you, that day when I left behind – and yet did not – home and husband to make a marriage of shame!*

CHORUS-LEADER: Should good fortune come to you both from this day on, you would have recompense for your sufferings hitherto.

700 SERVANT: Menelaus, sir, give me, too, a share in your happiness; I can see it for myself but I'm still in the dark.

MENELAUS: Of course, old fellow, you also must share in our news.

SERVANT: Was this lady not the cause of everything we went through at Ilium?

MENELAUS: She was not; we were deceived by the gods.

SERVANT: Then we sweated away for no reason to win a phantom?

MENELAUS: This was the work of Hera, of the three goddesses who quarrelled.

SERVANT: Eh? This woman is really your wife?

MENELAUS: Yes, she is; trust me when I say it.

710

SERVANT [*turning to HELEN and raising his hands*]: Well, daughter, how intricate are the gods' ways, how hard to fathom,³⁵ but somehow they bring everything safely back on course, directing things now this way, now that. One man knows hardship, another avoids it, but still he comes to a sorry end; there is no security in the luck he enjoys from one day to the next. Now you and your husband had your share of suffering – you in the matter of your reputation, he in the unsparring test of war. How hard he laboured then, and for such a poor return, but now, without raising a finger, he has won the greatest of good fortune. So you did not bring shame on your old father or the Dioscuri, you did none of the things that earned you a bad name!

720

Now I recall your wedding, now I remember the torches I held high as I ran alongside your team of four horses! There you stood in the chariot, at this man's side, as you left your wealthy home. After all, it's a poor kind of servant who doesn't respect his master's fortune, sharing his joys and sorrows alike. I may have been born a servant but I would have my place in the roll-call of noble slaves, having a mind, if not a name, that is free.³⁶ This is a better state of affairs than being one person yet the victim of two evils: possessing a heart that is false and, as a slave, being at the beck and call of those near you.

730

MENELAUS: Come on, old fellow, you've known many hardships in the past, as you toiled away in battle with your shield next to mine, so now share in my good fortune; go and tell the friends you left behind how you've found matters here and what our situation is. Their orders are to stay on the shore in readiness for the trials which I expect await me if I am to succeed in taking this woman away from here, and to watch for the opportunity for us to unite our fortunes and get safely away from this forsaken place, if we can.

740

SERVANT: I shall do this, my lord, but just consider how useless and full of lies prophecy is! There is, it seems, no reliability in divination by fire or the screaming of birds. Only a simpleton thinks that men are benefited by birds! Calchas gave no word,
 750 no indication to the army that he saw his countrymen dying for a phantom's sake, no, nor did Helenus; we sacked that city all for nothing! You may say the reason was the gods' reluctance to let the truth be known. Why, then, do we seek to know their minds through prophecy? When we ask for benefits, we should sacrifice to the gods, but pay no heed to the trade of prophecy. This was a barren invention, a bait to catch men's minds; no one ever grew rich from being idle or putting his faith in burnt sacrifices. Judgement and prudence are a man's best means of divination.

CHORUS-LEADER: I share the old man's view of prophets; if a
 760 man has the gods' goodwill, he has the best omen for his house.

HELEN: Very well; so far our situation continues fair. But I long to know, my poor husband, how you came safe away from Troy, though it would profit me little.

MENELAUS: How large a question put directly in so few words! Why need I tell you of our losses in the Aegean, when Nauplius lit his fires on Euboea's coast,³⁷ of the cities of Crete and Libya that I visited, and the look-out where Perseus kept watch?³⁸
 770 My tale would not satisfy your curiosity, and, in telling you how we suffered, my own sorrows would return.

HELEN: Your answer is wiser than my question. But pass over the rest and tell me one thing: how long did you wander exhausted over the ocean's briny depths?

MENELAUS: Seven circling years I spent on board ship, not counting the ten I had to endure at Troy.

HELEN: Oh, how wretched! What a long time you tell of, my poor dear! And now you have escaped that fate to meet the sacrificial knife here!

MENELAUS: What's that? What are you telling me? This destroys
 [780] me, wife!

HELEN: The man who dwells in this palace is sure to kill you.

MENELAUS: And what have I done to merit this end?

HELEN: You have arrived without warning to thwart his marriage to me.

MENELAUS: What? Someone wants to marry my wife?

HELEN: An act of outrage against me, even if I submitted.

MENELAUS: Is he an ordinary citizen seeking to enforce his will, or does he rule the land?

HELEN: He is the son of Proteus and ruler of this land.

MENELAUS: That explains the servant's words that puzzled me so much.

HELEN: What gates did you stand at in this outlandish place?

MENELAUS: These ones, before they drove me away like some mendicant. 790

HELEN: You weren't begging for bread, surely? Oh, what have I to endure next!

MENELAUS: That is what I was doing but I'm not happy with the description.

HELEN: It seems you know everything, then, about my marriage-to-be.

MENELAUS: I do; but what I don't know is, have you resisted his advances?

HELEN: Chaste I was as your wife and chaste I remain; be sure of that.

MENELAUS: How can I be sure if it? If true it would gladden my heart.

HELEN: Do you see this tomb where I have been sitting as a miserable suppliant?

MENELAUS: I see a mattress there, you wretched woman; what use did you put that to?

HELEN: That was my place of sanctuary in trying to escape this marriage!

MENELAUS: Had you no altar for this purpose, or were you following a custom of the land? 800

HELEN: It gave me as much protection as a god's temple would.

MENELAUS: So is there no way for me to get you to a ship and safe home?

HELEN: You're more likely to feel the point of a sword than me
in your arms.

MENELAUS: Then no man on earth is as wretched as I.

HELEN: Have no scruples now; make your own escape from
here!

MENELAUS: And leave you behind? I sacked Troy for you!

HELEN: Better do as I say than let my marriage cause your death!

MENELAUS: That is cowardly talk, unsuited to the conqueror of
Troy!

HELEN: You may be planning to kill the king but you would not
succeed.

810 MENELAUS: Is his body so invulnerable to the sword?

HELEN: You will know soon; it is a fool who dares the impossible.

MENELAUS: Then am I to submit to having my wrists bound
and utter not a word?

HELEN: You have reached an impasse; we need a clever plan.

MENELAUS: Yes, dying in action is the preferable course.

HELEN: There is one hope, one alone, that might enable us to
escape.

MENELAUS: Does it call for bribery or daring or eloquence?

HELEN: If only the king could be prevented from learning of
your arrival!

MENELAUS: He won't discover my identity, I know; who would
tell him?

HELEN: Inside the palace he has an ally as potent as the gods.

820 MENELAUS: A private oracle in some secret recess of his home?

HELEN: No; his sister; they call her Theonoe.

MENELAUS: Her name is oracular;³⁹ tell me what she does.

HELEN: She is omniscient, and she will tell her brother that you
are here.

MENELAUS: That's the end for me; I cannot keep a secret from
her.

HELEN: Perhaps if we tried to win her over, throwing ourselves
on her mercy . . .

MENELAUS: Asking her to do what? What hope are you offering
me?

HELEN: . . . to refrain from telling her brother that you are here.

MENELAUS: Then, after persuading her, we would make our escape?

HELEN: Yes, without difficulty, if we have her help; if we try to delude her, it is impossible.

MENELAUS: I leave this to you; woman to woman is an appropriate way to proceed.

830

HELEN: I'll clasp her knees like any suppliant, be sure of that!

MENELAUS: Yes, but what if she rejects our appeal?

HELEN: You will die and I will know the misery of submitting to a forced marriage.

MENELAUS: False woman! You use force as a pretext!

HELEN: No! I swear a sacred oath by your life . . .

MENELAUS: What oath – to die? Never to take another husband?

HELEN: To die, yes, and by the same sword; I will lie at your side.

MENELAUS: Then, to bind that oath, take my right hand.

HELEN [*taking his hand*]: And so I do; I swear to end my life if you are killed.

MENELAUS: And I swear to take my own life if I lose you.

840

HELEN: How, then, shall we die and keep our honour intact?

MENELAUS: I will kill you here on the tomb and then kill myself.

But first I will mount a fierce challenge to win you. Approach, any man who dares! I shall not disgrace the glorious name I won at Troy or go back to Greece to face men's insults as the man who robbed Thetis of Achilles,⁴⁰ witnessed the corpse of Telamonian Ajax and Nestor childless, but refused to die himself for his own wife's sake! No, not I! If the gods have wisdom, the earth lies light on the tomb they give a brave man slain by his enemies; but the coward they cast up, unburied, on a hard reef.

850

CHORUS-LEADER: O you gods, grant happiness at last to the house of Tantalus, and bring them release from their woes!

[*Voices are heard inside the palace.*]

HELEN: Oh, help me! I am in such peril! Menelaus, we are ruined! She is coming out from the palace, the prophetess

860 Theonoe! The house resounds to the sound of bolts being thrown back. Run! But there is no point – whether she sees you or not, she'll know that you're here. Oh, what misery! I'm finished! You escaped from Troy and its savagery only to fall on savage swords here!

[THEONOE enters from the palace, preceded by two female acolytes, carrying an incense-burner and a torch.]⁴¹

THEONOE [to first acolyte]: Hold up the lamp in its radiance and lead on! Fumigate in sacred ordinance every corner of the air, so that I may breathe in heaven's pure breath! And you [to second acolyte], purge with flame the path on which I am to walk, lest any man has defiled it with unholy footprints, dashing your torch on them before my feet, so I may proceed on my way. Once you have paid my dues of service to the gods, return the flares to their place in the hearth inside the palace. [The acolytes having performed this function go back into the palace.]

870

Helen, have my predictions not come true? He has come, your husband Menelaus, and there he stands before your eyes, his ships lost, together with the phantom of yourself! Poor man, what hardships you have overcome in getting to this place, and still you do not know if you will return home, or if you will remain here! For on this day there is to be a heated debate about you among the gods, before the judgement seat of Zeus. Hera, your enemy in the past, now looks on you with favour. She wants to bring you and your wife safely to your homeland, so that Greece may learn that Alexandros was deceived in the Cyprian's gift of the bride he was to marry. But the Cyprian wishes to thwart your homecoming; she has no desire to be exposed as having bought the prize for beauty with a marriage that, so far as Helen was concerned, was empty. The decision rests with me, whether to oblige the Cyprian by telling my brother you are here, so causing your death, or to side in turn with Hera and save your life, deceiving my brother, whose orders are that I tell him whenever your homeward voyage brings you to this land.

880

890

HELEN: O maiden, I fall in supplication at your knees and entreat

you in abject misery for myself and this man! I have only just found him after so long and it seems I now run every risk of seeing him dead. Please, do not tell your brother that my beloved husband has returned to my arms, but save him, I beg you! Never sacrifice your own piety by purchasing tokens of his gratitude that debase your honour and justice itself! Heaven has no love of violence and would have us all possess property without recourse to robbery. My coming here was timely but it has proved no blessing to me. Hermes gave me to your father to keep safe for my husband, who now stands beside me, wishing to receive his due. Would the god and your dead father want what belongs to another to be properly returned or would they not? I think they would. You should defer to a virtuous father rather than a foolish brother. You are a prophetess, a believer in the gods; will you taint your father's sense of justice and indulge a brother who has none? Would it not shame you to know all the secrets of heaven, both past and present, but not the difference between right and wrong?

Consider my wretchedness, all the misery that is mine, and give us your protection, a step on the road to justice! Helen is a name reviled the world over. In Greece they say I betrayed my husband to live in a wealthy Trojan palace. But if I return to Greece, to a life in Sparta, and the people see and hear that their ruin came from the gods' scheming, while I did not, after all, betray my loved ones, then they will once more consider me a virtuous woman; I will betroth my daughter, whom no man will have now; my life of bitter penury here will end and I shall enjoy the comfort and prosperity of my own home.

Had this man died at Troy and been cremated, I should have paid him the tribute of my tears, although he was far away; now that he is here, safe and well, shall he be taken away from me? Not that, maiden, not that! I ask this of you, in all humility: do me this kindness and imitate the nature of your just father; no fairer renown can children have than to match in their characters the nobility of their parents.

CHORUS-LEADER: These words you offer for consideration

are pitiful indeed; pitiful, too, is your state. But I am eager to hear what plea Menelaus will enter for his life to be spared.

950 MENE LAUS: I cannot bring myself to stoop before you or to let tears drop from my eyes; such lack of manliness would bring much disgrace on Troy. And yet men say it is not beneath a man of noble birth to weep in adversity. But this honourable course, if honourable it be, I will not choose when I can show courage instead. No, if you decide to save a stranger's life, a man who quite properly seeks to reclaim his own wife, then give her back and save me too. If you decide otherwise, then once more I will know misery, my constant companion for many years, and you will reveal yourself as a woman of no principle.

[MENE LAUS moves towards the tomb of Proteus.]

960 I will make the appeal we think we deserve and justice demands, one that is most likely to touch your heart; I will fall at your father's tomb and speak these words: 'Aged spirit, who lives in this tomb of stone, give me back my wife, I beg you, whom Zeus sent here for safe-keeping. I know that you never will give her back to me, as you are dead; but your daughter will not tolerate her once glorious father being summoned from the world below to hear the curses of men. She now has the power to act.

[MENE LAUS turns from the tomb and stretches out his hands to the earth in prayer.]

970 'And you, Hades, lord of the infernal regions, I call on you also to be my ally. Many a warrior has my sword dispatched for Helen's sake to enrich your kingdom; you have your fee. You should either return those men now, alive once more, or at least compel this woman to show herself yet more pious than her pious sire by returning my wife to me.'

[MENE LAUS again addresses THEONOE directly.]

980 But if you and your brother rob me of my wife, then I will tell you what she has declined to tell. You must know, maiden, that I am held fast by an oath, first of all to fight it out with your brother, until he or I should die: there you have it. But if

he refuses to engage me in combat and chooses to starve us to death at the tomb we have made our sanctuary, I am resolved to kill my wife and then to thrust this two-edged sword into my own heart, here on the top of this tomb, so that streams of blood may drip down its sides; we shall lie, the two of us in death together, upon this polished sepulchre, to cause you anguish and stain your father's name for evermore. No one shall make Helen his wife, not your brother or any other man. I shall take her away myself, to my home, if I can; if not, then to join the dead! 990

CHORUS-LEADER: It is for you, maiden, to judge what each has said; make your decision one that will please all here.

THEONOE: Both nature and personal desire incline me towards piety. I am true to myself and will neither stain my father's glorious name nor render my brother a service that will bring me disgrace. There is in my heart a great shrine of Justice;⁴² this is an inheritance I possess from Nereus, Menelaus, and I will try to preserve it. Since it is Hera's wish to help you, I will cast my vote with hers. As for the Cyprian, at the risk of incurring her displeasure, never have we had dealings with one another. I concur entirely with your words of reproach at my father's tomb: it would be a crime for me not to return your wife. Indeed, had he been alive, he would have given this lady to you to have and hold, and you to her. For not only are just and unjust acts rewarded among all the nations of the earth; the dead, too, observe this custom. When a man dies, his mind may cease to live but, through merging with the everlasting aether, it possesses everlasting consciousness.⁴³ 1000
1010

So, to keep my lecture brief, I will, as you have asked, say nothing; never will I be a party to my brother's foolishness. He may not realize it but I am doing him a service in turning his ungodly intentions to a proper respect for the gods. 1020

It is for you to find an escape route for yourselves; my part will be to make myself scarce and hold my tongue. Begin with the gods; pray humbly that the Cyprian may allow your safe return to Greece and that Hera, who now wishes you and

your husband a fair voyage home, may not change her mind. [THEONOE turns to face the tomb.] And this vow I make to you, my dead father: as far as in me lies, I shall see that your holy memory remains unsullied. [She withdraws into the palace.]

1030 CHORUS-LEADER: No man ever prospered through injustice, but if his cause is just he has hope of salvation.

HELEN: Menelaus, the maid is no barrier to our escape; now we must put our heads together and hatch a joint plan for our route to safety.

MENELAUS: Then listen: you have lived in the palace for a long time and have got to know the king's servants.

HELEN: Why do you say that? You give me hope! What plan do you have in mind to help us both?

1040 MENELAUS: Could you persuade one of the men in charge of the four-horse teams to give us a chariot?

HELEN: I could; but how shall we manage to escape when we don't know the local terrain?

MENELAUS: There is no way – you are right. Well, what if I hid in the palace and killed the king with my double-edged sword here?

HELEN: His sister would not keep silent and let you carry out her brother's murder.

MENELAUS: We don't even have a ship to escape in, once we've made a run for it; my own is at the bottom of the sea.

HELEN [*struck by a new idea*]: Listen to this, if a woman, too, can make a clever suggestion:⁴⁴ are you willing to have a false report spread that you are dead?

MENELAUS: It's a bad omen; still, if I profit from it, let's hear it. I'm ready to die if it means I carry on living!

HELEN: Good; and then I would mourn your passing before the ungodly king, cutting my hair and lamenting in woman's fashion.

MENELAUS: How does this make it easier for us to escape? Your plan is hardly very original.⁴⁵

HELEN: I shall ask the king's permission to bury you in an empty tomb as one who drowned at sea.

MENELAUS: Let's imagine he agrees. How are we then going to get safely away without a ship, for all this honouring me with an empty tomb? 1060

HELEN: I will put it to him that he provide a ship from which we may drop your burial-offerings into the bosom of the deep.

MENELAUS: It's an excellent plan, except in one respect: if he tells you to perform the burial on land, the scheme falls flat.

HELEN: Well, I'll tell him that it's against Greek custom to bury on land those who died at sea.

MENELAUS: You meet my objection well; then I will go on board with you to assist in the burial rites.

HELEN: Yes, it's essential for you to be on board with me, and those crewmen of yours, besides, who survived the shipwreck. 1070

MENELAUS: Just get me a ship lying at anchor and I'll have my men board her in proper army fashion!

HELEN: That's for you to take charge of; I only hope that favourable winds swell our sails and bless our voyage!

MENELAUS: We *shall* have them; the gods are going to bring my trials to an end. But who will you say gave you the news of my death?

HELEN: You! You must stay that you are the only survivor of those who sailed with Atreus' son and that you saw him die.

MENELAUS: Yes, and these rags I'm wearing will bear witness to your story of the shipwreck. 1080

HELEN: They have come at a good time to cover your back, though the loss of your proper clothes then must have seemed far from timely. You are a pitiful sight, and this may prove our deliverance.

MENELAUS: Should I accompany you into the palace or sit here quietly by the tomb?

HELEN: Stay where you are; if he tries anything untoward against you, this tomb will give you protection, and you have your sword. I will go indoors, take the knife to my hair, change my white clothes for black, and tear my cheeks with my nails until they run with blood. [MENELAUS *begins to protest.*]

I must do this: no small issue is at stake and I see two ways 1090

the scales can tip: either I must die, if I am caught plotting, or else I am to return home and save your life.

[HELEN raises her hands.] O Lady Hera, who lies in the bed of Zeus, we beg you, stretching our arms up to the heavens tapestried with stars, where you have your dwelling, grant relief from suffering to two unhappy mortals! And you, Lady of Cyprus, Dione's child,⁴⁶ who won the prize of beauty with the promise of my hand in marriage, do not destroy me! I suffered enough cruelty before at your hands, when you degraded me – in name if not in the flesh – among the barbarians at Troy. Let me die, if it is this you want, in the land of my forefathers. Why do you never have your fill of human sorrow? Passion and deceit are what you foster, treacherous intrigues and potions that lead to death! Yet, if you knew moderation, there is no other god who brings more joy to mortal hearts.⁴⁷ I cannot deny it.

[HELEN goes into the palace; MENELAUS conceals himself behind the tomb.]

CHORUS [Strophe]: On you let me call, who sit amidst the leafy coverts, turning your haunt into a chamber of song, melodious nightingale, sweetest of singers, bird of tuneful lamentation, come trilling through your russet throat to help me sing my dirge! Helen's piteous suffering is my theme, and the Trojan women's woeful fate as the Greeks' spears drove in, from the day when there sped on barbarian oar over the grey surge the man who came, came bringing from Sparta you, Helen, a bride to curse the sons of Priam with sorrow, Paris of deadly marriage, under Aphrodite's escort.

[Antistrophe:] And many a Greek met a pitiful end in Hades' embrace, slain by the spear or casting of a rock, causing wives to crop their hair in misery while their bedchambers are widowed. Many a Greek a solitary oarsman dispatched; lighting his fiery beacon on sea-girt Euboea, he dashed them on Caphereus' rocks and the headlands of the Aegean Sea by the light of his false star.⁴⁸ And inhospitable proved the wretched coastline to the man who then swept past it before the storm-blasts, away from his homeland, Menelaus, carrying on his

ships the prize of a foreigner's visit that was no prize but the source of strife with Greeks, Hera's holy phantom.

[Strophe:] *As for what is god, or not god, or something in between, what mortal having searched can say?*⁴⁹ *The distant end of this enquiry has been found by the man who sees the gods' fortunes leaping this way and that, and back again in twists of circumstance, contradictory and unforeseen. You, Helen, were born the daughter of Zeus; he assumed wings and fathered you in Leda's lap. And then your name was cursed by every Greek tongue as a traitor's, a breaker of faith, a breaker of laws of god and man! What tale of the gods among men is true and certain? I cannot tell.*

[Antistrophe:] *What fools you are, all who seek to gain honour in war and the clash of spear on spear, stupidly trying to solve men's troubles by death! If they are to be settled by contest of blood, never will strife end among the cities of men.*⁵⁰ *They received each one his portion of Trojan earth to slumber in, when reasoned argument might have solved the dispute you roused, Helen. Now they lie deep in Hades' lap, and Troy's walls, as if struck by Zeus' fiery thunderbolt, lie levelled; your heart, Helen, bears grief after grief; wretched and piteous are your misfortunes.*

[THEOCLYMENUS enters with servants who carry hunting gear and hold hounds on the leash. He does not at first see MENELAUS as he honours his father's tomb.]

THEOCLYMENUS: Greetings, Father! Here at the palace entrance I placed your tomb, Proteus, so that I might salute you; every time I leave or enter my house, I your son Theoclymenus pay you these respects, Father.

[To the servants] You men, take the hounds and hunting tackle into the palace! [To the CHORUS] I have been blaming myself as an utter fool; we don't use the death penalty nearly enough on criminals. It has just come to my notice that a Greek has landed on my shores in broad daylight, undetected by my scouts. Either he's a spy or he has Helen in his sights and plans to steal her. Well, he's a dead man, if only we can get our hands on him!

[THEOCLYMENUS *suddenly sees that HELEN is missing.*] Aha! Apparently it's all been accomplished, I find! Tyndareus' child has abandoned her seat of sanctuary at the tomb and taken ship
 1180 from my land! [*He starts banging on the palace door.*] Hey there, you men, unfasten the bars, open up the stables, bring out the chariots! The woman I mean to marry is not going to be whisked away from these shores if I can help it. [*The door opens. The servants run to do his bidding when he suddenly sees HELEN coming to the entrance.*] Wait! I see her here, the lady I am after, inside the palace. She has not escaped.

[HELEN *emerges.*] What is this, lady? You have changed your white dress for a black one and taken a knife to your hair,
 1190 marring that noble head! And you are weeping; your cheeks are wet with fresh tears! Has a dream in the night counselled you to sadness or have you heard some news from home that makes you ravage your mind with sorrow?

HELEN: O master – this is now the way I am to address you – I am ruined! What was mine is gone; my life is over!

THEOCLYMENUS: What has brought you to this? What is the matter?

HELEN: My Menelaus – ah, the pain! How can I find the words?
 – is dead!

THEOCLYMENUS: How do you know? Not from Theonoe's lips, surely?

HELEN: She has told me, as has the man who witnessed his end.

1200 THEOCLYMENUS: You mean someone has come and reported this as true?

HELEN: He has, and may he go off where I want him to!⁵¹

THEOCLYMENUS: Who is he? Where is he? I need to understand more clearly.

HELEN [*pointing to the figure of MENELAUS*]: There he sits, cowering at the tomb.

THEOCLYMENUS: Apollo, what a sight! How shabbily dressed!

HELEN: Oh! My poor husband was in no better state, I fancy!

THEOCLYMENUS: Where is the man from? From which port did he sail here?

HELEN: He is Greek, one of the men who shared my husband's voyage.

THEOCLYMENUS: What kind of death does he say Menelaus met?

HELEN: One most pitiful, amid the surging waves of the sea.

THEOCLYMENUS: In what foreign waters was he sailing then? 1210

HELEN: Libya's rocky shores were where he was wrecked – no harbours there!

THEOCLYMENUS: How did this fellow escape death, if he was on the same ship?

HELEN: An ordinary man is sometimes luckier than one of royal birth.

THEOCLYMENUS: Where did he leave his wrecked vessel before coming here?

HELEN: Where I hope it perishes – except for Menelaus!

THEOCLYMENUS: He *has* perished! What sort of ship brought this fellow here?

HELEN: He says some sailors came across him and took him on board.

THEOCLYMENUS: And what about the phantom that was sent instead of you to curse Troy? Where is that?

HELEN: You mean the cloud-image? Vanished into air.

THEOCLYMENUS: O Priam and land of Troy, you were 1220 destroyed for no reason!

HELEN: I too shared in the misfortunes of Priam's people.

THEOCLYMENUS: Did he leave your husband's body unburied or cover it with earth?

HELEN: He is unburied! Oh, pity me, pity me for the agonies I suffer!

THEOCLYMENUS: This made you cut off your locks of golden hair?

HELEN: Once he shared my life and still he has my love.

THEOCLYMENUS: You are right to weep at this calamity.⁵²

† †

HELEN: An easy task, to deceive your sister!

THEOCLYMENUS: Of course not. So, tell me, do you mean to continue making this tomb your home?

1230 HELEN: I do; in shunning you I keep faith with my wedded lord.

THEOCLYMENUS: Why do you tantalize me? Why not let the dead man go?

HELEN: I will tantalize you no more; you may begin the preparations for my marriage.

THEOCLYMENUS: Your agreement has come late but still I welcome it!

HELEN: Let me tell you what must be done; we should forget the past.

THEOCLYMENUS: What would you have me do? I must repay your kindness.

HELEN: Let us make peace and be reconciled.

THEOCLYMENUS: I renounce my quarrel with you; let it join the winds!

HELEN: Well, as we now are friends, I clasp your knees and beg you . . .

THEOCLYMENUS: Why do you stretch out your hands to me as a suppliant? What favour do you seek?

HELEN: . . . I wish to give my dead husband burial.

1240 THEOCLYMENUS: What, a grave without a body in it? Will you bury a ghost?

HELEN: It is a custom among Greeks, that if a man dies at sea . . .

THEOCLYMENUS: To do what? It's true, the Pelopid house has expertise in such matters.⁵³

HELEN: . . . to give him burial rites in an empty shroud.

THEOCLYMENUS: Honour him as you see fit; raise a tomb wherever you wish in my land.

HELEN: This is not how we entomb those lost at sea.

THEOCLYMENUS: Then what *is* your practice? I am a stranger to the Greeks' customs.

HELEN: We take out to sea all the offerings that are due the dead.

THEOCLYMENUS: What would you have me provide for the dead man?

HELEN [*pointing to MENELAUS*]: This man knows. I do not have experience, as no such misfortune has afflicted me before now.

THEOCLYMENUS [*to MENELAUS*]: Fellow, you have brought welcome news. 1250

MENELAUS: Not to myself or the one who has died.

THEOCLYMENUS: How do you Greeks bury those who died at sea?

MENELAUS: It depends on the dead man's means.

THEOCLYMENUS: For this lady's sake no expense will be spared. Tell me what I should do.

MENELAUS: First of all we make a blood sacrifice in honour of the dead.

THEOCLYMENUS: Which animal should be killed? Tell me and I will follow your instruction.

MENELAUS: You yourself should decide; any offering you make here will be acceptable.

THEOCLYMENUS: In this country the custom is to sacrifice a horse or bull.

MENELAUS: Do so but make sure the beast is unblemished.

THEOCLYMENUS: My herds are well stocked; such animals are mine in plenty. 1260

MENELAUS: Then robes and a bier are brought out, even though there is no corpse.

THEOCLYMENUS: You shall have them; what else is usually provided?

MENELAUS: Weapons of bronze; he carried the spear with pride.

THEOCLYMENUS: The weapons I shall give will not disgrace a scion of Pelops.

MENELAUS: Finally, fruit and flowers – all the finest that your land produces.

THEOCLYMENUS: Agreed. But how do you lower these gifts into the sea?

MENELAUS: There must be a ship manned with oarsmen.

THEOCLYMENUS: And how far is this vessel to sail out from shore?

MENELAUS: So far that it is difficult to make out the white wake from land.

1270 THEOCLYMENUS: But why? What makes the Greeks observe this custom?

MENELAUS: It is to prevent any of the victim's blood from being washed back to the shore.

THEOCLYMENUS: You shall have a Phoenician galley that will not lack speed.

MENELAUS: That will do well; you are gracious to Menelaus.

THEOCLYMENUS: Are you not able to perform these rites alone, without this lady's assistance?

MENELAUS: The duty falls upon the mother or wife or children of the deceased.

THEOCLYMENUS: Then, from what you say, she has the task of supervising her husband's funeral.

MENELAUS: Well, piety demands that the dead are not cheated of their due.

1280 THEOCLYMENUS: So be it; I would not have the wife in my home an enemy of piety. Go into my house, take what finery you require for the corpse, and, if your behaviour pleases this lady, I will not send you on your way empty-handed. You have brought me welcome news and so, to replace these rags, you shall be given clothes and provisions to see you to your homeland, since I see you now in such a wretched state. [To HELEN] And you, poor lady, must stop wearing yourself out in endless grief. Your grief is fresh, I realize; but Menelaus has met his fate and no amount of tears can make the dead come back to life.

1290 MENELAUS: Now you know what you must do, young lady: you must be happy in the husband you have and bid farewell to the one you have no more. Given your situation, this is the best course for you to take. If I come safely to my Greek homeland, I will stop people cursing your name if you show yourself a fitting wife to the man whose bed you will now share.

HELEN: So I shall; my husband will never have cause to blame

me; you yourself will be there to witness this. Now go inside, you wretched man, take a bath and change your clothing. I will not keep you waiting for my reward. You will, I think, be readier to honour my beloved Menelaus as custom prescribes, if you find me suitably grateful. 1300

[THEOCLYMENUS leads HELEN into the palace. MENELAUS follows them under escort.]

CHORUS [Strophe]: *In time gone by, the Mountain Mother⁵⁴ of the Gods rushed on swift feet through wooded glades, past swirling rivers and the deep-voiced swell of ocean, longing to find her lost daughter whose name men dread. And the thunderous cymbals rang out, raising a piercing cry, when the goddess yoked her team of beasts behind her chariot to search for her child, stolen from the dancing ring of maidens. At her side, with feet storm-swift, ranged goddesses — Artemis armed with her arrows, and, spear in hand, the Lady of the Gorgon Shield. But Zeus, who sees all things, looked down from his heavenly throne and decreed a different outcome.* 1310

[Antistrophe:] *But when the Mother, wearied by her rapid quest over many a land, had ceased in her labour to find the daughter stolen from her by stealth, she scaled the snow-bound heights of Ida, sacred to its nymphs, and flung herself down in anguish on the rocky summit where the trees are buried in snow. The spreading lands below she turned from green to brown, frustrating mortal husbandry, and bringing death to humankind. For the flocks she stopped the growth of fresh greenery to sustain them with leafy tendrils, and life began to ebb from cities; of sacrifices to the gods or of burnt offerings at their altars there were none. Gushing springs of bright water at her bidding ceased to flow, as she mourned inconsolably for her child.* 1330

[Strophe:] *When the Mother had brought an end to feasting for mortals and gods, Zeus wished to appease her hateful anger and spoke to the Graces: 'Go forth, reverend ones, go to Demeter who is bitter at the loss of her maiden child, and with loud music charm away her sorrow. Let the Muses assist you with their skills of dance and song.' Then first of the immortals came the beautiful Cyprian, and she took up the rumbling voice of bronze and the drums stretched with hide.* 1340

1350 *The Goddess-Mother laughed and received in her hands the deep-sounding flute, delighted by the pulsating noise.*

[Antistrophe:] *O princess, the love you kindled in your chamber offended purity and the eye of heaven; great is the Mother's anger at your neglect of Her ceremonies. There lies great power⁵⁵ in a dappled cloak of fawnskin, in the ivy-shoot wreathed round a holy fennel-stalk, in the spinning bull-roarer that is whirled round on high, in the wild tossing of hair in honour of Bacchus and the night-long vigil kept for the Mother. But you ignored all this and gloried only in beauty.*

1360

[HELEN comes out from the palace.]

HELEN [to the CHORUS]: All goes well for us inside, my friends; 1370 Proteus' daughter who is helping to conceal my husband's presence was questioned about him but, to please me, she said he no longer lives. Then my husband brilliantly seized this chance: the weapons he was supposed to throw into the sea he took himself – shield with his left arm behind its band, spear held in his right hand – all to assist me, of course, in paying our respects to the dead man. He has put on defensive armour; he 1380 means to score a victory over any number of Egyptians once we board ship and get under way.

I've given him a set of clothes to replace those rags from the wreck and a proper bath of fresh water for his skin after so long a time. But I must say no more; here he comes from the palace, the man who thinks my hand in marriage is his for the taking. I beg you to be loyal and guard your tongues. Perhaps, if we two escape, we may one day help you to do so too.⁵⁶

[THEOCLYMENUS enters with attendants bearing gifts. MENELAUS follows in full battledress.]

1390 THEOCLYMENUS: On your way, men, with these offerings consecrated to the sea; file off as the stranger instructed. And, Helen, if you agree, do as I ask and stay here. Whether you are on board or not, you will be rendering equal service to your husband. I fear that some longing may prompt you to jump into the sea, distraught by loving thoughts of your former lord. Your mourning for him is excessive, even though he is missing.

HELEN: O my new husband, I must honour my first marriage, when I was a virgin bride. Indeed, I love him so, I would even share his death! But how would it gratify him that I should die as he has died? Allow me to accompany his corpse in person and give my gifts to the dead. And may the gods grant to you all that I wish, and to the stranger here, for helping me in this enterprise. You will find me the kind of wife you deserve to have in your home, since you have been generous to me and to Menelaus. All this conspires in our favour. Now, to crown my obligation to you, give the order for a ship to be supplied for us to convey these offerings. 1400

THEOCLYMENUS [*to an attendant*]: Go; give them a Sidonian galley with fifty oars and crew to match.

HELEN: Shouldn't this man command the ship, as he is organizing the funeral?

THEOCLYMENUS: Most certainly; my mariners are to take their orders from him.

HELEN: Give that instruction again, so they may be in no doubt as to your meaning. 1410

THEOCLYMENUS [*to his men*]: I repeat the instruction! [*To HELEN*] I'll give it a third time, if you like!

HELEN: Bless you! And bless my plans, too!

THEOCLYMENUS: Do not spoil your cheeks with all these tears!

HELEN: This day will make clear my gratitude to you. 1420

THEOCLYMENUS: These rites are a waste of effort; the dead are nothing.

HELEN: My thoughts are with the dead as well as the living.

THEOCLYMENUS: You will find me just as good a husband as Menelaus.

HELEN: I cannot fault you; I only need things to turn out well.

THEOCLYMENUS: That is for you to ensure; only be a loving wife to me.

HELEN: I have not waited till now to learn to show love where it belongs.

THEOCLYMENUS: Would you like me to participate in this expedition myself?

HELEN: Oh, no! A king should not serve his own servants, my lord!

1430 THEOCLYMENUS: Let's proceed, then. I needn't concern myself any more with the customs of Pelops' people. Menelaus did not give up the ghost here; my house has no such taint. [*To his attendants*] One of you, on your way to tell my subjects they may now bring their wedding presents to my palace. [*Exit one of the attendants.*] The whole land must ring with their joyful songs, so that men may envy my wedding with Helen! [*He turns to address MENELAUS.*] You, stranger, go and consign these offerings to the sea's embrace, honouring the man who once was husband to this lady, and then hurry back home with my wife. I want you to share my feast when I wed her; after
1440 that you can either sail for home or else stay here and be a lucky man! [*THEOCLYMENUS goes into the palace.*]

MENELAUS: O Zeus, whom we call the Father and the god of wisdom, look upon us in our troubles and grant us a change! As we haul our fortunes up this steep hill, stretch out your hand and send us to the top! A mere touch of your finger and we shall reach the goal we desire. My former sufferings have been enough. You gods, I have called upon you many times with prayers that did me no good and gave offence; I deserve to see an end to my misery; my path should now be a straight
1450 one. Grant me this one blessing and you will make me happy for the rest of my days. [*MENELAUS, HELEN and attendants move off in the direction of the shore.*]

CHORUS [*Strophe*]: *Hail! Swift Phoenician ship from Sidon, with oars that beat so dear to Nereus' waves, dance-leader of the skilful dolphins when the sea is windless and still and the grey-green goddess, Calm, daughter of Ocean, speaks thus: 'Shake out your sails, you sailors, you sailors, bid farewell to sea-breezes and grip your pinewood oars, as you escort Helen to the harbours of her native shores and the city that Perseus raised.'*⁵⁷

[*Antistrophe*:] *What will she find there?*⁵⁸ *Leucippus' maiden daughters, perhaps, by the swirling river, or before Pallas' temple she*

may join at last in the ritual dance, or on the joyous night take part in 1470
the revelling for Hyacinthus, whom Phoebus challenged and killed
with the round discus. In his honour the son of Zeus proclaimed a holy
day for the land of Sparta to mark with sacrifice of bulls. Perhaps she
may see the daughter she left behind at home, flaxen-haired Hermione,
for whom the bridal torches have not yet burst into flame.

[Strophe:] If only we might find ourselves flying⁵⁹ through the air
where go the ranks of Libyan birds, leaving the winter storms behind, 1480
heeding their leader's piping cry, who shrills as he wings his way over
earth's plains, both waterless and fruitful. O feathered travellers with
your long necks, partners of the racing clouds, fly beneath the Pleiads
at mid-course and Orion in the night, and, as you come to rest on 1490
Eurotas, deliver the news that Menelaus who sacked Dardanus' town
will soon be coming home.

[Antistrophe:] And you, sons of Tyndareus,⁶⁰ come on your
steeds, I pray, galloping through the air, you whose dwelling is in
heaven under the whirling of the lustrous stars, come, you saviours of 1500
Helen, over the green salt depths, skimming the white-flecked ridges
that mark the sea's dark face, and bring the gentle breath of winds that
sailors welcome, the gift of Zeus. Vindicate your sister, branded as the
mistress of a foreign prince: remove the infamy she won in retribution
for the strife on Ida, though never did she go to Ilium's towers that 1510
Phoebus raised.

[THEOCLYMENUS comes out of the palace, accompanied by
servants. Before he can speak, the MESSENGER, one of the servants
he sent to accompany the procession, rushes in from the shore.]

MESSENGER: My royal lord, prepare yourself, for such is the
strange news you are soon to hear from me.

THEOCLYMENUS: What has happened?

MESSENGER: You must set about finding another woman to
woo; Helen has gone from this land.

THEOCLYMENUS: What? Did she soar into the air or escape on
foot?

MESSENGER: Menelaus has carried her off from Egypt by sea.
He was the man who came and reported his own death.

1520 THEOCLYMENUS: Oh, terrible news! But how could they sail away from this land? Your tale is beyond belief!

MESSENGER: In the ship that was your own gift to the stranger; in a word, he's gone, taking your sailors with him.

THEOCLYMENUS: But how? I must know how! A whole crew of men, yourself included – was I to imagine that a single man could overpower all that?

MESSENGER: When Zeus' daughter had left the palace here and come to the sea, stepping out with delicate tread she started like an expert on a lament for the husband who was there at her side and not dead at all.

1530 We reached the enclosure of your dockyard and started to launch a Sidonian galley on her maiden voyage, a vessel manned by fifty oarsmen. The various tasks were carried out in turn: one sailor was stepping the mast, another setting the oars in place, the white sails were folded and put in position, and ropes were used to lower the rudders by the stern.

While we were busy at this work, some Greek seamen, who had sailed with Menelaus and had doubtless been watching for this moment, approached us on the shore. They were handsome enough men but, dressed in rags from the shipwreck as they were, a picture of squalor. The son of Atreus, seeing them there, put on for us a crafty display of pity and spoke to them: 'You poor fellows, what brings you here? What Greek vessel were you on and how were you wrecked? Join us in giving burial to the fallen son of Atreus! This lady, Tyndareus' daughter, is going to perform the ceremony, though his body is lost.' So, with feigned tears in their eyes, these men began boarding the ship, bringing with them their sea-offerings in Menelaus' honour. Now this made us suspicious and we muttered to one another about the number of these extra passengers. However, we obeyed your instructions and held our tongues. For you had given the stranger command of the ship and that was what caused the whole fiasco.

1550

Now most of the gear was manageably light and we had little trouble in loading it on board. But not the bull:⁶¹ his

hoofs twisted and turned as he refused to mount the gangway; he rolled his eyes and bellowed, humping his shoulders and glaring along his horns, and let no one touch him. Then Helen's husband called out, 'Come on, you men who sacked the town of Ilium,⁶² lift up that bull the Greek way! Get your young shoulders under him and heave him on board! Are we to deny the dead man his sacrifice?' They moved to do his bidding, and, hoisting up the bull, carried him and set him down on the deck. The horse was easier to deal with; Menelaus patted his neck and forehead and so enticed him on board. 1560

In the end, when everything was loaded on deck, Helen mounted the ladder, stepping with trim ankles up each rung, and took her seat alongside her supposedly dead husband, next to the stern quarterdeck. The remaining Greeks sat equally to port and starboard, man for man, each with a sword concealed under his clothes. The churning waters were filled with our shouting as we responded to the boatswain's cries. 1570

When we were some distance from land, not too far but not near either, the helmsman put this question to Menelaus: 'Full ahead still, sir, or is this far enough? You are our ship's captain.' And he replied, 'Far enough!' Then, taking his sword in his right hand, he made his way forward to the prow. There he stood to sacrifice the bull and, with no mention of any dead man, he slit the beast's throat and uttered this prayer: 'Poseidon, Lord of the sea, your own domain, and you holy daughters of Nereus, carry me and my wife safely away from this land and set us on the shores of Nauplia!' The blood shot out in a stream and poured into the sea – an omen favourable to the stranger. Someone said, 'Treachery on board! Let's sail back! You, give the order for a starboard pull, you, get the helm over!' 1580 1590

The son of Atreus stood fast⁶³ where he had slaughtered the bull and shouted to his comrades: 'What are you waiting for? Now show you mettle, sons of Greece! Cut these foreigners to pieces and throw them into the briny!' At this our captain shouted in reply to your own sailors: 'These strangers are our

enemies! Quick, pick up end spars, smash benches, rip out rowlocks and crack their skulls open!

1600 Every man jumped to his feet; we had oars in our hands, but they had swords. Then the ship was awash with blood. A voice could be heard shouting encouragement from the stern – it was Helen's! 'Where is that fame you won at Troy? Show these barbarians!' At her eager cry, men fell down or kept their feet; some were to be seen lying still, dead. Menelaus, fully armed, was keeping an eye out for any signs of his men struggling in the fight, and that was where he was to be seen, sword in right hand, sending your crewmen tumbling off the ship like divers and clearing the benches of them. Then he went over to the helmsman and told him to set course for Greece. His men raised the sail and the breeze freshened in their favour. So they have put Egypt behind them.

1610

I managed to escape the slaughter by lowering myself into the sea alongside the anchor. Fatigue was getting the better of me when I was picked up by a fisherman, who brought me back to shore to tell you this news.

To sum up,⁶⁴ there's nothing more useful in life than showing a healthy scepticism. [*Exit MESSENGER.*]

1620 CHORUS-LEADER: My lord, I would never have believed that Menelaus could appear here among us, as he did, without being recognized by you or us!⁶⁵

THEOCLYMENUS: Oh, to have been caught out⁶⁶ so miserably by a woman's wiles! My marriage has slipped from my hands! If there was any chance of overtaking their ship, I'd cram on every stitch of canvas to catch them. But instead I'll be revenged on the woman who betrayed me, my sister, who saw Menelaus in the palace but kept me in the dark. Never again will she deceive a man with her prophecies!

[*THEOCLYMENUS turns angrily to enter the palace but his path is barred by a servant who steps between him and the door and clutches him by the arms.*]

SERVANT: Now, sir, where are you off to? Who do you mean to kill, master?

THEOCLYMENUS: I go where Justice prompts me; get out of my way!

SERVANT: I won't let go of your robe! You're planning to commit a terrible crime!

THEOCLYMENUS: Are you, a slave, going to give orders to your master? 1630

SERVANT: Yes; what I say is right.

THEOCLYMENUS: You are disloyal, if you do not let me . . .

SERVANT: No! I will not let you!

THEOCLYMENUS: . . . kill my traitorous sister . . .

SERVANT: No traitor but a most pious lady.

THEOCLYMENUS: . . . who has betrayed me . . .

SERVANT: An honourable betrayal, to act as justice dictated.

THEOCLYMENUS: . . . by offering my wife to another man.

SERVANT: A man who has a greater right to her than you.

THEOCLYMENUS: Who has a right to what is mine?

SERVANT: He received her from her father.

THEOCLYMENUS: But Fortune gave her to me!

SERVANT: And Destiny took her away.

THEOCLYMENUS: You have no right to interfere with my affairs.

SERVANT: I do, if I am talking better sense.

THEOCLYMENUS: Then I am the subject here and not the ruler!

SERVANT: You rule to do what is right, not what is wrong.

THEOCLYMENUS: It seems you are in love with death.

SERVANT: Then kill me; you will not kill your sister before me, if I can help it! There is no more glorious end for a true-hearted slave than dying for his master.⁶⁷ 1640

[As THEOCLYMENUS raises his hand to strike the servant the DIOSCURI appear above the palace.⁶⁸]

CASTOR: Curb the unjust anger that grips you, Theoclymenus, king of this land! That is our command. We are the Dioscuri, sons of Zeus, who call you, whom Leda once bore, brothers of Helen who has fled from your home. This marriage that rouses your anger is not yours to enjoy, nor are you wronged by your sister Theonoe, maiden daughter of Nereus' divine daughter. She was honouring the laws of heaven and her

[1650] father's just precepts. No, keep that sword unstained by a sister's blood and think of her action as inspired by virtue. Long ago we would have taken our sister from your land to safety, since
 1660 Zeus had made us gods. But we were subservient to fate and to the gods as well, whose will it was that these things should be.

These are my words to you, and now I address myself to my sister. Sail onward with your husband; you will have a favourable wind. We your two Saviour brothers shall ride our horses over the sea with you and give you escort to your homeland. When your race is run and your mortal years at an end, you will be called a goddess⁶⁹ and, together with us, you will receive from men a cult-feast. This is the will of Zeus. There is a straggling island that keeps watch over Acte's coast,⁷⁰ where
 1670 Maia's son first set you down after taking wing on his heavenly course from Sparta, stealing you away so that you would not become Paris' bride. Henceforth it shall be called by mortals 'Helen's Isle', since it gave you welcome when you were stolen there from home.

To Menelaus the Wanderer the gods grant as his destined home a dwelling on the Isle of the Blessed.⁷¹ Men of noble birth are not hated by the gods, but they have more trials to undergo than their ordinary fellows.

1680 THEOCLYMENUS: Sons of Leda and Zeus, I will forego my former quarrel with your sister! Let her return to her home, if it is the gods' will, and I will renounce my decision to kill my sister. You are brothers in blood to a most excellent and virtuous lady. Go on your way rejoicing in Helen's great nobility of heart, something lacking in all too many women.

1690 CHORUS: *Many are the forms the plans of the gods take and many the things they accomplish beyond men's hopes. What men expect does not happen; for the unexpected heaven finds a way. And so it has turned out here today.*⁷²