

AGAMEMNON

Watchman: May the gods release me from this misery, this twelvemonth vigil. Here on the roof of the palace of the Atreidai, I crouch like a cur, familiar now with the night's constellations and those bright potentates, shining clearly in the sky, which, by their setting or rising, bring us winter and summer. So now I'm on the alert for the torch's sign, the flash of fire which will come from Troy and tell of her capitulation. Thus does a woman with a man's heart and full of expectation control me. My cot, restless, dew-damp, is visited by no dreams. Fear, not sleep, is my companion, fear lest my eyelids close in slumber; whenever I have a mind to sing or hum a tune to stave off sleep, I weep at the fortunes of this house, so different now from what they were in the past. O for a reversal of fate, a torch flashing in the darkness and bringing good news! Welcome, o lamp of night, o day in night! The sight of you will set all of Argos to dancing at this victory. Hurrah! Hurrah! Consort of Agamemnon, rise from your couch at once and raise a cry of triumph to all the house for this torch's message. The city of Troy is taken – clearly this firebrand announces the fact. I myself will begin the dance. This beacon has flung me a triple six, so, with my masters' fortunate throw, I shall move their pieces in my favour. Well, may he get home safely and clasp his dear hand in mine. As for the rest – mum! A great ox has landed on my tongue. The house itself, could it speak, would make all clear. I shall make sure that those in the know understand me, but to the others I'll offer no hints at all.

Chorus: It's been ten years since Priam's mighty foes
Lord Menelaos and Agamemnon, those
Twin rulers stoutly yoked by Zeus on high,
An honoured privilege, the Atreidai,
Sent out an Argive army from this land,
Shouting fierce cries amid the allied band,
Like vultures who have lost their young and fly
Around above the nest and madly ply
Their wings like oars, or linger in the air,
Preoccupied with their parental care;
Apollo, Pan or Zeus up in the sky,
Aware of these air-dwellers' screeching cry,
Now send a Fury to the thieves (though she
Is tardy), thus, since hospitality
Is his preserve, great Zeus sends Paris these
Two sons of Atreus, bringing to their knees
With heavy slaughter, while the marriage-rite
Proceeds, Argives and Trojans both – a fight
Because of just one woman who has had
So many men. The future, good or bad,
Will be just as it is and in the end
It's predetermined. No-one will unbend
The gods' inflexible severity
Through hecatombs and sacred wine. But we
Were left behind, dishonoured, old, our strength,

Now childlike, propped up by a crutch's length –
Young sap that leaps beneath a mortal's frame
When he is still an infant is the same
As that of an old man, the God of War
Not at his post; and old age must look for
Three feet to hold it, leaves now withering;
It roams about, an insubstantial thing,
A daylight shade, no stronger than a tot.
Tyndareus' daughter, Klytaimnestra, what
Has happened? What's to do? What have you heard?
What message prompts your sending out the word
For sacrifices? All the altars glow,
The city gods, the gods above, below,
At Argos' gates, the marketplace, receive
Your gifts; see smoke from countless places weave
As high as heaven, enchanted and induced
By soft and holy oil, which was produced
Out of the house's sanctum. Please tell me
What's right and possible to speak, and be
A healer for my fretfulness: I'm fraught
One minute with a most uneasy thought,
The next your sacrifices banish care
And give me hope. A witness, I may dare
Tell that our chiefs, while marching at the head
Of vigorous platoons, whom they both led,
Met with auspicious omens – from the Blessed
Persuasion's breathed on me; old age is best
When singing valorous deeds; the double might,
The flower of Greece holding a common right,
Were sent to Teucris' land with vengeful spear
By the dark, warlike bird and he whose rear
Shows white – kings flying to the kings' argosy,
Hard by the tent-pole, on the right side – see,
Clear omens, how upon a hare they feed
That's big with young and with their lightning speed
Cut off her final dash. Lament, lament,
But may the good prevail! The elder, sent
As seer, knew that the birds who ate that hare
Were the twin-purposed kings commanding there,
And prophesied: "In time this expedition
Will banish Priam's city to perdition,
The common stock abducted. O but may
No godly hate darken great Troy this day,
Already doomed in battle! Artemis,
The Holy One, feels sympathy for this
Poor teeming hare and hates the ravaging

Here wrought by Zeus's curs upon the wing." Lament, lament, but may the good prevail! "She's well-disposed to and will never fail The helpless whelps of savage lions and The sucklings of all creatures in the land, And now she craves fulfillment of this sign. Visions like this (it's a belief of mine) May be auspicious or unlucky. O Lord Paian, I invoke you now: let no Unfriendly storm hinder our ships, push on This second dreadful sacrifice (upon Which none may feed!), this natural creator Of enmity, which fears no man; for later Will come dread Wrath upon the house, begetting Revenge for this child's murder, unforgetting, Inveterate, deceitful." Prophecies Both good and bad thus Kalchas shouted. These, Acquired by divination, to each lord He spoke; and so, likewise, with one accord. Lament, lament, but may the good prevail! If he's content that I may "Zeus" him hail, So shall I call him: he is all I need (And I've considered all) – if I indeed May cast away this burden from my mind; A once great, dauntless god one day you'll find Is ranked as nothing, for a younger one Has vanquished him; sing victory to *his* son And you'll be worldly-wise; for Zeus conveyed Us on the path of knowledge and has made Us see that we must learn by suffering; Instead of sleep there drips the harsher sting Of painful thoughts before our hearts; so we Against our will acquire sagacity; The gods, who sit on holy thrones, on us Bestow a favour that is vigorous. The leader of our fleet attached no blame To any prophet and, as Fate's blows came, He rode them out, while the Achaean host, Marooned, was plagued by famine on the coast Of sea-girt Aulis. Hungry and confined To port, inertia ravaging their mind, Their ships wind-battered, all the soldiery Were kept there twice as long as they should be – The flower of Argos worn away. Kalchas Announced a remedy which would surpass The vicious storm in woe: and when he prayed

To Artemis the sons of Atreus made
The ground re-echo with their staffs, and tears,
Unbidden, filled their eyes. And now his fears
The elder king expressed: "My heart will break
To yield, yet so it would if I should take
My child, my sweet delight, and butcher her,
Staining these father's hands, and so incur
Pollution at the altar; either thing
Is fraught with ill. For how could I, your king,
Desert my duty? It's appropriate
That you insist, to make the winds abate,
We shed in sacrifice her virgin blood.
I pray, therefore, the consequence be good."
And so the harness of necessity
He donned, a spirit of impiety
Now ruling him, unholy, evil – now
He's pledged himself to an audacious vow.
This lunacy, a wretched cause of sin,
Emboldens all; he'll sacrifice his kin
Himself and champion a "woman's" war
By giving favourable passage for
The ships. Her protestations and her screams
Of "Father", and her tender years, it seems,
The chieftains thought as naught. After the prayer
Her father ordered the attendants there
To raise her, as she clasped him desperately,
Face downwards, like a she-goat, and to see
Her pretty mouth was bridled lest her cry
Should curse the house; her robe of purple dye
Fell down and at each executioner
She cast a pitiful glance, as though she were
The central figure in a painting that
Wanted to speak, for often she'd been at
Her father's feasts and, at the third libation,
Had, in her virgin tones, in jubilation
Intoned the paean for her father dear.
What happened next I cannot venture near
(I did not see it); but never in vain
Are Kalchas' arts; and those who suffer gain
Wisdom from Justice; what's to come you'll see
When it unfolds; for now, then, let it be.
No point in grieving yet! It will come clear
With the first dawn of day, but for the here
And now, may good be done! That is our prayer,
We who are Apia's bulwark, her sole care.

Klytaimnestra, we are here: we respect your authority. It's only right to defer to the wife when the throne's incumbent has left it empty. If you have had bad news and hope to reverse it by these sacrifices, I will be happy to hear it, though likewise content at your silence.

Klytaimnestra: They say: "May Dawn, bursting from her mother Night, bring glad tidings!" Well, you're about to hear a joy past all hope of joy: the Argives have taken Troy.

Chorus: What? This is beyond belief.

Klytaimnestra: She's ours. Am I speaking distinctly enough?

Chorus: Elation has taken me by surprise. I weep with it.

Klytaimnestra: Indeed your eyes betray your good judgments:

Chorus: How do you know it's true? Have you proof?

Klytaimnestra: Yes, of course. Unless a god has deceived me

Chorus: Do you put your trust in persuasive dreams?

Klytaimnestra: I have no credence in what appears to me in sleep!

Chorus: Maybe an unspoken rumour has made you revel thus?

Klytaimnestra: You're treating me like some green girl!

Chorus: And since when was the city taken?

Klytaimnestra: Since the kindly night who gave birth to this dawn.

Chorus: And what messenger could reach you so fast?

Klytaimnestra: Hephaistos! He sent a bright flame from Ida. A flame passed from one torch to another – Ida to Lemnos' Hermean rock! From the island a third great torch reached steep Athos, Zeus' abode! High over the sea the powerful light traveled and, like the sun, the torch announced its golden news to the rocks of Makistos! In a trice, not nodding in pointless sleep, it did not abandon its role as messenger but gladly revealed the torchlight to the watchmen at Messapion on the straits of Epirus! They laid fire to dry heather and flashed on the message; in full blaze and no less dim, it skipped over Euripus' plain, a bright moon, towards Kithairon's rock where it roused another guiding beacon! The next guard did not ignore the journeying light, which now beamed brighter than those I mentioned; the light fell on Lake Gorgopis and, reaching the mountain where goats wander, urged it on its rightful way! A new, powerful fire is lit, a great beard of flame; swooping down, it came to steep Mt. Arachnaion, hard by the city! And thus this light, born of the Idaian flame, shone on the House of Atreus! These fiery structures were built in succession, one torch to another, successful runners first to last. *That's* the method my husband employed to reach me from Troy.

Chorus: Lady, once more I offer my prayers to the gods; tell me again that I may once more hear your words and marvel at them.

Klytaimnestra: Today Troy is in Achaean hands. The city should raise its voice in raw, unblent jubilation. If you mix oil and vinegar in the same bowl, they quarrel, hardly friends; and the cries of the vanquished and the victors may be heard separately. Those who fall about the corpses of their husbands and brothers are now bewailing their nearest and dearest in servitude. After the battle our troops wander all night, hungry, scavenging, and at last sit down to what breakfast the city can provide. No order of seniority here – they take their places according to the lot that each man draws. They are quartered in the Trojan houses they have taken, free now of the high, dew-covered rocks; now, like happy men, they'll sleep all the blessed night. No more sentry-duty! If the respect the protecting

gods and the shrines of the city they have taken, then the victors will not in turn be overturned. May the army, through lust for gain, not immediately succumb to a desire for unlawful devastation. They must have safe passage home, they still must run their second lap. Should they return untainted with offence to the gods, the sufferings of the dead may be roused or some new obstacle may show itself. Yes, you heard this from me - a woman. May all be well and clear for all to see. A great blessing will be mine, picked from so much good.

Chorus: Well spoken, lady, like a wise man. Now I've heard convincing proof I must make all preparations to address the gods. We have a worthy return for our troubles.

King Zeus and kindly Night, whose finery
Is awesome and who cast a cloaking net
Over the walls of Troy so nobody,
Children or warriors, could ever get
Above its all-embracing web of woe.
Protector Zeus, I stand in awe of you
And these your deeds; long have you aimed your bow
At Paris, making sure your aim is true
(Not past the stars nor yet short of its foe).
A blow from Zeus they own, for we can trace
Its very course – he did what he decreed.
Some say, it's true, the gods will not debase
Themselves with mortals who have done a deed
Of blasphemy which brings delight. But they
Are impious; the penalty for sin
In overweening dynasties, I say,
Will be inflicted on the future kin.
May men of sense not drown in wealth; you'll see
There's no protection from excess at all
Once you have tossed into obscurity
The shrine of mighty Justice. Thus you'll fall
A victim to Persuasion, dogged spawn
Of scheming Folly; every cure's in vain;
Her plague's not hidden – like some dreadful dawn
It shines out clearly. So, a blackened stain
Like that on bronze that's been rubbed and assailed
Surrounds the evildoer, who's pursued
The winged bird of safety and has failed
To catch him, and the city's now imbued
With dread pollution. No god hears his plea –
He's punished for his sin. For Paris came
To Argos to commit a robbery –
A woman! – thus inflicting lasting shame
And spurning hospitality. So she,
Leaving her people, soldiers, sailors too,
Has brought to Troy harsh ruin; speedily
And with a monstrous pride she set out through

The gates; the house's seers groaned mightily
This news: 'Grieve, kings, grieve, palace, marriage-bed,
Those lovers' haunts; and there for all to see –
Abased, mute king! Her shade, he might have said,
Now rules the palace, while for her he yearns
Across the sea, her shapely statues now
He eyes with loathing, for no passion burns
For eyeless things! Sad fantasies allow
Vain comfort, for what seems fine slips away
Before one's eyes, not ever to come back
On wings of sleep; these miseries now lay
Within the house, and more; there was no lack
Of women-mourners for the troops who went
From Greece – each house bore all things patiently,
But hearts were passing sore, for those they sent
Were known to them, but what were they to see
On their arrival back? No longer men
But urns and ashes! In the dreadful fray
Gold-Changer Ares tips his scales and then
Gluts all those urns with dust that's stored away
So easily, for they're not warriors now;
A heavy burden for their family;
In grief they praise this man, remarking how
He shone in war, that man for gallantry
In dying for a female alien
(Snarled in a whisper!). For the Atreidai,
Though plaintiffs, are grudged by the common men.
Yet, in the prime of youth, some others lie
In Troy (our foe keeps them foe evermore).
But angry talk is dangerous; Argos
Has ratified a curse. So I wait for
Some hidden tale. But those who caused the loss
Of such a host the gods watch carefully;
The murky Furies at some future date
Will punish and corrode a man if he
Has wrongfully enjoyed a happy fate,
That man of darkness will be powerless;
There's danger in excessive praise, which draws
God's thunderbolt. I say lack of excess
In wealth is good. May I, then, have no cause
To sack a city, then forever be
Another's chattel! This beacon's good news
Spreads winged talk. Is this reality?
Who knows? It's either false or god-sent. Who's
So childish, witless, as to be ablaze
At this flame's message, then to feel the woe

When it's reversed ? A woman should give praise
For this. Her thoughts, however, always go
Too fast, and they persuade too easily;
A woman's rumour withers rapidly.

Klytaimnestra: We'll soon know more of the watchmen and their relayed beacons and be able to determine whether they speak true or this light has come like some sweet dream and baffled our senses. See, a herald from the shore, covered in olive-wreaths. That thirsty dust, mud's twin-sister, cries out that he won't be a voiceless messenger, a mere igniter of woodland branches to fan the flame. He'll elucidate the joyful news – I loathe the alternative! May his new words, added to the beacon's message, be favourable ones.

Chorus: Whoever prays otherwise for the city, let him lose his wits.

Herald: Argos! Fatherland! I have returned to you after ten years' absence with one hope attained after so many shattered! I never bragged that I would die here in Argos and be put to rest by my loved ones. Greetings, my country, greetings, sun, Zeus high above the land, Lord Apollo of Pythia! Shoot your arrows at me no longer! You were implacable enough along the banks of the Skamander. Be my saviour and healer instead, Lord Apollo! I address all the gods that sit in judgment, my protector Hermes, beloved, revered herald, our hero-companions, look kindly on us and take us back again, the army's remnants. Palace, dear houses, you solemn seats of stone, east-facing statues of the gods, duly receive your king at long last! Look brightly on him! Lord Agamemnon is here and he brings for all of you light in darkness. Give him good welcome – it is right you should for he has ploughed up all of Troy with Justice-delivering Zeus' mattock. Their altars are gone, their shrines too, and every seed in the whole land has been blasted. Our revered lord has come, fortunate man and of all mortals the most deserving of reward. For neither Paris nor his native-city can boast that their deeds outstripped their suffering. He is a debtor now for that theft and that rape – his property forfeited, his all-destructive family home mown down. A double price have the sons of Priam paid.

Chorus: Greetings, herald of the Achaean army.

Herald: Greetings! Gods, no longer would I look at death with an unwilling eye.

Chorus: Has your patriotism enfeebled you?

Herald: Yes. I begin to weep with joy.

Chorus: A pleasing sickness, then?

Herald: What? Explain. Then shall I master my tale.

Chorus: We have been plagued with a longing for those who love us.

Herald: You mean you yearned for the army that yearned for its city?

Chorus: Yes, a troubled mind caused us great sorrow.

Herald: Why such gloom? That was the army's concern.

Chorus: For a long while silence has been the medicine for my grief.

Herald: How? With our leaders abroad, did you fear someone here?

Chorus: Now, as you say, death would be most welcome.

Herald: Indeed, for all is well. For a long time now one may say some things have turned out favourably, but others not so. Who but the gods is eternally free of care? If I told you of the hardships of war, uncomfortable lodgings, narrow and irregular gangways, what daily lot would not be cause for complaint? Yet dry land afforded even worse misery. Our beds were up against the enemy's walls, for heaven and earth the dew of the meadows left us damp, a constant plague which rendered our clothes and hair verminous. But if

you talk of the winters, fatal to birds, made unbearable by Idaian snow, or the summer's heat, when the sea, calm and waveless, dropped and snoozed in its midday couch, why do you grieve these conditions now? The misery's gone. It's gone and the dead don't care to rise again; for those of us in the Argive army who are left, gain is the victor and more than counters grief. Why count the numbers of the dead, why should the living weep for a reversal of fortune? We should instead rejoice at what has transpired, as we fly over land and sea we shout our boast to the blazing sun: 'The Argive army has taken Troy and fastened these spoils on the houses throughout Greece, a proud memorial.' Hearing this, the generals too should praise the city and Zeus' favour will be honoured for these accomplishments. That is my message.

Chorus: I am not sorry that your words have won me. One is never too old to learn. These things concern Klytaimnestra and the house most deeply, though I shall have a share in their riches.

Klytaimnestra: I have roared my joy ever since the first night-messenger of fire came and told of the utter capitulation of Troy. Someone reproved me: 'Your belief that Troy is no more is based on *beacons*? How like a woman to get so carried away!' They thought I was raving. Nevertheless I offered up sacrifices and in womanly fashion shrieks of triumph were raised, one to another, throughout the city and on the shrines of the gods the sacrificial flame was laid to rest by fragrant incense. Why tell me any more? I'll learn all from my lord. I must hasten to make sure I receive my revered husband with all possible ceremony. For what could be sweeter for a woman than to open her gates to a husband who has been spared in combat? Tell my darling husband to get to the city as soon as he can. Let him see his faithful wife at home, just as he left her, his loyal dog, hostile to his enemies and the same in all other respects, her wedding-seal intact after all this time I know neither pleasure nor censure from any other man any more than I have experienced tempered bronze. That's my boast, full of truth! That's not a shameful thing for a noble lady to utter.

Chorus: You accept her words offhandedly but they would seem fair enough to wise interpreters. But, herald, tell me of Menelaos, our dear king – of him I long to hear. Has he come home safely with you?

Herald: I cannot tell a pretty tale to gladden his friends in the long years ahead.

Chorus: I wish you would tell a joyful truth! When true and false are parted, they cannot lie hidden any longer.

Herald: He's disappeared from the Achaian army, both he and his ship. This is no lie.

Chorus: Was he seen leaving Troy or did a storm, a common burden, carry him off?

Herald: An excellent marksman, you have hit it. You have succinctly told a long tale of woe.

Chorus: Did the other sailors speak of him as living or dead

Herald: No-one can say for certain – only the all-nurturing sun.

Chorus: How came that fatal storm, the missile of divine rancour, upon the fleet?

Herald: It would be wrong to tarnish an auspicious day with ill news. Honour due to the gods must be kept apart from such reports. But when a messenger with a sullen face brings to the city the news of a fallen army's wretched grief, the news that the city has suffered one common blow and that many people have been dispossessed, victims of a double scourge, Ares' joy, a two-pronged disaster, a twin bloodletting... Well, when one is stuffed with such disasters, then one should utter such a paean to the Furies. But

bringing a tale of deliverance to a prosperous city... How could I mix good and bad and tell you of a storm? For our former detested enemies Fire and Water swore their good faith and destroyed the Argive army. In the night the sea performed a dreadful feat. The Thracian winds shattered the ships one against the other – they were mightily rammed together by a storm sent by Typhos and a devastating torrent of rain, and then they were gone, like sheep whirled round in confusion by an evil shepherd. At the first light of day we saw the Aigaian sea blossoming with the corpses of Achaeans and with flotsam; some god, certainly not a mortal, was at our tiller and either stole our ship away from the wrack unharmed or gained a pardon for us; surely Chance, our protector, was aboard our boat, so we would neither ride the storm at anchor and so be overwhelmed by the seething sea nor be dashed against the rocky coastland. Then, free of a watery death – it was now clear day – and not convinced that our troubles were over, we cast our minds back on our recent misfortune, how the army had suffered and was still being pounded by the storm. Anyone still breathing would naturally have assumed that the rest of us were dead, and we would have thought the same of them. We must hope for the best

Our principal expectation is that Menelaos will soon be here so if the sun's rays show him to be truly alive (for Zeus would never wish to destroy that scion), then there is some hope that he will come home once more. That's my tale. Be assured it is true.

Chorus: Who ever gave a more appropriate name?

Was some unseen force able, then, to frame
His tongue so accurately? The spearsman's wife,
Helen, a source of discord! Why, the strife
She brings to ships, men, cities so dovetails
With *Helen*. From soft coverlets she sails
On mighty Zephyros's winds. Behind
A myriad of warriors toils to find
Her unseen spoor; and now upon the strand
Of leafy Simoeis she comes to land,
The source of savage war. A guarantee
Of wedlock (and of war) across the sea
Was brought to Troy by Wrath, working her will:
Thereafter she her vengeance would fulfil
Because they flaunted hospitality
And Guardian Zeus on those who raucously
Sang bridal songs in reverent celebration
(Their duty on that day). That city nation
Of Priam, ancient now, a new refrain
Was taught and groaned, a groan of grievous pain,
Now naming Paris 'fatally-wedded one'
Now that by bloody slaughter she's undone.
Thus was a lion cub by one man raised,
Lacking her mother's breast; the aged gazed
On her with joy, so sweet-tempered was she
When young, a paragon of amity
To children; much she got and, shining-eyed,
(Just like a babe) she'd fawningly abide

Close by his hand when hunger bit. But then
One day she showed her parents' temper when,
In thanks to those who reared her, she created,
Unasked, a feast – thousands of sheep were fated
For slaughter and the house with blood defiled
And those who lived within were all beguiled
By irresistible pain, a killing field,
The house divinely destined now to yield
A slaughterous sacrificer. Thus she went,
I say, to Troy, the clear embodiment
Of windless calm, a soft accessory
To wealth, her eyes flashing compassionately,
A piercing bud of love. The Fury, though,
Turned wedlock on its head, inflicting woe
On Priam's house, sent as a harbinger
By Guardian Zeus. And Helen wept for her
Sad fate. An ancient saying goes that when
A man attains great wealth he fathers then,
Not dying childless. Yet the human race
From honourable Fortune still must face
Unending misery. I must dissent,
However, single in this sentiment:
Foul deeds produce yet more which imitate
Those of their doer's forebears. For the fate
Of virtuous houses is their progeny
Is likewise virtuous. In civility
Among the bad, though, merely will create
More of the same, upon that very date
Of birth, and Ruin whom no mortal can
Withstand, bold, vicious in the halls which man
Inhabits – children, parents, both akin
In morals. Justice shines, however, in
Dwellings which reek with smoke; she's quick to prize
The righteous man but she averts her eyes
From gold-encrusted mansions soiled with sin
And moves toward holy folk; wealth that has been
Falsely approved she spurns, and everything
She guides towards its goal. Come now, great king,
Troy's hammer, son of Atreus, how shall we
Address you? honour you? What courtesy
Will show the golden mean between extremes?
So many go too far and prize what *seems*
Correct, and everyone's prepared to groan
With the unlucky but they do not own
The sting of love themselves; they also try
To seem as happy as all others by

Adopting joyful features. Any man
Who is an expert judge of people can
See through someone who fakes a loyal mind
But fawns with lukewarm love. I was unkind,
I must confess, when you had marched away
For Helen's sake, depicting you that day
In ugly terms – I thought your wits had strayed
When with the sacrifices that you made
You brought new heart to dying men; but here
I offer you a friendship that's sincere
For bringing to fruition your campaign;
In time through question you shall ascertain
Who of our folk that stayed at home were true
In all their deeds and who to mischief grew.

Agamemnon: My first duty is to address Argos and the gods of our country, who share with me the credit for our safe return and for my just treatment of Priam's city. They have listened to pleas which were made not with words but with deeds and they have cast into the urn of blood their unfaltering votes for murder and the destruction of Troy. The opposing vessel held merely the hope of a hand's touch and remained empty. It is now clear – that city has been taken through the smoke of war. The squalls of Ruin live, their embers dying hard as they scatter to the winds her mighty wealth. We must pay the gods a much-remembered debt of gratitude since we have exacted payment from those insolent thieves. That Argive newborn equine beast, shielding a host of shield-bearing warriors, utterly shattered their city, all because of a woman – at the Pleiades' setting, out they leapt! A flesh-eating lion topped their citadel and lapped its fill of tyrant's blood. For the gods I spun out this prelude of war.

As for your observations, I heard them, they live in my memory; I concur and will be your advocate for them, since few men possess the natural ability to respect the fortunate without envy. A malignant arrow pierces the heart of the man who suffers from envy and doubles his discomfort. Weighed down with his cares he groans when he catches sight of his neighbour's riches. I know what I speak of - I have seen society's mirror and know it to be a shadow's image which merely affects devotion to me. Odysseus alone was my willing yoke-mate and he went to Troy against his will! Yes – alone out of the whole army, living or dead.

For the rest – the city, the gods – I shall hold a national assembly. Let us make sure that our fortune shall continue. Relying on healing medicine, we shall, as prudent men, attempt to eradicate the pain of sickness either by cauterization or diversion. But now I shall enter the palace and hail the gods who sent me from home and brought me back again.

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Klytaimnestra: Citizens, elders of Argos, I do not blush to speak to you of my fidelity as a wife – a mortal's fears eventually fade away. I need no messenger for what I am about to tell you – that my life here has been as grim as what this man underwent at Troy. For a woman to remain at home without her man is dreary, terrible, harsh, hearing, as she does,

countless dreadful rumours – one brings ill news, shrieked aloud to the palace, then another brings even worse. And if my husband here has been wounded as much as cascading hearsay has it, he's fuller of holes than a net. If he has died as many times as we have been told, he would have become Geryon II, with three bodies, boasting of a threefold cloak of earth (a great amount above him, not to mention what's below) – one death for each shape! It was because of these dreadful rumours that many folk uncoiled the hanging rope from around my neck, holding me as I struggled against them, and that is why Orestes is not here as he should have been, the holder of the pledges between us. No need to wonder at this! He is being looked after by the Phocian Strophios, our friend and ally – he told me of possible trouble: danger to you at Troy or anarchy among the people crushing council (it's a natural reaction to kick someone when he's down). Grounds such as these are utterly guileless. Now the gushing fountains of my tears have been quenched and not one drop remains. Late nights hurt my eyes as I wept for the neglected beacons which brought no news of you. My dreams were disturbed by the faint and rapid movement of a buzzing gnat and this caused me more pain than what I could have suffered during sleep. But now, after such woe, I am free of my grief and can say that this man here is the watchdog of our land, our strong forestay, the solid base of our high dwelling, his father's only child, land spied by mariners who have lost all hope of land, a beautiful day after a storm, a splashing spring to a thirsty traveler. It is sweet to escape all the stress of need. I deem him worthy of these salutations. But envy, begone, for we have suffered so much already. Now, dearest, step down from this your chariot but do not place your feet (those destroyers of Troy) on the ground. Slaves, what are you waiting for? You've been ordered to spread carpets on the pavement. Quick, cover his way with purple cloth, let him be escorted by Justice into the palace he never expected to see again. For the rest careful thought, unconquered by sleep, shall, with the gods' help, justly carry out the plans of Fate.

Agamemnon: Leda's child, custodian of my home, your address fits with my absence – both were long-drawn-out. But my reward of praise is better coming from others. For the rest don't pamper me like a woman, and don't treat me like a barbarian, groveling and shrieking before me. Don't strew my path with garments – it will lead to envy in others. It is the gods who should be honoured thus. No mortal, I know, may tread on dappled and exquisite fabrics without fear. Revere me as a man, not a god. Fame shouts out loud without footcloths and embroideries. The gods' best gift is a mind free of pride, and a man may be deemed happy only if he has lived his whole life in serenity. If I conduct my whole life thus, I will be content.

Klytaimnestra: Tell me your true opinion.

Agamemnon: Be assured that I'll not corrupt my own opinion.

Klytaimnestra: Did you pray to the gods that in a moment of fear you would do this?

Agamemnon: Yes, if someone with true knowledge had made it my duty.

Klytaimnestra: What would you think of Priam were he to do it?

Agamemnon: Priam would *certainly* tread on dappled garments.

Klytaimnestra: Well, pay no attention to the censure of mortal men.

Agamemnon: Yet the talk of the people has great power.

Klytaimnestra: A man whom nobody envies is not happy.

Agamemnon: It's hardly womanly to crave conflict.

Klytaimnestra: Yet even defeat will benefit the unhappy.

Agamemnon: You value victory in this?

Klytaimnestra: Allow this willingly and you're a *winner*.

Agamemnon: Well then, if that's your will... Someone, quickly, undo these boots, these foot-slaves, and when I step on these purple vestments let no god's eye strike me from high up in the sky. It would be shameful if I ruined my family by spoiling these expensive weavings. Enough of this. Graciously escort this foreign girl in. God looks kindly upon a gentle master. Nobody takes on a slave's role willingly, but she is the chosen bloom of many treasures, the army's gift, and she accompanied me here. Since your advice has subdued me, I shall enter the palace's halls treading on purple.

Klytaimnestra: There's a sea – who will quench her?

She breeds the juice of purple dye, worth its weight in silver and totally renewable, which tints these embroideries. The house, my lord, can, with the gods' blessing, partake of them. The palace doesn't have to work to acquire it. I would have invoked the gods that countless vestments be trodden upon had an oracle imposed it upon our house that I revive this man. For while the root still lives foliage comes to the house and obscures Sirius the Dog-Star, and now that you have returned to your hearth and home warmth announces its coming in wintertime and Zeus produces wine from the bitter grape, then there is coolness in the house while our lord moves to and fro within it. Zeus, Zeus, fulfil my prayers. Decide what you intend to do.

Chorus: Why is there dread in my divining heart,
Perversely hov'ring? An unbidden strain,
Unleased, now executes the prophet's part,
And forceful confidence will not attain
My soul's throne that I may spit out that fear
As some vague dream. A long time has gone by
Since the Greek army sailed to Troy. It's clear
That they are safely home again (my eye
Confirms it). Yet my soul spontaneously
Intones a gloomy dirge, nor can I spy
A glint of hope that would be dear to me.
Nor do my inmost feelings voice a lie
As they rotate and tumble in my mind.
I pray my expectations all fall out
As falsehoods, not fulfilled. We always find
Rude health has boundaries – there's no redoubt
When sickness dwells next door and presses hard
Upon her. So unswerving fate may hit
An unseen reef, and yet, in hopes to guard
The cargo, caution jettisons some of it –
The house, not overfull, then does not fall,
Nor does the vessel sink. A gift from Zeus,
Abundantly recurring from the haul
Of yearly harvests, crushes the abuse
That famine causes. Who can once again
Recall by incantation the dark gore
That, gushing forth, lies at the feet of man?

He who could from Hades' very door
Bring back the dead, even he did not evade
A dreadful punishment for Zeus. So I,
Had god-appointed destiny not laid
Mandates against an equal share, would cry
These things aloud, forestalling all my thought;
My heart, though, mutters in the dark, in pain,
My mind's ablaze – and hope that may be sought
For any good result is all in vain.

Klytaimnestra: Go in! Yes, I mean you, Cassandra. Zeus has mercifully allowed you a place at our table and you will, with our many slaves, partake in the worship of Guardian Zeus, so step down from the chariot and curb your pride. They say that even a child of Alkmene once suffered the bread of servitude. So, if necessity has assigned this fate to you, a slave of masters of long-standing wealth has much to be grateful for. Those who unexpectedly reap a splendid harvest are always cruel to their slaves, treating them by the book – you know from us what is the rule here.

Chorus: It's to you she addresses those lucid words. You are caught in the net of fate, so obey, if you are going to obey. Perhaps you plan not to!

Klytaimnestra: Well, is she speaks an unintelligible and barbarous language, like a twittering swallow, I am at least getting through to her telepathically.

Chorus: Follow her in. That's the best she can do as things stand. Leave your chariot seat and obey her.

Klytaimnestra: I can't afford to waste time hanging around the door. The sheep stand in the central hearth, ready for slaughter, a pleasure I never expected to witness. If you plan to participate at all, do it now! If you don't understand my actual words, at least make some gesture to show you know my intention.

Chorus: The stranger seems to need a good interpreter. She's acting like a newly-caught beast.

Klytaimnestra: She's mad! And she hearkens to bad advice! She's left her new-caught city and come hither but she hasn't learnt to accept the bridle until she has exhausted her vigour, foaming at the mouth. I won't suffer more insolence in wasted words.

Chorus: I shan't be angry at her – I pity her. Go, poor wretch, quit the chariot and yield to necessity. Don your new yoke!

Kassandra: Aiii! Apollo, Apollo!

Chorus: Why this sudden wailing, why the cry of 'Apollo'? Such a dirge doesn't befit him.

Kassandra: Aiii! Apollo, Apollo!

Chorus: Another cry of ill omen to a god who will not suffer cries of misery.

Kassandra: Apollo, Apollo, lord of the street. A second casual slaughter!

Chorus: She speaks, surely, of her own troubles. Prophecy remains in her slave's heart.

Kassandra: Apollo, Apollo, lord of the street, my Apollo. Whither are you taking me? What kind of abode is this?

Chorus: The House of Atreus. You must understand this. I speak no lie.

Kassandra: Oh, oh! It hates the gods, it has been witness to countless murders of its kin, homicides. Its floors are red with blood.

Chorus: The stranger is a bloodhound. She's tracking down blood and she will find it.

Kassandra: Yes, and I believe these witnesses – they tell of children eaten by their own father.

Chorus: We have been told of your prophetic powers but we seek no prophets here.

Kassandra: God, what is she plotting? What new pain is here? Between these walls she plans great evil, unbearable to her kin, incurable. Help is far away.

Chorus: I know nothing of these last prophecies, but the former...? I know *them*. The whole city screams them.

Kassandra: Wretch! Are you doing the deed? You are bathing your lawful husband! How can I put it into words? It will be performed very soon. Hand after hand she stretches out towards him.

Chorus: I'm still in the dark. Obscure prophecies bewilder me. Such riddles!

Kassandra: Oh no, what is this? A net from Hades? No, his consort is the snare, she shares the guilt of blood...! Strife, insatiable, shriek aloud over this stony sacrifice.

Chorus: What fury is this that you enjoin to wail against the house? Your words kill me. Saffron blood rushes to my heart, as when the sun of life itself has set. Calamity comes quickly.

Kassandra: Look, look! Keep the cow from the bull! She's caught him in the robes and is plunging the black-horned weapon into him! He subsides in the bath! A treacherous, bloody deed!

Chorus: I cannot claim great prowess in interpreting prophecies but I suspect foul play here. What good news ever comes to us through prophecy? It is through misfortune that the wordy arts of prophets implant fear in men.

Kassandra: Oh, oh, *my* fate is an evil one. I roar it out too. Why did you bring me here if not to share another's death?

Chorus: You're a frantic seer, shrieking out tuneless melodies like some nightingale endlessly trilling 'Itys! Itys!' as she groans out her wretched heart with a plethora of evil forebodings.

Kassandra: Ah, the shrill nightingale lived out her life – the gods gave her a winged shape and a sweet, tranquil lifespan, but I will be butchered with an axe.

Chorus: Whence comes this violent, god-sent anguish? What use is it? Why do you make a melody out of fearful events, wailing it out in an ill-omened din? Who set you on your path of fearsome prophecy?

Kassandra: Ah that marriage! Paris' marriage which destroyed his dear friends! Ah the Scamander, whence my forefathers drank! I was raised on your banks, alas! But now I fear I shall chant my prophecies by Cocytos and the shores of Acheron.

Chorus: Your pronouncement is all too true! The youngest generation could understand it. This sting is fatal You cry aloud your piteous fate and it breaks my heart to hear it.

Kassandra: Oh the city's torment! She is destroyed utterly! Oh, my father sacrificed countless beats of the field before her towers, yet they brought no relief – she was destined to suffer. And I shall soon shed *my* blood.

Chorus: Prophecy on prophecy! Some evil god has descended on you, overpowering you and forcing you to sing of these piteous and fateful events. Heaven knows the outcome!

Kassandra: But now the oracle will no longer be veiled but revealed like a new bride. It will, I think, arrive in all freshness lie a wind at sunup, and a greater grief than this will, like a wave, surge towards the sun's rays. I will no longer deal in riddles. Be witnesses as I closely trace the sources of ancient sins. The choir will never leave this house, sounding

in unison but out of harmony, for it does not speak of good. A reveling band of Furies remains in the house (for they are members of the family!) – it has drunk mortal blood and gained in confidence. It is not easy to oust. It is besieging the palace, singing a song of primordial sin, and curses that brother's adultery, deplores the filthy act. Am I wrong? Or have I hit the quarry archer-like? Am I like one of those itinerant, babbling false prophets? Witness on oath that I know the storied sins of this house?

Chorus: How could an honestly-bound oath heal the wound? You astonish me, a foreigner from across the sea who speak such truth as though you were a native.

Kassandra: Prophet Apollo set me this task.

Chorus: Surely he has not been smitten with desire for you?

Kassandra: Up to now I have been embarrassed to speak of such things.

Chorus: Well, it's the wealthy who can afford to have such delicate feelings.

Kassandra: He was an avid suitor, filling me with pleasurable feelings.

Chorus: Were you really lovers?

Kassandra: I told him I would succumb but I lied to him.

Chorus: You were taken captive by divine art?

Kassandra: I was already prophesying calamity to the citizens.

Chorus: Did you escape Apollo's rancour?

Kassandra: Since I committed the sin, none of my words were believed.

Chorus: We believe your prophesies to be believed.

Kassandra: Oh no! Oh no! The dreadful pain of prophecy is boiling deep inside me. See the young ones, these ghosts at the doorway! Babes, killed, it seems, by their kin, their hands full of flesh, their own flesh, and food for others! Liver, intestines, a pitiful load, eaten by their father! There is a plot afoot – devised by that savage stay-at-home coward who serenely frequents the royal bed. He is coming for my lord! I must bear the yoke of slavery. Our admiral, Troy's destroyer, is unaware that that hateful bitch, with her light-hearted and extensive plea, is secretly planning hid death and will succeed. That is her daring aim! A woman killer - a male victim. How can I give a name to such a foul monster? Amphisbaina? Rock-dwelling Skylla, the mariner's nemesis? Mother of Death offering up her sacrifice and breathing implacable conflict against her kin? How she yelled in triumph, the shameless thing, as though she were on a battlefield. Yet she seemed delighted at her lord's safe return. Should you not believe me, it's all the same. The future *will* arrive. And soon, right here by my side, you will pity me and say I prophesied all too true.

Chorus: I know of the babes' flesh served up to Thyestes: it makes me shudder, fear grips me when I hear that tale – a true one, no mere chimera. For the rest, though, I have lost the scent.

Kassandra: I tell you you will soon see Agamemnon dead.

Chorus: Be propitious! Rest your mouth!

Kassandra: The Healing-God did not direct these word of mine.

Chorus: No, not if he's to die. Heaven forbend!

Kassandra: Pray it doesn't happen, yet some are plotting death.

Chorus: Who is it who is planning this dreadful deed?

Kassandra: My prophecies have indeed blindsided you.

Chorus: I cannot see how the murder could be done.

Kassandra: Well, my Greek is excellent.

Chorus: You understand Pythian oracles too, but they are hard to grasp.

Kassandra: Ahh! The fever! It's coming for me! Oh, Lyceian Apollo, oh!

A two-footed lioness, coupling with a wolf while her lion is absent, is killing me. God! In her rage she will wreak vengeance on me too. She whets the knife for her man and boasts that my murder will pay for my presence here. Why do I keep these mockeries? Why do I keep my staff and the bands of prophecy which hang from my neck? Before I die I shall destroy you. Go to your death! There! Lie there! You're requited now! Make another rich in ruin, not me! See, Apollo himself strips me of my mantic accoutrements! Even in these vestments he watched me being mocked unreservedly by friends who are in truth enemies. They call me names, they say I am a distraught vagrant, a wretched beggar near-dead from hunger. The prophet has hamstrung the prophet and now propels me to this fatal misfortune. The executioner's block, not my family tomb, awaits me. I shall be felled, spilling the warm blood of a scapegoat. He and I shall not have perished unavenged by the gods. No, another avenger will come – he will kill his mother, requite his father. After a wandering exile's life he will arrive and make an end of this curse. A great oath has been sworn to the gods that news of his father's outstretched body shall summon him. Why then do I grieve? Now I have seen the city of Troy acting as it did and its takers annihilating her by the mandate of heaven, I will start the proceedings and accept my death. I address the gates of Hades. I pray that I suffer an easy death – no convulsions, the blood discharging quickly as I close my eyes.

Chorus: Poor wretch! Yet you are wise. You have told us much – a long tale. If you truly know of your own death, how is it you approach the altar without fear like a god-driven heifer?

Kassandra: There is no escape. My time has run out.

Chorus: But one's last moments are the most precious.

Kassandra: The time approaches. I shall gain nothing by fleeing it.

Chorus: I must tell you – you have a bold spirit.

Kassandra: No happy person is thus praised.

Chorus: A brave death is a pleasing thing for a mortal.

Kassandra: Oh my father! I weep for you and your noble sons.

Chorus: What is this? What fear turns you back?

Kassandra: Oh!

Chorus: What do you shrink from? It must be some horror in your soul.

Kassandra: The palace reeks of slaughter, dripping blood.

Chorus: No!! That is the odour of the family's sacrifices.

Kassandra: It is like the vapour from a tomb.

Chorus: No, it's not splendid Syrian incense you talk of.

Kassandra: I am on my way. I shall bewail my fate, and Agamemnon's too. I have had enough of life. See my plight, strangers. I do not tremble with fear like a trapped bird. Be my witness as I go to my death – a woman shall die to avenge my death, a man shall fall to avenge that ill-wed one. At the door of death I appeal to you as your guest.

Chorus: Poor wretch, I pity you for your prophecy.

Kassandra: I wish to say something more - a dirge for myself. I pray to Helios, on my final day, that my father's avengers avenge my slaughter too, the casual killing of a slave. Oh the dealings of mortals! The prosperous one might liken to a shadow, yet for those

who lack good fortune a wet sponge may erase their whole history. *That* I pity more than the former.

Chorus: Mortals never achieve all the prosperity they want. No-one ever bars it from enviable palaces, saying 'You must not enter here.' The Blessed Ones approved Agamemnon's capture of Priam's city and he has come home honoured by the gods. Yet now if he must pay for the blood of ancestors and give retribution for other deaths by dying himself and precipitating yet further deaths, what mortal, hearing such news, could boast of a fortunate life?

Agamemnon: Ah! I am hit - a fatal blow!

Chorus: Silence! Who is that shouting that he has been fatally struck?

Agamemnon: Ah! A second blow!

Chorus: The deed is done, I believe. The king's cries confirm it. Let us confer and see if we may trust our resolutions.

- This is my plan: call the citizens to come to the palace and effect a rescue.
- No, we must fall to work as quickly as possible and catch the perpetrator in the act with her freshly-flowing sword.
- I agree. That's what we should do. No delaying.
- I see their plan. This is the first act of people who have the marks of tyranny upon them.
- We're wasting time. Those who crush a reputation for delay are never still.
- I don't know what to suggest. An active man must have a plan.
- I agree. Words will not resurrect the dead.
- Are we to drag out our lives in subjugation to these corrupt folk who rule the palace?
- It's unendurable. Better to die, an easier fate than tyranny.
- May we not conclude by these groans that our lord is dead?
- We must know the truth before we discuss our plans. Clear knowledge is different from guesswork.
- I fully concur and approve this plan – we must be unequivocally certain about Agamemnon.

Klytaimnestra: I am not ashamed to gainsay all my earlier artful words. How else could one be successful against one's enemy (one who *seemed* a friend), surrounding him with a net of harm, a net too high for jumping? This long-standing quarrel reached its apogee – it was not unexpected and it finally happened. Here I stand, where I struck him. Yes, I did it. I'll deny nothing. He could neither avoid nor ward off his fate. I flung a fishing-net over him – there was no escaping. It was a massive robe, and a fatal one. I struck him twice and with two cries his limbs gave way. I administered a third to his prostrate body. It was a gift from the God of the Underworld, saviour of corpses, and I had prayed hard for it. He vomited forth his life. His blood flowed swiftly in this slaughter. He splashed me with dark showers of his life's blood, and my joy was no less than that of the growing corn as the seedbuds burst with God-given plenty. That's how things stand, elders of Argos, so rejoice if you may. *I* offer my imprecations. Should it have been right to offer fitting libations over his corpse, these prayers would also have been just, nay, more than just. In the house this man filled a bowl to the brim with cursed evils and on his return he drained it dry.

Chorus: Your bold tongue astounds us. How can you boast like that over this man?

Klytaimnestra: You challenge me as though I were a reckless woman, but it is with a steadfast heart that I address folk who know what has happened. You want to praise me? Castigate me? It's no matter. Here is Agamemnon, my husband, but a corpse, thanks to this right hand of mine, a just artisan. Those are the facts.

Chorus: Woman, what drug have you eaten or drunk, taken from the sea, to take on this sacrifice, casting off, nay, cutting off the people's curses? You'll be exiled from the city, mightily hated by the citizens.

Klytaimnestra: You threaten me with banishment now, with the people's hatred, civic curses, yet back then you spoke not a word against this man, who had no more concern over his daughter's death than of a beast from a large flock of sheep. He sacrificed her, the darling child of my womb, to cast a spell on the Thracian winds. Should you not banish *him* for that pollution? Hearing of my deed you prove a harsh judge. Threaten away, but while I am prepared to be ruled by him who overpowers me, yet by the same token, if God decides otherwise, you will *at last* learn wisdom.

Chorus: You have too much ambition, shouting your outrageous pride to the rooftops. This slaughter has driven you to insanity – your eyes are pools of blood. You have no friends, and you must requite blow for blow.

Klytaimnestra: You hear my oaths – they are just ones! By true Justice for my daughter, by the Goddess of Ruin, the Goddess of Vengeance, with whose aid I slew this man, my expectation has no place in the palace of fear so long as Aigisthos is lord of my hearth and home, my protector as before. Our shield of courage is no small one. There he lies, the man who dishonoured me, the darling of Chryseis and her like at Troy, and here is his captive, prophetess and loyal bed-fellow – they wore out the ship's benches! Their fate is not undeserved. There he is and at his side his lover – like a swan she warbled her last song in her death-throes – whom he brought as his favourite (over me!), an added fillip to the luxury of my bed.

Chorus: Oh, may fate take me quickly to eternal slumber, painless and sudden, now that our most kindly guardian has been murdered, suffering dreadfully at the hands of a woman. Yes, subdued by a female's actions. Oh, demented Helen, you alone snuffed out so many many lives at Troy. You adorned yourself with a final garland because of unredeemed blood – Strife reigned in the house, Strife which subdues men.

Klytaimnestra: Don't pray for death because this oppresses you. Don't turn your rancour to Helen because she is a murderess, one woman who brought incurable, murderous grief to countless Greeks.

Chorus: God, you have descended upon the house and the sons of Tantalos, you have power over me like those two wicked women, peas in a pod. There she stands over the body like some hateful crow, out of tune like him, and brags that she is singing a triumphal tune.

Klytaimnestra: You have spoken my mind in calling on the thrice-fattened god of the house. His lust for blood is fed within the belly; before the old pain dies comes a new pus.

Chorus: You praise that savage god. Oh, a god of grievous and endless trouble. Everything occurs through Zeus – he is the cause of all. What do mortals experience without Zeus? O my king, my king, how shall I show my grief for you? Whatever must I sing from deep within my heart? Caught in this spider's web you lie, breathing out your last in a vile death. A slavish end to be subdued with treachery, slain by a two-edged axe.

Klytaimnestra: You insist that the deed is mine and that I am the wife of Agamemnon. No, it is the spirit embodied within the wife of the dead man, an ancient and fierce avenger of Atreus, the master of that foul feast, who has offered him as payment for those little ones.

Chorus: Who will swear that you are guiltless of this murder? How is that possible? Perhaps an avenger sent by his father aided you. Black Ares lays it on with streams of kindred blood and as he advances he shall forge justice for that feast of clotted gore. O my king, my king, how shall I show my grief for you? Whatever must I sing from deep within my heart? Caught in this spider's web you lie, breathing out your last in a vile death. A slavish end to be subdued with treachery, slain by a two-edged axe.

Klytaimnestra: No, not a slavish end. Did not this man practise treachery on the house? But his unworthy act on my grievously lamented Iphigeneia sprung from his loins is avenged as he suffers a *worthy* death. Let him not give himself airs in Hades now that he has paid for what he started, run through with a sword.

Chorus: I'm helpless, deprived of the wit for any plan. I don't know where to turn now that the house is fallen. I am in dread of this crashing storm, raining blood, which shakes the house. The mere drizzle is coming to an end. Justice is being sharpened for another dread deed on other whetstones of Fate. O earth, take me before I have to see him in his new couch – a silver-sided bath! Who shall bury him? Who shall mourn him? Will *you* dare do it? You, who killed your own husband, will you wail your grief, will you impiously give a tribute that is no tribute at all in recompense for his mighty deeds? Who will speak a eulogy for this godlike man, a sincere and tearful toil?

Klytaimnestra: Such a charge is not for you to fulfil – he fell in death at my hands, so *I* shall bury him, helped by none of his household. Yet Iphigeneia, his daughter, shall, I am sure, as is only proper, greet her father warmly by that swift ferry of pain, take him by the hand and kiss him!

Chorus: Same answers shame and it is hard to choose between them. The ravager is ravaged, the killer pays the price. While Zeus remains on his throne it remains for the perpetrator to suffer – that is lawful. Who will cast from the house the seed of ruin? The family is indissolubly knit to ruin.

Klytaimnestra: Truly this man embodies an oracle. Therefore I would like to make a pact with the gods of the House of Pleisthenes to accept the situation, however burdensome, and, in the future, may he leave this abode and oppress some other family with kindred deaths. I shall be wholly content with few possessions now I have exorcized the frenzy of murder from these halls.

Aigisthos: Kindly light of the day of judgment; the gods who avenge mortal men look down from above on the griefs of the earth. With joy I see that this man who lies here has paid for his father's violent act. Yes, Atreus, this man's father, ruled this land – he exiled from the palace and from the city my father Thyestes (this is the truth), his own brother, challenging his right to rule. Poor Thyestes returned and found safety for himself as a suppliant of the hearth, guaranteeing that he would not die there and stain his native land with his blood. Godless Atreus, this man's father, more zealous than friendly and in the guise of providing a day of feasting, offered my father a meal which consisted of the flesh of his own children. The feet and fingers he disguised so that the others who were sitting apart would not recognize them; meanwhile Thyestes partook of the meal in ignorance, a meal which brought destruction to the race. Then, realizing the

heinous crime for what it was, he groaned aloud and prayed for unbearable destruction to fall on the House of Pelops. He kicked over the table as he cursed and said< “So perishes the House of Pleisthenes, root and stock.” And consequently you may see this fallen man. And I was the one who planned this murder. I was the third son of a wretched father and he banished me while I was still in swaddling-clothes. Justice led me back as a grown man and, though not within the palace, I reached this man with my whole wicked plan. I could die happy now that I have seen him in the toils of Fate.

Chorus: Aigisthos, I have no respect for someone who revels in misfortune. You say you killed this man wittingly and that you alone planned this pitiable murder. I tell you that in the hour of judgment you will not escape the curse of the people. They will stone you to death, be assured.

Aigisthos: You say this, you, at the lower oars! It is those on the top deck who are the masters. You are old! You will see how hard it is to learn from a younger man like me, when sense must be seen. Chains and hunger are two excellent teachers and healers of the senses – even for the old. You have eyes – can you not see that? Don’t fight the lash! Such aggression will only hurt you.

Chorus: You woman! Staying at home, waiting for the army to return, defiling our general’s bed – *you* planned his death?

Aigisthos: Those words will cost you a wealth of tears. Your tongue’s the reverse of Orpheus’s – he led all with his sweet voice, *you* will be led off yourself. You annoy me with your childish whining. Your downfall will tame you.

Chorus: Oh yes, *you* will be the chief of the Argives. You, who planned this man’s death but hadn’t the courage to carry it out.

Aigisthos: Clearly the subterfuge was a woman’s job – I have long been suspected as an enemy. But with this man’s resources I shall strive to rule the people. I shall, however, severely restrain the disobedient with the yoke. The wanton trace-horse shall find himself assailed by hunger and kept in darkness – these two things shall tame him!

Chorus: Why did you not kill him yourself – your heart is black enough! No, your woman did the job, that blight to our land and our gods. Somewhere Orestes looks on the light of day – kind fate will bring him back and he will be the all-conquering slayer of both of you.

Aigisthos: That’s your plan, that’s what you say, but you’ll soon learn your lesson.

Chorus: Come, friends, spearsmen, the deed is near.

Aigisthos: Come, draw your swords, every one of you.

Chorus: I am ready to die, I do not flinch.

Aigisthos: You speak of your death to one who acquiesces: I welcome the deed.

Klytaimnestra: Dear one, no more violence, please. All these misfortunes are a dreadful harvest. We’ve had enough of grief. No more bloodshed. Go in, old men, before you regret your actions. Our deeds must be ratified. If all our troubles are over, we welcome the fact, bombarded as we have been, the prey of some god’s grievous assault. Such is a woman’s advice, should it be worth the attention.

Aigisthos: Stop their foolish talk – they are testing their own fate and insulting their king with their nonsense.

Chorus: I hope no Argive will dance attendance on a wicked man.

Aigisthos: Some day I shall have my revenge on you.

Chorus: Not if a god brings Orestes back.

Aigisthos: Exiles feed on hope, I know.

Chorus: Go ahead, be lavish! Defile Justice while you can!

Aigisthos: You shall pay for your idiocy.

Chorus: Brag to your heart's content! You're like a rooster with his hen!

Klytaimnestra: Pay no attention to this ranting. From now on we are the master and mistress of the palace.

