

PROMETHEUS BOUND

Strength:

We've come to earth's remotest boundary,
In Scythia's wilderness. Zeus's decree,
Hephaestus, carry out! This reprobate
On these high, craggy rocks must meet his fate
In binding chains, for to all folk on earth
He gave the flashing fire which owes its birth
To you, the blazing spark of every art:
For such a crime as this one must impart
Recompense to us gods, so that he may
Accept Lord Zeus's rule and cease to play 10
The mortal-lover.

Hephaestus:

 Strength and Force, to you
I leave it. There is nothing one can do
To stop it – as for me, I do not dare
To bind a kindred god where he must bear
These shackles on this rocky cleft, attacked
By cruel winter. Yet I must, in fact,
Summon the courage, for it's perilous
To disregard the orders given us
By Zeus. [to Prometheus] High-handed son of Themis, who
Gives honest counsel, I must shackle you 20
Against my will with brazen bonds no man
Can loosen here, where anyway you can
Perceive no mortal. But the sun will sear
Your flesh, and its fair bloom will disappear.
And you'll be happy when bejewelled night
Arrives to cover up his burning light
And when the sun dispels the frosty air
Of morning. Evermore this load you'll bear,
For he's not yet been born who will undo
Your shackles. Such, then, is the prize that you 30
Have gained for forwarding the human race.
Though you're a god, you did not fear to face
The anger of the gods, but you bestowed
On men the honours that they were not owed.
So on this joyless cliffside you must keep
Your vigil, knees unbent, bereft of sleep.
You'll chant your songs of mourning fruitlessly -
Like all new gods, Zeus shows harsh tyranny.

Strength:

Well, why delay? Your pity is in vain!
A god we gods hate you, too, should disdain. 40
He gave the secrets of his genius
To men.

Hephaestus:

A potent tie obliges us,
For we're both friends and kin.
Strength:

Yes, I agree,
But would you spurn Lord Zeus's stern decree?
Do you not fear that more?
Hephaestus:

You're pitiless
And insolent!
Strength:

There is no usefulness
In pity here!
Hephaestus:

I hate my craft.
Strength:

But why?
For it's irrelevant in this case.
Hephaestus:

But I
Wish someone else possessed it.
Strength:

Everything
Is burdensome but that of being king 50
Of Heaven.

Hephaestus:
Yes indeed!

Strength:
Go on, then! Bind
The wretch, for otherwise you'll maybe find
That Zeus will think that you're intentionally
Taking your time.

Hephaestus:
The bonds are here with me.
Strength:
Gather them up and then with all your might
Nail him upon the rock! And make them tight! [Hephaestus and Force do do]

Hephaestus:
I'm doing as you say.

Strength:
Strike harder still!
Leave nothing loose, for he possesses skill
To get out of the worst complexity.

Hephaestus:
This arm, at least, is fixed immovably. 60

Strength:
This one as well! That way, no matter how
Clever he is, he'll learn that he must bow
To Zeus and seem a fool.
Hephaestus:

No-one but he
Can justly blame my labour's quality.
Strength:
Now drive it through his chest, hard as you can!
Hephaestus [to Prometheus]
I sorrow for your suffering, poor man!
Strength:
Am I to think that you commiserate
With Zeus's foes? Do you still hesitate?
Take care you won't grieve for yourself one day!
Hephaestus:
My eyes behold this sight with great dismay. 70
Strength:
My eyes behold a man getting his due.
Now put the chains on him!
Hephaestus:

This I must do -
Spare me your orders!
Strength:
I will not do so -
I'll hound you on. Now do your work below
And bind his legs!
Hephaestus:
There now! My works complete
With very little toil.
Strength:

Now you must beat
The piercing fetters with full force, for he
We serve will judge our work exactingly.
Hephaestus:
The words you utter match the way you look!
Strength:
So be soft-hearted, then! But you must brook 80
My harshness.
Hephaestus:

Now the chains are fitted on
His body, that's enough. So let's be gone! [exeunt Hephaestus and Force]
Strength [to Prometheus]:
Indulge your insolence and take away
Their honours from the gods so that you may
Give them to mortals! Can mortals relieve
You of the miseries that make you grieve?
Your name's not fitting! Prescient indeed!
To live, a truly prescient man you need
To know. [exit]
Prometheus:

Bright skies, swift breezes, rivers, sea,
Whose rippling waves laugh out incessantly, 90
And Mother Earth and you, all-seeing sun,

I call upon you, each and every one.
See how a god can suffer! See my shame!
See how much agony assails my frame,
Which I throughout the years apportioned me
Must wrestle with! Such is the misery
That Zeus has wrought upon me. Ah, such woe!
I groan for all my ills; I do not know
How I shall be delivered from this grief.
What am I saying? I possess belief 100
Of all affliction I must bear. And so
I must be patient, for I surely know
Necessity is obdurate. However,
About this fate I suffer I must never
Speak or be silent since I gave mankind
Good gifts – thus in these straits I am confined.
The source of fire I hunted out and stored
In fennel stalk, and it proved to afford
To humankind knowledge in every skill.
Such is the crime for which I suffer ill, 110
Chained to this rock beneath the open sky.
What sound is this I hear? What scent comes nigh?
Divine or human? Both? Who's come to see
Me suffer at Earth's distant boundary?
And why? Is it to see someone in woe?
Is it to see a god in chains, a foe
Of Zeus, hated by every deity
Because of his love for humanity?
What's this I hear nearby? A rustling stir
Of birds? With rushing wings the breezes whirl. 120
Whatever may approach fills me with fear. [enter Chorus]

Chorus:

Don't be alarmed, Prometheus! We are here,
Borne on swift winds, to offer amity
To you, having obtained, eventually,
Zeus's consent. Our caves were penetrated
With clanging iron which reverberated
And thus drove all our modesty away:
Unshod, we hither flew.

Prometheus:

See my dismay!

Ah, bountiful Tethys's progeny
And offspring, too, of him who sends the sea 130
To circle all the earth, look on this scene -
Upon the summit crag of this ravine,
Fettered, I hold a watch that nobody
Would covet.

Chorus:

Ah, Prometheus, yes, I see:

My eyes are filled with tears, my heart with fear

As I perceive you sadly withering here
In iron bonds. There are new deities,
And Zeus rules with felonious decrees,
Disdaining former laws.

Prometheus:

 If only he
Had sent me down to Hades, ruthlessly 140
Fettering me in bonds none could untie,
That neither god nor man could see what I
Was suffering and gloat over my woes!
Instead I give delight to all my foes,
Thrashed by the winds.

Chorus:

 Who of the gods can be
So callous as to entertain such glee
As this? Who could not sympathize with you
In all your pain? - except for Lord Zeus, who
Has set his heart against you and the race
Sprung from Uranus he will cause to face 150
Subjection, and he will not cease until
His soul is sated or another will
By guile usurp his reign.

Prometheus:

 One day, although
I'm fettered here, Lord Zeus will need to know
From me the new design whereby he'll be
Stripped of his sceptre and his dignity.
His honeyed words won't charm me, and I'll never
Cower before his threats, nor will I ever
Divulge his secret till he takes away
These cruel bonds and for this outrage pay 160
Me recompense.

Chorus:

 You're obstinate, and you
Don't yield to bitter pangs and don't give too
Much license to your tongue, and yet I fear
For you and wonder whither you must steer
Your ship to see an end of all your grief.
For Zeus is harsh and offers no relief
To anyone.

Prometheus:

 That Zeus is harsh I know -
He keeps his justice in his hands, although
His judgment will be softened on the day
That he finds he's been vanquished in the way 170
That I have knowledge of. His anger he
He'll crush, and we will bond in amity.

Chorus:

Reveal the tale! Tell us what accusation

Lord Zeus has made, bringing humiliation
To you, unless there is no reason why
You shouldn't tell us everything.
Prometheus:

Ah, I

Will find the telling painful – painful, too,
To hold my tongue and keep the facts from you.
In every way my case is truly cursed.
When heavenly powers were moved to wrath at first 180
And feuds broke out (some deities hankering
To banish Cronus and, instead, to bring
Zeus to the throne, while some, contrarily,
Were keen to outlaw Zeus's mastery),
The Titans with my words I could not sway -
Instead, disdaining skilful counsel, they,
Relying on their strength, thought they'd obtain
An easy victory. Time and again
My mother Thetis told me all about
The future, telling me it will turn out 190
That brain, not brawn, will gain the upper hand.
But stubbornly they clung to what they'd planned.
Therefore the wisest option seemed to me
To join my mother, voluntarily
Siding with Zeus. So in the cavernous
And melancholy halls of Tartarus
Hide Cronus and his allies. In that way
I helped the tyrant, who's resolved to pay
Me foully for it. It's a malady
In tyrants that they have no loyalty 200
For friends. You asked me, though why I am here
In torment, so I now will make it clear.
Installed upon the throne, immediately
He started to assign each deity
His powers, but of wretched humankind
He took no notice, for he had in mind
Obliterating all the human race
And fashioning a new one in its place.
There was no-one who challenged him but me,
For I alone possessed the bravery 210
To save all humankind from their descent
To Hades, quite destroyed. That's why I'm bent
With painful tortures, such a piteous sight.
I pitied mortals but possess no right,
It seems, to gain another's sympathy.
But here I'm disciplined remorselessly,
Thus placing shame on Zeus.

Chorus:

Those who possess

No sympathy for your unhappiness

Are made of stone. I never wished to see
Your pain, but, now I do, I'm horribly
Distressed. 220

Prometheus:

Indeed I am a wretched sight
To all my friends.

Chorus:

But could it be you might
Have further sinned?

Prometheus:

Ah yes, I stopped mankind
Foreseeing their own death.

Chorus:

What did you find
To use for this?

Prometheus:

I caused blind hope to dwell
In all men's hearts...

Chorus:

Indeed you acted well
For them.

Prometheus:

...and gave them fire.

Chorus:

What's that you say?
You saw to it that creatures of a day
Have fire-eyed flame?

Prometheus:

Ah yes. They may acquire
A myriad of arts by using fire. 230

Chorus:

And it was on a charge like this that Zeus -

Prometheus:

Torments me thus and from his vile abuse
Allows no rest.

Chorus:

But is no end assigned?

Prometheus:

Unless some thought of it enters his mind,
There's none at all.

Chorus:

Therefore what hope is there?
You see that you have sinned? Yet it's not fair
To talk about your wrongs, for you feel pain
To hear me. And therefore let us refrain
From it! And may you from your suffering
Soon be released!

Prometheus:

It is an easy thing 240

To counsel someone who's in misery
And caution him when you yourself are free
From harm: this I have always known. Yes, I
Have erred – a fact that I will not deny.
Through aiding men my state is piteous,
But I believed I'd not be punished thus,
Wasting away up here, high in the air,
Upon this dreary crag, full of despair.
Mourn me no more! Come here! Listen to me
That you may know my future thoroughly! 250
I beg of you, accede! I pray, accede!
Share in the woe of one in dire need!
In truth, affliction wanders everywhere
Impartially, and we all have our share.

Chorus:

To willing ears you have made this request:
I'll leave my wingèd throne and take my rest.
Quitting the air, I'll settle here below,
Anxious to hear your tale of endless woe. [enter Oceanus]

Oceanus:

After a long trek on my wingèd steed,
Without a bridle, I've come here. Indeed 260
I pity your ordeal, not only through
Our kinship but because I honour you
More than all others. You'll know what I say
Is simple truth, for it is not my way
To utter empty words. Tell me how I
Can aid you! For no more steadfast ally
Have you possessed than me.

Prometheus:

What do I see?

Someone to gaze upon my misery?
Why did you hither come? How did you dare
To leave behind the watery streams that bear 270
Your name and all the caves built by your hand
And end up in this harsh and iron-bound land?

Oceanus:

I'll give to you the best advice, although
You're full of craftiness. But get to know
Yourself and learn new systems. For Zeus, too,
The ruler of the gods, is very new.
If you speak words that have a stringent tone,
Perhaps Lord Zeus will hear you, though his throne 280
Is far away, and then your miseries
Will look like nothing but frivolities.
Poor wretch, banish your mood of angeriness
And try to temper your unhappiness!
My words may be old-fashioned to your mind,
But boasting has caused you to be confined

Up here. You've not yet learned humility
And do not bend before adversity
But rather add to all your miseries.
Let me teach you! Don't let your injuries
Be joined with insults since a brutal king
Now rules, a king whom you'll find answering
To no-one. Now I'll leave to see if I
Can free you of your sufferings. But try
To cease from blustering. Or can it be
That you, despite your great sagacity,
Are not aware that there is punishment
For speaking out of turn?
Prometheus:

How I resent
 You for eluding culpability
 For sharing all my miseries with me! 300
 Leave me alone – this is not your concern!
 Do what you want, but we will never turn
 His thoughts around. Do not, for pity's sake,
 Allow this mission that you undertake
 To harm you!
 Oceanus:

You warn others well – less so
Yourself! This is a fact I surely know
By judgment, not hearsay. So do not hold
Me back! I promise you that I am bold
In my belief that Zeus will offer me
The right to free you of your misery. 310
Prometheus:

My thanks will never cease, but please restrain
Your zealousness, for all will be in vain.
I don't wish you to grieve. Already I
Am anxious for my brother in the sky,
Atlas. He stands facing the west somewhere,
Holding a weight that's difficult to bear -
Heaven and Earth. And pity moved me, too,
To see the reckless earth-born Typho who
Dwells in Clician caves, the gruesome beast
With five times twenty heads, whose power ceased 320
Through violence – he had the bravery
To stand against the gods, formidably
Hissing out terror, while a hideous frown
Shot from his brow, as though he would bring down
Lord Zeus's power. But upon him came
That constant thunderbolt with spurts of flame.
His bragging left him then as, full of fright,
He found himself bludgeoned and set alight,
Reduced to ashes; now he helplessly
Lies sprawling by the narrows of the sea, 330

Pressed down by Etna. Meanwhile, up on high
Hephaestus sits beneath the open sky
And beats the molten ore. One day there'll be,
Upon the fields of fruitful Sicily,
Rivers of flame – thus Typho shall shoot out
His boiling rage, while fiery jets will spout,
Though charred with lightning.

Oceanus:

Are you not aware
That words best remedy the raging flare
Of anger?

Prometheus:

Yes, I am, but certainly
A wound should be treated auspiciously, 340
Not when it's raging.

Oceanus:

Tel me, though, when zeal
Is mingled with a daring urge to heal,
What harm is there?

Prometheus:

Thoughtless simplicity
And wasted effort.

Oceanus:

Well, then, let me be
Thoughtless, for when someone is truly wise,
It's best to seem a fool.

Prometheus:

Then in men's eyes
I'll be at fault.

Oceanus:

The way you speak, it's clear,
Will send me home.

Prometheus:

And thus you'll have no fear
Of being hated for lamenting me.

Oceanus:

By Zeus?

Prometheus:

Indeed, for he could suddenly 350
Turn angry.

Oceanus:

Yes, for your predicament
Is my instructor.

Prometheus:

Hold to your intent
And go away!

Oceanus:

Your words find me indeed
Ready to leave you now. My wingèd steed

Fans at the air, eager to rest his knees
Once he has flown back home to take his ease
In his own stall.

Chorus:

I mourn your wretched plight,
Prometheus. Floods of tears now blind my sight
And wet my tender cheeks. For Lord Zeus reigns
With most unholy laws while he maintains 360
An hauteur for the gods of long ago.

And now the whole earth cries aloud its woe
For the time-hallowed honour you possessed,
Your brother, too; all Asians are distressed
For you, as are those in Colchian land,
The maidens ever bold to make a stand,
And Scythian people who dwell in the most
Remote region on earth, upon the coast
Of Lake Maeotis. I've seen the distress 370
Of Titan Atlas, tortured with the stress
Of rigid bonds, who moans beneath the rack
Of Heaven which he bears upon his back.
Laments rise from the waves upon the sea,
And in response black Hades noisily
Rumbles, and flowing rivers show their pain.

Prometheus:

Don't think that it's from pride that I restrain
From speaking, not even from obstinacy.
Pain grips me to be used so viciously.
Yet it was none but I who had assigned
Those upstart gods their rights. But I've no mind 380
To speak of this, for you already know
It all. Yet listen to the dreadful woe
Of all mankind! They had no wits until
I gave them sense and reason. But I will
Not speak to reprimand them. No, I'll tell
The reason prompting me to wish them well.
Though they had ears to hear and eyes to see,
They both heard sounds and saw things fruitlessly.
Like shapes in dreams throughout their lives they'd wrought
All things in disarray and lacking thought. 390
They knew not of brick houses that are turned
Towards the sun, and they had not yet learned
To work with wood but dwelt beneath the ground
In sunless caves like ants, nor had they found
Signs of the winter, summer or the spring
On which they might depend, but everything
Was done without a single thought till I
Taught them to note the stars up in the sky -
Their risings and their settings, hard to do!
And I invented numbers for them, too, 400

The chiefest science, aiding memory
By blending letters, but creatively.
I yoked brute beasts to serve all mortals' needs
And carry heavy loads. I harnessed steeds
To show men's opulence and luxury,
And I invented ships to roam the sea
With flaxen wings. Such arts for all mankind
I have devised, and yet I cannot find
A means to end my woe.

Chorus:

Shame and dismay
Are now your lot: your wits have gone astray, 410
And like an artless doctor, fallen ill,
You have lost heart and cannot find the skill
To cure yourself.

Prometheus:

You'll marvel all the more
When you have heard the rest and know the store
Of arts and means I had, particularly,
Should one get sick, there was no remedy -
No food, no salve, no drink – and therefore they,
For lack of medicine, would waste away
Until I showed to them the remedies
To soothe their pain and ward off each disease. 420
I first discerned the many ways to read
The future, and I knew which dreams would lead
To their fulfilment, and I would define
Vague omens and interpret any sign
From chance encounters. I was clear about
The flight of birds, knowing without a doubt
The happy and the sinister – how they
Existed, loved and hated, and the way
They paired with one another – showing, too,
The smoothness of the entrails and what hue 430
The gall must have to please the deity;
The liver-lobe's bespeckled symmetry
I showed them, and the thigh-bone, wrapped around
With fat; the chine I burned that I might find
An occult art for men. I was their guide
In noting signs in flames, erstwhile denied
To them. As to the gains that lie beneath
The earth, who has been eager to bequeath
Them to mankind but I? These I will name -
Bronze, iron, silver, gold – all which I claim 440
To have discovered first. If there should be
Someone who claims that he was first, then he
Is babbling. This no-one can deny -
He who gave mankind all of this was I.

Chorus:

Don't go beyond all reasonableness
And thereby disregard your own distress
By benefitting mankind overly!
But I am sure that you will be set free,
As powerful as Zeus.

Prometheus:

No, not until

I'm bent with torture and excessive ill. 450
Necessity trumps skill.

Chorus:

Necessity

Is helmed by whom?

Prometheus:

That three-shaped coterie

Of Fates and the careful Furies.

Chorus:

But do you

Think that Zeus has less power than they do?

Prometheus:

Yes. He cannot escape what is foretold.

Chorus:

What's fated for Lord Zeus except to hold
Eternal sway?

Prometheus:

Don't be so keen to know

This yet!

Chorus:

It is a solemn secret, though,

I'm sure, which you in mystery enshroud.

Prometheus:

The time's not ripe for speaking this aloud. 460

Think of some other topic! It must be
Concealed no matter what: accordingly
I'll be set free and lose the dreadful sting
Of shame.

Chorus:

May Zeus, who metes out everything,

Never destroy me! May I not restrain

From offering my gifts of oxen slain

To the gods by ceaseless Ocean! And may I

Speak holily! May this rule never die

Within my heart! It is so sweet a thing

To live in confidence, thus bolstering 470

One's spirits. But at your ceaseless distress

I quake. For Zeus you feel no fearlessness,

But you adore mankind too ardently.

How mutual was their reciprocity,

My friend? What did those creatures of a day

Provide you with? Did you not see that they

Resembled but a feeble reverie
Where the blind race of mortals endlessly
Is fettered? Mortals cannot violate
Zeus's decrees: I've learned this truth of late, 480
Observing your downfall. Into my mind
There came two songs, so different in kind,
This one and that which by your bridal bed
And bridal bath I sang when you were wed
To Hesione, my sister, once you'd won
Her with your gifts. [enter Io]

Io:

What land is this? Someone,
Tell me who sojourn here! What should I call
The one who stands against this rock, in thrall
To all the elements? What did you do
To earn the punishment aggrieving you? 490
Where have I wandered in my misery?
Ah, ah! Once more the gadfly's stinging me,
The ghost of Argus! Earth, send him from here!
That many-eyed herdsman fills me with fear,
His crafty gaze upon me constantly.
Even in death he goes on hounding me.
The earth can't hide him – from the shades below
He trails me in my hunger and deep woe
Along the shore. The waxen pipe I hear,
A strain that's slumberous and crystal-clear. 500
Where is my roaming leading? Cronus' son,
Why am I clothed in grief? What have I done?
I'm a poor maid, harassed to lunacy,
Dreading the gadfly that's pursuing me.
Burn me, inter me, feed me with the fare
Of monsters of the deep! Ah, hear my prayer!
I have been taught enough but can't perceive
A way that will my sufferings relieve.
Hear the horned virgin!

Prometheus:

How can I not hear
The gadfly-maddened maiden wandering near? 510
Zeus loved her but, because of Hera's hate,
She has been forced to undergo the fate
Of endless wandering.

Io:

But who are you,
Poor wretch? For you know me – it's clear you do,
For you have named the plague that maddens me,
And here you see me bounding frenziedly,
By hunger driven, Hera's victim. Who
Among the wretched suffers as I do?
What am I doomed to bear? Ah, make it plain

What remedy there is to ease my pain! 520
Prometheus:
I will. I'll tell you all straightforwardly,
As one should do with friends. The god you see
Is called Prometheus, who gave fire to men.
Io:
Truly a benefactor! Wherefore, then,
Are you thus used?
Prometheus:
I ended my lament
Just now about my cruel punishment.
Io:
So you won't tell me?
Prometheus:
All that you are keen
To know I'll tell you.
Io:
Why in this ravine
Are you thus fettered?
Prometheus:
I have made it clear -
No more is needed now.
Io:
No, I must hear 530
When all my woes must end
Prometheus:
It's best you do
Not know the answer.
Io:
No! I'm begging you,
Don't hide the truth from me!
Prometheus:
It's not that I
Don't wish to grant you your request.
Io:
Then why
Do you refuse?
Prometheus:
I'm not unwilling to,
But I'm afraid it will dishearten you.
Io:
Don't show more kindness than I'd wish to show
Myself!
Prometheus:
Since you're determined, then, to know,
Listen!
Chorus:
But let us hear the tale as well.

So, firstly, let us ask the maid to tell 540
Why she was punished! Then tell her what she
Will suffer later on!
Prometheus [to Io]:

 This courtesy
You may grant them, especially since they
Are all your aunts. To mourn one's own dismay
With tears is good since you may earn a tear
From somebody who'll lend a friendly ear
To you.

Io:
 I can't refuse. You'll learn it all.
And yet I shame to tell about the squall
Of woe from Heaven and the injury
Inflicted on my body, making me 550
So desolate. For as I lay in bed
Night visions ever haunted me and said,
"Why do you cling to your virginity
When you possess the capability
Of lying with Lord Zeus? No god is higher,
And passion has inflamed him with desire
For you. My child, do not disdain his bed!
Go forth to Lerna's meadowland instead,
Where all your father's flocks and cattle feed,
That Zeus's eye may satisfy its need." 560
Each night such dreams beset me, to my woe,
Until I found the bravery to go
And tell my father what was haunting me;
He searched out oracles that he might be
In favour with the gods. But all he found
From those he'd sent to Pytho's holy ground
And to Dodona were words riddingly
Expressed, obscure and dark. Then finally
Came an emphatic voice with the command
That he should send me from my native land 570
To roam to the remotest boundary
Of earth or with his bolt he'd utterly
Destroy the human race. Forced to obey
Apollo's forecasts, he drove me away,
Against our wills: at once my form and mind
Became distorted, and these horns you find
On my forehead were stung by this gadfly:
From Lerna's spring and Cerchnea's streamlet I
Rushed frantically away. But angrily
The earth-born herdsman Argus followed me 580
And watched my bounding with his many eyes.
But unexpectedly came his demise,
While the gadfly still racks me with this pain,
Forced to move on before this Heaven-sent bane.

This what happened. If you can declare
What labours still remain, tell them! And spare
Your pity – do not lie, because to me
False words reveal the foulest malady.

Chorus:

Begone! Begone! Never did I believe
I'd hear such things. Such sufferings make me grieve. 590
These terrors with their two-pronged goads so chill
My soul. I shudder at the dreadful ill
That Io undergoes.

Prometheus:

 Your grief and fear
Are all too soon. Wait, then, until you hear
The rest.

Chorus:

 Proceed! Tell all! To know before
What misery the future has in store
Comforts those who are sick.

Prometheus:

 You gained from me
Your earlier entreaty easily,
Wishing to hear how she was so distressed
From her own lips. But now receive the rest, 600
How Hera caused her sorrow! Listen, too,
Daughter of Inachus, and learn how you
Will end your wanderings! Now from this place
Turn round until the rising sun you face!
Then cross the barren plains till finally
The nomads of the Scythian land you see!
Their homes are thatched, on wagons perched on high,
Equipped with sturdy bows. Do not go nigh
To them! Keep going on the rugged shore,
Where you will hear the sea break with a roar. 610
On the left the ironsmiths, the Chalybes,
You'll find, although you must beware of these,
For foreigners should not approach these men,
Since they are savage. The Hybristes then
You'll reach, well-named, for it is furious,
So do not cross it! Then the Caucasus
You'll see, the highest mountain of them all.
There, from its summit in a mighty squall
The river floods. And then traverse its peak,
Which rests upon the stars. Then you must seek 620
A southward course where the misandrous race
Of Amazons you'll find. Soon you will face
Themiscyra upon the Thermodon.
Fronting the sea, you'll then be looking on
Salmydessus' rugged jaw – she is the foe
Of ships. The Amazons will help you go

Beyond their bounds. The narrow passage through
Cimmeria will be the next place you
Will reach. And then you must eschew dismay
Till reaching the Maeotis passageway. 630
In future years mankind will breathe the name
Of Bosphorus in everlasting fame
For you. Having left Europe, you'll then be
In Asia. [to the Chorus] Don't you see how violently
Zeus treats mankind? For in his great desire
For a mortal maid he makes her suffer dire
And awful things. [to Io] A cruel match indeed,
Io, you've gained, but even so you need
To know your pain's not done.
Io:

Ahh!

Prometheus:

Why do you
Lament and groan once more? What will you do 640
When you know all?

Chorus:

What? Is there more to tell?

Prometheus:

Oh yes! A stormy sea of constant hell.

Io:

Why live, then? Why do I not straightaway
Leap from this rugged rock so that I may
Be dashed to earth, free from my suffering?
Better to die but once than lingering
Through all my coming days in misery!

Prometheus:

Ah, you would hardly bear *my* agony,
Whose fate is not to die. Death would have freed
Me from my pain, but now there is indeed 650
No limit to the tribulation I
Endure, till Zeus is hurtled from on high.

Io:

Indeed??

Prometheus:

You'd joy, I think, to know that's so.

I:

Why not, since it's through him I suffer woe?

Prometheus:

Then be assured it's true!

Io:

Who shall it be
To steal the sceptre of his sovereignty?

Prometheus:

Himself and his own idiotic will.

Io:

How will it happen? If there is no ill
In doing so, tell me!

Prometheus:

There'll be distress

For him when he is wed.

Io:

To a goddess 660

Or mortal?

Prometheus:

Why ask that? I must not say.

Io:

Well, will his own wife cast Lord Zeus away??

Prometheus:

Yes, she will bear a son who will excel
His father in command.

Io:

I pray you, tell

If this may be averted!

Prometheus:

Only I

Can help him, but somebody must untie
My fetters.

Io:

Who, then, will commit the sin
Of going against his will?

Prometheus:

One of his kin -

A grandchild.

Io:

You'll be freed from misery
By somebody of my own family? 670

Prometheus:

Exactly! At the thirteenth generation.

Io:

Your prophecy needs more illumination.

Prometheus:

Don't seek to learn the breadth of your own pain!

Io:

Don't give a boon, then take it back again!

Prometheus:

I'll give you choice of two tales.

Io:

What's that? Two?

Then let me choose!

Prometheus:

One is about what you

Must still endure, the other will reveal

My rescuer.

Chorus:

Prometheus, we appeal
To you that you be willing to bestow
To us one of your choices, to Io 680
The other! Don't deny one tale to me,
And tell her of her future misery
In all her wanderings! I wish to know
Who will deliver you.

Prometheus:

Since you are so
Determined, I will not refuse to tell
You all you crave to know of. Very well,
Io, I'll tell you of the woe you'll find:
Engrave it in the tablets of your mind!
Reaching the flaming east across the sea,
You'll find the Gorgon plains of Cisthene, 690
Where dwell Phorcys's ancient daughters – they
Are three in number, swan-shaped, and display
Between them just one tooth and just one eye:
Neither the sun nor moon up in the sky
Looks down on them. Beside them you may see
Their wingèd sisters, who are also three
In number, snake-hared Gorgons who despise
Mankind so much that any mortal dies
Who looks on them; they're very dangerous -
Beware! Hear of another hideous 700
Wonder, for, once again, you must beware
Of Zeus's sharp-beaked hounds who always spare
Their barks, the gryphons, also the one-eyed
People of Arimispia, who ride
On horses and dwell close to Pluto's stream
Which flows with gold. Avoid them, for you'll deem
Them harmful! After that you will come to
A far-off land of swarthy people who
Dwell near the Aethiop. After you wind
Along its banks, the cataract you'll find, 710
From the Baltic mountains, and the Nile will glide,
A sweet and sacred stream, and be your guide
To Nilotis, where you will, finally,
Be sure to found your far-off colony.

Chorus:

If there is more to tell of Io's plight,
Then speak! If you've told all, grant us the right
Of our request.

Prometheus:

You've heard it all, but still
That she may know I tell the truth, I will
Tell of the toils she was forced to endure
Before she came here – thus you can be sure 720
Of my account. Most of it I'll forgo

And move on to the end of all your woe.
 Molossus and Dodona's promontory
 And Zeus' Thesprotian seat of prophecy
 You have discovered, and those marvellous
 Oak trees that talk and thus bewilder us -
 When you were the distinguished bride-to-be
 Of Zeus they hailed you unambiguously
 (Did that not please you?). Stung by the gadfly,
 You rushed along the thoroughfare close by 730
 The massive gulf of Rhea and were thrown
 Backward. This sea will evermore be known,
 You may be sure, as the Ionian Sea
 To mark your treks through all humanity.
 But all of you must hear the rest of what
 I was recounting to you. At the spot
 At the Nile's mouth and silt-bar you will find
 A city called Canopus. There your mind
 Zeus will restore with just a touch, and thus 740
 You'll bear a swarthy child called Epaphus,
 A fitting name, for touching is the root
 Of his conception. All that country's fruit
 He'll harvest. Fifth from him, then, in descent
 To Argos fifty maidens shall be sent,
 Not of their own free choice, for they will flee
 Marriage with men of their own family,
 Who, hearts ablaze with passion, will pursue
 These maids, as falcons vigorously do
 With doves, craving a lawless match. But they
 Won't be allowed to sweep their brides away 750
 By God's decree. They'll live in Argos; then
 During the night they'll massacre these men,
 A daring deed committed by each maid,
 Each husband's throat pierced by a two-edged blade.
 May Love attack my enemies that way!
 But Love will charm one maiden not to slay
 Her mate, for her resolve will lose its force,
 And therefore she will have to run the course
 Of cowardice or murder. It is she
 Who's destined to give birth to royalty. 760
 To make this manifest there is a need
 To tell a lengthy story: of her seed
 There will be born a stalwart man, renowned
 For skill in archery, and he'll be found
 To be my rescuer. Born long ago,
 My mother Themis told me this is so.
 It needs a lengthy tale to tell of it
 And knowing it would have no benefit.
 Io:
 Ah, ah! Once more I feel convulsive pain

And frenzy that is striking at my brain, 770
In flaming me. I feel the gadfly's sting
Unforged by fire. My heart is hammering
Against my ribs in terror; round and round
My eyeballs wildly roll, and I am bound
By blasts of madness, and all mastery
Over my tongue has quite abandoned me.
Mad words beat recklessly against the swell
Of dark destruction.

Chorus:

He has spoken well
Who said that it's far better to be wed
Within one's class: poor men should not be led 770
To wed the rich or one endowed with power
At birth. Ah, may I never see the hour,
Immortal Fates, when you will see me lie
With Zeus or any mighty god on high!
I quake to see the sad virginity
Of Io crushed by Hera's cruelty.
An equal marriage has no cause for dread,
So may I never be lured into bed
By any mighty god! For that would be
A fruitless war with endless misery. 790
I don't know what my fate would be. For who
Will ever know what Zeus intends to do?

Prometheus:

Though he is ever in a stubborn mood,
The day will come when Zeus will be subdued:
He will be hurled into obscurity,
Losing his throne and shining sovereignty
Due to the wedding plans he'd made, and then
The malediction Cronus uttered when
He tumbled from his throne will clearly be
Fulfilled. Relief can only come from me. 800
I know what will occur, observing how
To rescue him. But let him sit for now,
Safe in his thunderbolts, though none of these
Can save him from oppressive miseries.
For he's equipping now an enemy
Despite himself – a forceful prodigy,
Who will unearth a flame of greater might
Than crashing thunderbolts and flashing light,
Who'll shake Poseidon's spear, scourge of the sea
And shaker of the land. Accordingly, 810
Wrecked by this evil, Zeus shall surely know
The difference between the high and low.

Chorus:

Ah, wishful thinking, I believe!

Prometheus:

That's true,
 But it will happen.
 Chorus:
 Is there someone who
 Will master Zeus?
 Prometheus:
 Yes, and he'll undergo
 More pains than I.
 Chorus:
 How is it you are so
 Fearless to breathe such taunts?
 Prometheus:
 My destiny
 Is not to die, so nothing frightens me.
 Chorus:
 He might inflict a blow more bitter still.
 Prometheus:
 So what? I am prepared for any ill. 820
 Chorus:
 Those who fear Nemesis are truly wise,
 Prometheus.
 Prometheus:
 Love, worship and idolize
 Your lord! For Zeus I do not care one whit.
 Let him do what he likes! Let him do it
 With what time he has left! He will hold sway
 For not much longer – he has had his day.
 But wait! I see a herald over there,
 Our new lord's man. He must be here to share
 Some news. [enter Hermes]
 Hermes:
 It's you, clever and crafty one,
 Bitter beyond all bitterness, who've done 830
 Wrong to the gods because you took away
 Fire and to the creatures of a day
 Bestowed it, I address. To this bleak land
 I now have come at Father Zeus' command -
 The marriage that you boasted of, whereby
 He's destined to be hurled down from the sky,
 He wants to know of. Unambiguously
 Reveal it, point by point, not forcing me
 To come again. Zeus won't be satisfied
 With clever tricks.
 Prometheus:
 Your words were full of pride, 840
 Fitting for minions! It's your belief
 That you are far beyond the reach of grief,
 Young as you are in age and might. Have I
 Not seen two sovereigns cast down from the sky?

A third, the present lord, I'll live to see
Cast out in shameful ruin rapidly.
Do you believe, however, that I quake
Before these upstart gods? Make no mistake -
I don't! So scurry back, for you will know
Nothing of me.

Hermes:

And yet you brought this woe 850
Upon yourself by your proud wilfulness.

Prometheus:

But rest assured, for your submissiveness
I would not trade my lot.

Hermes:

You would prefer
To serve this rock than be the messenger
Of Zeus, no doubt!

Prometheus:

Insults are fittingly
Offered by those full of effrontery!

Hermes:

I think you revel in your present plight.

Prometheus:

You think I revel? Oh, I wish I might
See all my enemies revel this way,
Including you!

Hermes:

What? You blame your dismay 860
On me?

Prometheus:

I hate all gods who had my aid,
And now look at the way I've been repaid!

Hermes

You sound deluded.

Prometheus:

Crazy I may be
If it be mad to hate one's enemy.

Hermes:

You'd be unbearable if you were freed.

Prometheus:

Alas!

Hermes:

A word unknown to Zeus.

Prometheus:

Indeed
Time teaches everything, however.

Hermes:

True!
But learning wisdom has eluded you.

Prometheus:

Or I would not talk to a minion
Like you!

Hermes:

Obviously, then, you will give none 870
Of the answers Zeus demands.

Prometheus:

Oh, certainly

I'm in his debt!

Hermes:

Hah, you are taunting me
As if I were a child.

Prometheus:

You've less a brain
Than any child if you expect to gain
One thing from me. There is no persecution
Zeus can devise to lead to the solution
Of loosening my tongue until I'm set
Free from these painful fetters. So, then, let
Him hurl his lightning and with wings of snow
Confound the reeling world. Yes, let him throw 880
His thunder! Nothing still will make me yield
To tell him at whose hands his fate is sealed
To be deposed.

Hermes:

And this will profit you?

Prometheus:

From long ago my conduct has been due,
Decided and foreseen.

Hermes:

Yield, idiot,
To wisdom! Face your miserable lot!

Prometheus:

Look, you are pestering me fruitlessly
As though I were a wave upon the sea
That you could sway to ebb instead of flow.
Do not imagine that I'd ever grow 890
Effeminate in fear of Zeus and be
So fearful as to beg an enemy
To free me from these bonds.

Hermes:

I speak in vain -
You're like a new-hitched colt I can't restrain,
The bit between its teeth. Your quibbling
Encourages your rage – it's footling!
For foolish men find their obstinacy
Is useless. But if you will not heed me,
Think what a towering wave of woe will fall
On you past all escape! For first of all, 900
Zeus with his thunder and his lightning-flame

Shall smash this cliff, thus burying your frame,
Still fastened to this rock. Eventually
After what will seem an eternity,
You'll come back to the light. At the behest
Of Zeus, his eagle will arrive, a guest
Who'll feast on you all day, his appetite
Tearing you piecemeal, bite on savage bite,
Until your liver turns a jet-black hue.
Your agony will not relinquish you
Until some god appears to put an end
To it and, of his own free will, descend
Into the sunless depths of Death below
The earth in darkest Hell. And, therefore, know
That this is true, not vaunting fabrication,
For Zeus does not know of prevarication.
For all he utters shall be brought about.
Think carefully, and do not ever doubt
That stubbornness is wrong.

Chorus:

To us, Prometheus. He importunes you 920
To be astute and not refractory,
For there is shame in acting wrongfully.

Prometheus:

Hermes:

These words are nought but frenzy, not a prayer.
Where will it end? You women, you who share
His anguish, leave this spot in haste lest he
Should stupefy your sensibility
With constant roaring!

Try some other way
To bend me to your will, for what you say 940
Is useless. For his roaring, I believe,
Gives more pain than a person can conceive.
I cannot be so base. With him I'd be

Content to suffer any destiny,
For I have learned all traitors to detest:
Indeed there is no other kind of pest
I could loathe more.

Hermes:

Accept my warning, then,
And do not put the blame on fortune when
You're overcome by ruin! It's not true
To say that it was Zeus who piled on you 950
These sudden pains. No, blame yourselves instead,
For you're aware of what now lies ahead.
It is no secret that you have been caught
By torment through the folly you have wrought.[exit]
Prometheus:

Now word has turned to deed! The earth is shaking,
With thunderbolts the ocean's depths are quaking.
The lightning-flashes flare, the dust is cast
About by whirlwinds and I hear the blast
Of hostile, howling winds, Both sky and sea
Are mingled, and against me visibly 960
Turmoil advances, which Lord Zeus has sent
To frighten me. O sacred firmament,
Revolving round the lights up in the air,
My holy mother, see the wrongs I bear!

