

HELEN

Helen:

Here are Nile's lovely streams which drench the plain
Of Egypt with white snow instead of rain.
Proteus once ruled this country as its king,
Dwelling on Pharos Island, marrying
Psamathe, one of the daughters of the sea,
Once she had left Aiakos' bed, and she
Gave birth to a brace of children – of these, one
Was Theoclymenos, her only son,
By whom the gods were always glorified;
The other was a girl, her mother's pride 10
And joy, called Eion in her infancy,
Though named, when she had reached the age to be
A wife, Theonoe, a maid who knew
What all the gods envisaged that they'd do
Besides their present plans, a blessing she
Received from Nereus. Sparta, equally,
My fatherland, is not without acclaim.
My father Tyndareus has garnered fame.
But to my mother Leda Zeus, they say,
In semblance of a swan once winged his way, 20
Stalked by an eagle, should the tale be true,
And lay with her. My name is Helen. You
Will hear from me my troubles. A contest
One day was held to judge the comeliest
Goddess beneath Mt. Ida. There were three
That Paris was to judge – apart from me,

Hera and Cypris, Zeus's child: her ache
 To win was strong, so she resolved to make
 An offer of my looks (if ills may be
 Lovely) so that Paris would marry me. 30
 And that is how she won the prize, and so
 The shepherd Paris left his stalls to go
 To Sparta. Angry that she hadn't won
 The contest, Hera gave to Priam's son
 A phantom of myself, not me, which she
 Had made out of the sky – it looked like me,
 It breathed like me. so that he really thought
 That he was holding me, but I was nought
 In fact. Then Zeus brought further woes to these –
 For he made plans to cause hostilities 40
 Between the Greeks and Phrygians, so that he
 Might ease the load of Earth's humanity
 And to our greatest leader bring great fame.
 And therefore I, or rather just my name,
 Was set up as a prize for Argive men,
 While Trojan fortitude was tested. Then
 Hermes hid me inside a misty spray
 At Zeus's charge and brought me here to stay
 In Proteus' house so that I may secure
 Myself for Menelaus and be pure, 50
 For Proteus is a man more to revere
 Than any other man. So I am here,
 While my poor husband gathers troops so he
 Might go to Ilium and rescue me.
 And now so many warriors beside

Skamander's flowing streams through me have died.

Accursed, I've borne all this and yet betrayed

My husband through that likeness Hera made

By causing bloody war. Why do I stay

Alive? Yet I heard the god Hermes say 60

I'd live in Sparta with my spouse – for he

Knew I have never gone to Troy – to see

That I'd be faithful. While King Proteus, then,

Yet lived, I would be safe from other men.

But now that he is in the earth, his son

Is keen to form a lasting union

With me. So my respect from long ago

Of Menelaus forces me to throw

Myself, an appliant, on Proteus' grave

And supplicate with him that he might save 70

Me for my husband. Thus, though I may face

Dishonour throughout Hellas, no disgrace

Will touch me here. [enter Teucer]

Teucer:

 This house is fortified –

Who rules it? It should be set side-by-side

With Ploutos' house in honour. Walls so high

And kingly chambers, pleasing to the eye!

Ye gods, I see the similarity

Of her who's ruined all the Greeks – and me.

May the gods spurn you! If I were not here

In foreign territory, you'd well fear 80

A well-aimed arrow from my bow, for you

Are so like Zeus's child.

Helen:

Ah, what's to do,

Poor man? Why do you turn away from me

And loathe me for that other's misery?

Teucer:

Oh, I was wrong – my anger was too great,

For everyone in Greece is full of hate

For Zeus's child. Forgive what I have said,

Dear lady!

Helen:

Who are you? Where were you bred?

Why are you here?

Teucer:

A wretched Greek am I,

Lady.

Helen:

Indeed, then that's the reason why 90

You hate her. What's the land, then, whence you came?

And whose son are you?

Teucer:

Teucer is my name,

My father's Telamon. I'm from the isle

Of Salamis.

Helen:

Why did you seek the Nile?

Teucer:

I am an exile from my native land.

Helen:

How wretched you must feel. At whose command?

Teucer:

My father. Who could be closer than he?

Helen:

But why? There must be some great tragedy.

Teucer:

My brother Ajax died in Troy – an ill

That ruined me.

Helen:

Surely you didn't kill 100

The man?

Teucer:

Oh no, upon his sword he threw

Himself.

Helen:

What sensible man would ever do

A thing like that? Was he, then, mad?

Teucer:

You've heard

Of Peleus' son, Achilles?

Helen:

Yes, the word

Was he was Helen's suitor.

Teucer:

Well, when he

Was dead, his armour he had left to be

Contested for.

Helen:

How would this contest, then,

Affect Ajax?

Teucer:

One of the other men

Won it and Ajax killed himself.

Helen:

And so

His suicide has made you sick with woe? 110

Teucer:

I should have died with him.

Helen:

So to famed Troy

You went?

Teucer:

Yes, that's how I came to destroy

Myself.

Helen:

Is Troy now sacked?

Teucer:

Yes, it has been

So wholly burned that no clear trace is seen

Of any wall.

Helen:

Poor Helen, you have cost

So many Phrygian lives now to be lost!

Teucer:

Achaeans, too! Such evils we have seen!

Helen:

When was the city sacked?

Teucer:

It now has been

Full seven years of harvest.

Helen:

And you stayed

How long?

Teucer:

Ten years in all.

Helen:

The Spartan maid – 120

Did you seize her?

Teucer:

Her spouse did – by the hair

He dragged her off with him.

Helen:

And were you there

To see the wretch? Or was this mere hearsay?

Teucer:

As I see you, I saw her plain as day.

Helen:

Was this no god-sent dream hoodwinking you?

Teucer:

Think up some other subject-matter, do,

Not her.

Helen:

You *really* saw her?

Teucer:

Certainly,

With my own eyes. My mind can also see.

Helen:

Is Menelaus with her now?

Teucer:

Oh no.

He's not in Sparta.

Helen:

That fills me with woe. 130

Teucer:

They've disappeared together, so they say.

Helen:

Was there not but one passage on the way

To Greece?

Teucer:

There was, but we were separated

By a great storm.

Helen:

And where were you located?

Teucer:

Within the centre of the Aegean foam.

Helen:

And no-one's seen her husband coming home

Since then?

Teucer:

No-one – in Greece the people say

He's dead.

Helen:

Ah, I'm completely lost! But, pray,

Is Thestius's child alive?

Teucer:

Do you

Refer to Leda? Because if you do, 140

She's dead, too.

Helen:

Surely the ignominy

Of Helen did not kill her?

Teucer:

Yes, for she

Has hanged her noble self, or so they say.

Helen:

Do Tyndareus' sons see the light of day?

Teucer:

They do and don't – a double tale I tell.

Helen:

Which is the likelier tale? Ah, I'm in Hell!

Teucer:

They say those two are now a constellation.

Helen:

Good news! But what's the other allegation?

Teucer:

They say that they committed suicide

Because of Clytaemnestra. Set aside 150

Such tales, however, for I do not need

To grieve twice over. But I'm here to heed

Theonoe's prediction. Please aid me

As patron to receive her prophecy

How I might sail to Cyprus Island where

Phoebus said I would live, and it will bear

The name of Salamis, my native land

In honour of it.

Helen:

This you'll understand

Upon your journey. But you must leave now
Before the son of Proteus should somehow 160
Return and see you here. He presently
Is hunting with his trusty hounds, but he
Kills every stranger whom he happens by
Here in our native land. Don't ask me why –
It wouldn't help.

Teucer:

 You've spoken well, so may
The gods bless you for what you had to say
To me, dear lady. So, although your frame
Is just like Helen's, you are not the same
In character. May evils overtake
That harridan and may she never make 170
Her way back home. I wish you happiness
Always. [exit Teucer]

Helen:

 As I lament my great distress,
How shall I grieve? How shall my threnody go?
With weeping or with songs of death or woe?
Winged maidens, virgin daughters of the Earth
And all you Sirens, hearken to the birth
Of all my mourning! Hear the Libyan flute
Or pipe or lyre or flowing tears that suit
My woes! Hear grief for grief and monody
For monody! And may Persephone 180
Send choirs of death in harmony with all

My woes so that within her gloomy hall
I may give her a paeon for the dead
In addition to the tears that I will shed.

Chorus:

Upon the tangled grass I chanced to be
Drying some purple robes as gleamingly
The sun was blazing by the water near
The young reed shoots, when suddenly I hear
My mistress' mournful, tuneless wails, for she
Was shrieking, pouring out her misery, 190
Just as a Naiad nymph sends out a sound,
A song of anguish ringing all around
The hills and rocky caves in lamentation
That she's the victim of Pan's violation. [enter Helen]

Helen:

O maids of Hellas, foreign sailor's prey!
Alas, a Grecian sailor came to say,
With tears to add to mine, that fire and flame
Have vanquished Troy and I'm the one to blame.
Leda has hanged herself through my disgrace,
My spouse, long roaming on the ocean's face, 200
Is gone as well, while the Tyndarides,
Hellas's glorious celebrities,
Have vanished from the meadowlands where steeds
Gallop and, where Eurotas sports its reeds
Along its banks, the schools of wrestling
In which young men spend hours practising.

Chorus:

Lady, alas, I mourn your destiny,

For clearly you were doomed to tragedy
Since Zeus begat you as he glimmered through
The air, a snow-white swan. What grief have you 210
Not borne? Your mother's dead, and misery
Surrounds the heavenly Twins; you may not see
Your native land, and, mistress, it is said
That you were sharing a barbarian's bed,
While Menelaus in the salty sea
Has lost his life, nor will you ever be
A joy in your old home nor will you bless
Athene's bronze-bound house with happiness.
Helen: Alas, was it a Phrygian or a Greek
Who cut the pine that brought tears, sad and bleak, 220
To Troy? For from this wood Paris constructed
That fatal ship by foreign oars conducted
Straight to my home. He was attracted to
My tragic beauty, hankering to woo
Me for his wife. The underhanded, fell
Queen Aphrodite took that ship as well,
Death-dealing. Hera, Zeus's darling one,
Upon her golden throne dispatched the son
Of Maia, Hermes – I was gathering
Fresh rose-leaves in my robe that I might bring 230
Them to Athena. He swept me away
Across the heavenly skies that I might stay
In this unfortunate land, fashioning me
Into the object of the rivalry
Of Greece and Troy, where I have now become
A symbol of untrue opprobrium.

Chorus:

You grieve, I know, but you must undergo
As best you can life's misery and woe.

Helen:

Dear friends, what fate has overtaken me?

My mother bore me as a prodigy 240

To men. No woman, foreigner or Greek,
Has birthed a white bird's egg – surely a freak! –
And yet my mother did, so is it stated.

Inside a bird's egg have I been created.

Zeus is my father. Therefore all my life
Is thought a wonder: Hera, Zeus's wife,
Must partly take responsibility,

My beauty also. Oh, if I could be

Erased as paintings are and have a face

That's plainer than this fair one in its place! 250

The Greeks would not recall my villainy,
Recalling only my integrity.

A man with but one plan in mind, although
He's hindered by the gods, will find that row
Is hard to hoe but bearable. But I

In countless inconveniences lie.

Though I have done no wrong, yet my good name

Is gone: if someone should incur the blame

For someone else's sin, then that would be

Harder to bear than the reality. 260

The gods exiled me to a barbarous land:

Deprived of my companions, here I stand,

A slave, although free-born. In such a place

As this all the inhabitants must face
Bondage except for one. My one mainstay –
That Menelaus will come here one day
And free me from my woes – is gone, for he
Is dead. My mother, too, has ceased to be:
I'm called her killer – wrongly, but I must
Endure the stigma, though the slur's unjust. 270

My precious daughter's growing grey, unwed,
A virgin still, the heavenly Twins are dead,
And I'm as good as dead myself, for see
The miseries that have befallen me.
The worst of all is if I ever came
Back home I'd be repulsed, for folk would claim
I was the one who went to Ilium
And that with Menelaus I had come
Back home. If he yet lived, we would have known
Each other by the marks that we alone 280

Would recognize, but now he's dead. Oh why
Am I yet living? What fortune do I
Have left? Should I perhaps choose to be wed
In exchange for my woes and share the bed
Of a rich foreigner? However, should
A woman wed a man she hates, she would
Hate her own body too. Better to die –
But how? To choose to hang oneself on high
Is shameful – even slaves reject that way.
To use a sword is noble, I would say, 290
And happily concise. So utterly
Am I destroyed by abject misery.

Though other women have found happiness
Through their own pulchritude, I nonetheless
Am overcome by mine.

Chorus:

Don't take as read,
Helen, all that the stranger here has said.

Helen:

Of Menelaus' death he was quite clear.

Chorus

But there are many falsehoods too, I fear.

Helen:

And truths as well!

Chorus:

To misery instead
Of benefit you seem to have been led. 300

Helen:

Yes, terror leads me to the thing I fear.

Chorus:

And what benevolence do you enjoy here?

Helen:

There's plenty of it in my company
Except for him who seeks to marry me.

Chorus:

Then leave this tomb –

Helen:

Wherefore?

Chorus:

And go inside
And ask Theonoe there to provide

The truth about your husband, because she
Knows everything, for she's the progeny
Of the sea-nymph, and when you surely know
Whether he lives or not, be full of woe 310
Or celebrate. Till unambiguously
You're told the truth, why sing a threnody?
Trust me! Go question her! With someone there
To tell the truth, why should you look elsewhere?
I, too, would like to go with you and know
Her prophecies – we women ought to show
Support to one another.

Helen:

Friends, your views
Are welcome. Let's go in and hear her news
About my pain.

Chorus:

I'll enter willingly.

Helen:

O tragic day! Alas, what misery 320
Am I to hear?

Chorus:

Dear friend, your lamentation
Is undermined by your anticipation.

Helen:

Oh, how my husband suffered! Does he see
The light of day, the stars' trajectory
Or lie beneath the earth forevermore?

Chorus:

Whatever, though, the future has in store,

Be optimistic.

Helen:

Now I swear to you,
Reed-filled Eurotas, if the tale be true
About my husband's death – and it was plain
To me at least – a deadly rope I'll strain 330
About my neck or with a murderous sword
Slit my throat open and thereby afford
An offering to the Fates and that offspring
Of Priam, who long past was wandering
Among his flocks on Ida.

Chorus:

May you find
True happiness, your sorrows left behind!

Helen:

Poor conquered Troy! How undeservedly
You suffer now! The bounty given me
By Cypris caused incessant tears and pain;
Mothers lament their sons cruelly slain; 340
Young maidens shear their tresses all along
Skamander as they chant a mournful song
For their slain kin. While all of Hellas wails,
And all the widowed women with their nails
Tear at their tender cheeks. O Kallisto,
Honoured in Arcady some time ago,
Who, four-pawed, lay with Zeus, your happiness
Surpassed my mother's – like a lioness
In bearing, you had the anatomy
Of a wild beast and changed your misery 350

To joy. The Titan girl, shaped like a hind
With horns of gold, Queen Artemis declined
To keep within her choral band, for she
Was overly attractive. As for me,
Troy was demolished by my loveliness
And our lost warriors cause us great distress. [exit] [enter Menelaus]

Menelaus:

Pelops, who beat Oenomaus long ago
In a race of chariots in Pisa, o
If only, when the gods chose to prepare
A feast, cooked you and served you up as fare 360
To all the guests, you then had lost your life!
If only you had never had a wife
Or fathered Atreus, who then fathered me!
Instead, though, Atreus married Aerope
And from that union a famous pair,
Agamemnon and myself, were born. I swear –
And when I say this, it's no idle boast –
That I assembled a most mighty host
To take to Troy. No tyrant, though, was I –
I headed young Greek men selected by 370
Consent. Some now are dead, some luckily
Escaped and came back home exultantly
With names of the deceased. Upon the foam
Of salty sea I was destined to roam
Since I left Troy in ruins, hankering
To get back home myself, yet reckoning
That I'm unworthy. Libya's deserts I
Have sailed to, but whenever I drew nigh

My land I was blown back, no favouring
Breeze filling up my sails that I might bring 380

My ship ashore. And now I have been thrown
Upon this shore, shipwrecked, almost alone –
I've lost most of my friends, my vessel fractured
Against the rocks. My keel, though, manufactured
So cunningly, allowed me to get free
With difficulty unexpectedly,
With Helen, whom I dragged from Troy. The name
And people of this land I have to claim

I do not know. I would have blushed to break
Upon folks as I was and start to make 390

Inquiries, so I hid my shabby wear
Through shame, for when a noble man must bear
Distress, he's in an unaccustomed state,
Unlike the man who's inured to a fate
Of lasting misery. For poverty
Is wearing me away – just look at me,
Who have no sustenance, no clothes to wear.

What I am wearing now one may compare
To rags snatched from a ship. My robes the sea
Has swept away with all my jewelry. 400

I hid inside a cave the woman who
Has caused me all my grief and told those few
Who have survived to guard her. Now I'll try
To find some friends to help me. Ah, I spy
A walled house with impressive gates – maybe
A rich man lives here. Travellers on the sea
May benefit from people who possess

A wealthy home, though those in neediness

Would have to turn me down. Hello! Hello!

Is there a porter to announce my woe 410

Within?

Old Woman:

Who's there? Be off! Don't irritate

My master, standing at the court-yard gate

Or else, because you're Greek, you'll soon be dead,

For Greeks aren't welcome here.

Menelaus:

The words you've said,

Old woman, should be calmer. I'll comply.

Old Woman:

I'm not allowed to let a Grecian nigh

The gates.

Menelaus:

Don't push me! Don't thrust me away!

Old Woman:

But you won't hear what I have got to say.

Menelaus:

Just tell your master –

Old Woman:

If I did, you'd be

Unhappy.

Menelaus:

But I warrant sanctuary, 420

A shipwreck and a guest.

Old Woman:

Well, go elsewhere!

Menelaus:

No, I'll go in. Heed me.

Old Woman:

Be well aware

You're causing trouble, and you'll soon be tossed

Outside.

Menelaus:

Those splendid armies that I've lost –

Where are they?

Old Woman:

Maybe elsewhere you were great,

But not here.

Menelaus:

Oh, I grieve my tragic fate,

So undeserved.

Old Woman:

For what do you lament?

Menelaus:

My fortunes – heretofore I was content.

Old Woman:

So leave! Grieve to your friends!

Menelaus:

What is this land?

Who owns this palace?

Old Woman:

You must understand 430

It's Proteus. You're in Egypt.

Menelaus:

Ah, what woe

Has brought me here!

Old Woman:

Why do you censure so

The gleaming Nile?

Menelaus:

I don't - my misery

I rail at.

Old Woman:

Others fare lamentably –

You're not alone.

Menelaus:

But is the king you name

Within?

Old Woman:

This the tomb that tells his fame.

His son now rules here.

Menelaus:

Well then , where is he?

Old Woman:

He's not within. He holds great enmity

Against the Greeks.

Menelaus:

I've felt its fruits. Why so?

Old Woman:

Helen, the child of Zeus, if you must know, 440

Is here.

Menelaus:

Say that again! Helen?

Old Woman:

Yes, she,
The child of Tyndareus, who formerly
Lived in the land of Sparta.

Menelaus:

Tell me, though,
Where did she come from? For I long to know
Your meaning.

Old Woman:

She from Sparta's land came here.

Menelaus:

When was that? Ah, I've lost my wife, I fear,
Who must have left the cave.

Old Woman:

It was before
The Greeks set out for Troy. But, I implore,
Begone, for there is something happening
Within the palace walls – some dreadful thing. 450
You are untimely: should my master see
And capture you, then your guest-gift will be
Your death. I'm friendly to the Greeks despite
The harsh words which I uttered out of fright
Of him. [exit]

Menelaus:

What's this? After my woes, I hear
Of present ones in sadness coming near
My own. I came from Ilium and brought
My wife with me and in a cave I sought
To save her, but another woman came
To live here, yet possessing the same name. 460

She is the child of Zeus, she said to me,
But is it possible that there could be
A man whose name is Zeus who lives close by
The Nile? There is but one Zeus in the sky.
Is there a Sparta other than the one
Where the Eurotas' reedy waters run?
There's but one Tyndareus. Is another land
Called Troy or Sparta? I don't understand
What I should say: there must be many a name
Of towns and women that is just the same. 470

So this is no surprise. Nor would I flee
A servant's fears, since no man certainly
Would spurn to feed me when he hears my name.
The fire of Troy has now received great fame –
I lit it, and I am well-known world-wide
And so the master of the house I'll bide
To see. If he is cruel, I'll go away,
Unseen, back to the shipwreck in the bay.
But if he's kind, I'll ask him to abet
Me in my woes, for this is the worst yet 480

Of all my troubles, that, being a king
Myself, I must beg other kings to bring
Me sustenance, and yet I have great need.
There is a saying that is wise indeed,
Although it's not my own – nothing can be
More powerful than dire necessity.

Chorus:

I heard the prophetess give out a clear
And lucid answer in the palace here

That Menelaus does not lie below

The earth in gloom but on the ocean's flow 490

Lives out his life: wretched, without a friend,

He seeks to find his home and make an end

Of all his wandering, while every strand

He's looked for since he left the Trojan land.

Helen:

I'm back here at the tomb. Theonoe

Has said her welcome words, and certainly

She is omniscient. I heard her say

My husband looks upon the light of day,

And here and there he has been wandering,

Though a skilled sailor. When his suffering 500

Is over, he'll come here. One thing, though, she

Has not said is that he will then be free

Of harm. I did not make my question clear,

So glad that he yet lived. She said he's near

This land somewhere, a shipwreck with but few

Companions with him still. Ah, when will you

Be here? I long for you. Who's this I see?

Is there a plot on hand to ambush me?

Is this a trick of Proteus' wicked son?

Now like a rapid racehorse I will run 510

Behind the tomb, for he is stalking me

With wild looks. I must seek security.

Menelaus:

Hey . you, who's trying hard to reach the base

Of the tomb and find the sacrificial place,

The pillars, stay quite still and tell me why

You're fleeing from me. At your body I
Am speechless and amazed.

Helen:

I am ill-used.

You women, by this man I am abused.

He keeps me from the tomb and wants to take

Me to the king, whose wooing words I ache 520

To shun.

Menelaus:

No thief or slave of evil men

Am I.

Helen:

Why is your body covered, then,

In ugly rags?

Menelaus:

Don't run away in fear.

Helen:

I won't, now that I've got as far as here.

Menelaus:

Who are you? And whom do I see in you?

Helen:

And who are *you*? – a question that the two

Of us now seem to share.

Menelaus:

I've never known

So similar a frame.

Helen:

Placing one's own

Is god-sent.

Menelaus:

Are you Greek or from this land?

Helen:

I'm Greek, but I would like to understand 530

Your story also.

Menelaus:

Oh, you seem to be

Like Helen, lady.

Helen:

And you look to me

Like Menelaus. What am I to say?

Menelaus:

You've recognized a man of great dismay.

Helen:

Back with your wife at last!

Menelaus:

What wife are you

Referring to?? I give you warning – do

Not touch my robe!

Helen:

The robe that Tyndareus,

My father, gave you.

Menelaus:

Hecate, produce

Auspicious visions!

Helen:

Look into my face! –

I am no ghost.

Menelaus:

I did not wed a brace

540

Of wives!

Helen:

You must have wed another wife.

Menelaus:

I hid her in a cave to save her life.

From Troy I'm bringing her back home with me.

Helen:

You have no wife but me.

Menelaus:

Ah, could it be

That I am going mad or that my eyes

Deceive me?

Helen:

Do you not, then, recognize

Your wife in me?

Menelaus:

The shape's the same, I see,

But I'm confused by the reality

Of facts.

Helen:

Look closely – what more do you need?

For who knows better than you?

Menelaus:

You are indeed 550

Like her, I'll not deny.

Helen:

Believe your eyes!

Menelaus:

But they would have me think this is some guise.

Helen:

I did not go to Troy myself – in lieu

Of me there was a phantom there.

Menelaus:

But who

Fashions our living bodies?

Helen:

It's the air

From which an image was sent over there,

Your god-made wife.

Menelaus:

Which god? This puzzles me.

Helen:

Hera, so that Paris could never be

My spouse.

Menelaus:

How could you be both here and there

In Troy?

Helen:

My name could be just anywhere, 560

But not myself.

Menelaus:

Let go! This dire dismay

Is dreadful.

Helen:

Will you take that ghost away

And leave me?

Menelaus:

Yes, I will. A fond farewell

For that close likeness!

Helen:

Then unwed I'll dwell!

Menelaus:

It's not your tale but all my misery

In Troy convincing me.

Helen:

Oh, who could be

More wretched than I am? The man most dear

To me is leaving me, and so I fear

I'll never see my home again. [enter Messenger]

Messenger:

Ah sir,

Across this land I've been a wanderer –

Now, after all my troubles, you've been found.

Menelaus:

What? Surely these barbarians are not bound 570

To plunder you?

Messenger:

Ah, such a prodigy

Is this! For surely the reality

Transcends my news.

Menelaus:

Well, by your eagerness

You've something new to tell me, I would guess.

Messenger:

I'd say your troubles have all been in vain.

Menelaus:

Those griefs are old. Tell me your news! Be plain!

Messenger:

Your wife has disappeared into the air,
Concealed. She left the hallowed cavern where
We kept her, saying, "How I pity you,
Both Greek and Phrygian warriors, dying through 580
Queen Hera's schemes, and all because of me.
You wrongly thought Paris successfully
Won Helen. My allotted time have I
Stayed here, obeying Fate. To Father Sky
I'll go now. Wretched Helen, with no stain
Upon your conscience, underwent such pain." [seeing Helen]
Ah, Leda's daughter, there you are! But I
Just told how you dissolved into the sky,
Not knowing you have wings. Ha! You won't play
Such tricks on us again – the great dismay 590
Your husband and his comrades have gone through
Was quite enough.

Menelaus:

So then it all is true!

O longed-for day! Back in my arms again!

Helen:

The time has been so long, dearest of men.
Such joy! My husband's back, friends. I may gaze
Upon him now after so many days.

Menelaus:

And I on you. So many things I thirst
To ask but don't know what to touch on first.

Helen:

I'm filled with joy – the hair upon my head
Stands up, and see the happy tears I shed. 600
About your neck I'm clinging with delight.

Menelaus:

I find no fault in you. O dearest sight!
I have my wife! Your brothers, as they sat
Upon their snow-white steeds, revered you at
An earlier time, their torches on display.
The god, however, who took you away
Has turned bad into good and brought you here
After so long and filled me with such cheer.
Now may I prosper!

Chorus:

Both of you should be
Prosperous.

Helen:

I now feel no misery 610
For everything that happened in the past.
I've waited for so long and now at last
I'm with you.

Menelaus:

Oh, how hard it was to bear
Our time apart! But now I am aware
Of what the goddess meant. The joy in me
Is tearful, but I feel more buoyancy
Than grief.

Helen:

What can I say? Who would have guessed
At such a thing? I hold you to my breast.

Menelaus:

We thought the wretched walls of Ilium
Contained you Who'd have thought that it would come 620
To this? How were you swept away from me?

Helen:

Those words provoke a bitter history.

Menelaus:

Divine gifts must be heard. Tell on.

Helen:

I hate

The tale that I commence now to relate.

Menelaus:

Yet tell it! For to hear of one's past woe
Is sweet.

Helen:

Not to the bed of your young foe,
On wingèd oars, with wingèd lust to be
Feloniously wed –

Menelaus:

What destiny

Or god took you away?

Helen:

Lord Zeus's son

Brought me to Egypt.

Menelaus:

But who was the one 630

Who sent you here? All this amazes me.

A dreadful story!

Helen:

I've wept bitterly

For I've been ruined by the wife of Zeus.

Menelaus:

Hera? What in the world, though, could induce

Her deeds?

Helen:

Alas, those baths, those fountains where

The goddesses would gather to prepare

For beauty contests!

Menelaus:

But what misery

Did she effect on you through that decree?

Helen:

To take me from the judge, King Priam's son –

Menelaus:

How?

Helen:

Cypris vowed me him.

Menelaus:

Unhappy one! 640

Helen:

That's why I'm here.

Menelaus:

A phantom took your place,

You said.

Helen:

Ah, mother!

Menelaus:

What?

Helen:

From deep disgrace

She hanged herself.

Menelaus:

But is Hermione,

Our daughter, living yet?

Helen:

Dear husband, she

Laments my fatal match, without a spouse

And childless.

Menelaus:

Paris, you destroyed my house –

And countless Greeks.

Helen:

I've lost my country, too,

Ill-fated and accursed, and I lost you

When I deserted both my home and bed –

Although this was not so - , shamefully wed. 650

Chorus:

If you find happiness eventually,

It will match with the past.

Messenger:

My lord, let me

Share in that joy of which I am aware,

Although but barely.

Menelaus:

Come, old man, and share

Our talk.

Messenger:

She was, then, not responsible for
The Trojan troubles?

Menelaus:

No indeed – the war
Was caused by tricky gods who love to play
Their games. Instead of Helen thus they there lay
A cloud within my arms.

Messenger:

So pointlessly
We suffered so?

Menelaus:

It was the rivalry 660
Of three goddesses, and of Hera too.

Messenger:

And so is it this woman here whom you
Have as your wife?

Menelaus:

Yes, trust me – this is she.

Messenger:

Daughter, it is with great difficulty
That we fathom the god. And yet somehow
That's good because he twists about, up now,,
Then down, forcing one man to suffer, though
Another man who doesn't meet with woe
Will do so in the end, never secure.

You and your spouse were driven to endure 670

Much pain – you in repute, he in the stress
Of battle. For when he showed eagerness
He gained nothing. But now the joy that he

Has now has happened automatically
Without his stir. You have not shamed your kin
Nor done what we have heard. Now I begin
The wedding-rites once more, remembering
The torches that I bore while scampering
Beside the four yoked steeds, and by the side
Of Menelaus you sat as his bride, 680
As you were leaving your dear family.
The man who doesn't have true loyalty
To his lord's concerns, sharing his happiness
And, when it's à propos, his gloominess,
Is worthless. Though a slave, may I yet be
Considered honest, for my mind is free,
If not my name. For this is better than
To be a bonds slave to another man
And yet dishonest, too.

Menelaus:

Beside my shield

You've suffered much upon the battlefield, 690
Old man. So share my happiness as well –
Go to the friends I left behind and tell
Them how things stand here and reveal my fate
And say that I desire them to wait
Upon the beach to see the struggle here
That is about to happen soon, I fear.
If Helen can escape, may they then be
On hand and waiting for us so that we
May flee this foreign land!

Messenger:

My lord, I will.

I see now how seers' prophecies cause ill. 700

For after all I see they're full of lies.

The sacrificial blazes and the cries

Of birds are useless. Why should we perceive

Birds as an aid? For Calchas didn't leave

The army any sign or word when he

Saw how a cloud had caused such butchery,

Nor Helenus, when Troy was sacked in vain.

The gods, you might say, wished men to be slain.

Why question prophets, then? Although we should

Sacrifice to the gods to gain some good, 710

We should shun prophecies, for otherwise

Were they invented - just to tantalize

Mortals. For if a man is indolent,

A sacrifice won't make him affluent.

Good judgment and discernment are the best

Of seers.

Chorus:

To me as well that's manifest.

With gods as friends, at home a prophecy

Is best.

Helen:

Then all is going splendidly

So far. But, you poor man, how did it come

About that you were saved from Ilium? 720

Although I'll not be profited to know,

I wish to learn how you have suffered so,

As one dear to another.

Menelaus:

A great deal

To ask all at once! Why should I reveal
Our naval losses and the beacons seen
Upon Euboea or how I have been
To Crete and Libya and Perseus' land
Of peaks? For after this you would demand
More tales, and it would grieve me yet once more,
Redoubling all that I have borne before. 730

Helen:

Your answer is much better than what I
Asked of you, so the rest of your reply
Leave out and say how long you wearily
Were forced to wander on the endless sea.

Menelaus:

Besides ten years in Troy, yet seven more
I spent on board my ship since leaving shore.

Helen:

Poor man, that's long indeed. From liberty
In Troy at last, you're facing butchery.

Menelaus:

What do you mean? This is my ruination!

Helen:

Quick, flee! Abandon any hesitation! 740
You will be killed by him who's living here.

Menelaus:

Wherefore?

Helen:

Because you came to interfere

And break our marriage, quite out of the blue.

Menelaus:

What's that? Does someone mean to marry you?

Helen:

Yes. Ah, his blows I've borne!

Menelaus:

Is his command

A private one, or does he rule this land?

Helen:

He is the man who rules here, Proteus' son.

Menelaus:

That riddling story I have heard from one

Who serves here.

Helen:

At which gate?

Menelaus:

That one! He threw

Me out as if I were a tramp.

Helen:

Were you

Begging for food? That's dreadful!

Menelaus:

Begging? No,

That's not exactly accurate.

Helen:

And so

You know about my marriage.

Menelaus:

Yes, I do,

Save whether he has ever fondled you.

Helen:

I've saved myself for you.

Menelaus:

Your words are sweet

If they are true.

Helen:

You see my wretched seat

Here at this tomb?

Menelaus:

Some filthy straw I see,

But how does that affect you?

Helen:

You see me,

A suppliant begging that I may escape

His clutches and avoid a dreadful rape. 760

Menelaus:

Lacking an altar, or is that the way

Of foreigners?

Helen:

This is as good a mainstay

As shrines.

Menelaus:

Then I may not take you aboard

My ship and take you home?

Helen:

No, no, a sword

Awaits you, not my bed.

Menelaus:

Then that makes me

A wretched man.

Helen:

Feel no ignominy

But flee this land.

Menelaus:

What? Leaving you behind?

For you I sacked Troy.

Helen:

Better than to find

Death in my bed!

Menelaus:

Such words are cowardly,

Unworthy of one who gained victory

In Troy.

Helen:

You cannot tell the king, although

You're doubtless keen to do it.

Menelaus:

Is he so

Invulnerable, then?

Helen:

To undertake

Impossibilities would hardly make

A prudent man.

Menelaus:

And must I therefore bind

My hands in silence?

Helen:

We will have to find

A way out of this plight.

Menelaus:

Better to act

Than do nothing at all.

Helen:

There is, in fact,

But one hope we have left.

Menelaus:

Can it be bought?

Does it require some pluck? May it be sought 780

With words?

Helen:

If the king learns that you're here –

Menelaus:

Will he

Be told about me? He does not know me.

Helen:

He has a godlike friend who dwells inside.

Menelaus:

A voice that's come to settle and reside

Within?

Helen:

Oh no, his sister Theonoë.

Menelaus:

A holy name! What does she do? Tell me.

Heen:

She knows all things, and she will tell him you

Are here.

Menelaus:

We're doomed. There's nothing I can do

To hide from her.

Helen:

We *could* try supplication –

Menelaus:

To do what? Oh what kind of expectation 790

Is that?

Helen:

That she won't tell him.

Menelaus:

Let us say

That works – how are we, then, to get away?

Helen:

With ease by her aid: if we try to go

Clandestinely, then it will not be so.

Menelaus:

Women can deal with women, so the task

Is yours. Therefore approach the maid and ask

For her assistance.

Helen:

I shall clasp his knees,

You may be certain.

Menelaus:

Well, then, what if she's

Not willing?

Helen:

You will die, and I'll be wed

By force unhappily.

Menelaus:

That 'force' you said 800

Is but a pretext – you'd break faith with me.

Helen:

No, husband, I have sworn a guarantee

By your own life –

Menelaus:

That you would rather die

Than wed another man?

Helen:

Yes, that's what I

Have vowed. I'll die, killed by the self-same steel,

And I will lie beside you.

Menelaus:

Well, then, feel

My right hand.

Helen:

There! So now, should I lose you,

I vow to you that I will perish, too.

Menelaus:

And I, if I lose you, will do the same.

Helen:

How shall we do it, then, to gather fame? 810

Menelaus:

I'll slay you on this tomb, and then I'll kill

Myself as well. But first of all I will

Fight hard for you. Contenders, do you hear?

Yes, everyone who wishes may come near.

For I will not disgrace my Trojan fame.

Returning home, I'll not receive great blame –

I who robbed Thetis of her progeny,

Saw Ajax kill himself in misery

And Nestor, too, deprived of his dear son,

Antilochus. Yes, all of this I've done,

So shall I not brave death for my own wife?

I firmly am resolved to take my life 820

For her. Gods, if they're wise, will carefully

Bury brave men who've fought the enemy

And died, but it's in rocky ground they place

The cowards.

Chorus:

You gods, may Tantalus's race

Be fortunate at last, and may it be

Free of all evil.

Helen:

Oh, how miserably

Has Fate controlled me! We are lost! The seer

Theonoë is coming to us here.

The house's bolts are creaking! We must flee

However, what's the point of fleeing? She 830

Will know you've come whether she's far away

Or in the house. Alas for my dismay!

From barbarous Troy brought to security,

I'm caught now by more barbarous weaponry.

Theonoë:

Please lead the way with torches. Purify

The inmost corners of the air so I

May breathe the breath of Heaven. You, in turn,

If some unholy man has walked here, burn
The footprints, and when you have paid the fee
To the gods, required by formality, 840
Then take the household's blazing flame inside.
Helen, about what I have prophesied –
It's clear your husband's come here, isn't it,
Robbed of his ships and of your counterfeit?
Unhappy man, you have escaped much woe
To reach this land of ours, nor do you know
Whether you'll go back home again or stay
Right here. A factious conference today
Lord Zeus will hold. His consort in the past
Has been no friend of yours, but now at last 850
She's cordial and wishes to return
You both back to your home that Greece may learn
That Paris wed your wife deceitfully.
But Cypris hopes to crush you on the sea
That people may not think that she had bought
The prize of beauty for a marriage wrought
To no avail. The problem, then, is mine –
Whether to ruin you, which would align
With Cypris' plans, by letting my brother know
That you have now arrived or let you go, 860
Thus satisfying Hera, and conceal
It from him, for he told me to reveal
To him when you've arrived. [to the servants] One of you, go
And tell my brother what he ought to know,
That Menelaus has arrived, so I
May be secure.

Helen:

Maiden, to you I cry

And grasp your knees. My spouse is very near

To being slain. Now I have found him here

After much striving. Do not tell him he

Is back here in my arms. Your piety 870

Do not forsake, and do not buy good will

That proves itself to be unjust and ill.

The god hates violence and theft, so shun

Riches if they by robbery are won.

We own both Heaven and Earth, and therefore we

Should not fill up our homes through robbery.

Propitiously – unhappily for me –

Hermes assigned me, for security,

To your father's hands for Menelaus' sake,

Who hither has arrived and wants to take 880

Me back. But how can he if he is dead?

What would your father and the god have said?

Would they not to the owner, then, convey

The property they had? They would, I'd say.

So don't esteem your thoughtless brother more

Than your upstanding father. For if you're

A prophetess yet ruin the intent

Of your good father and thus make content

Your lawless brother, it's ignominy

That you should know what is and what will be – 890

All matters heavenly – yet still don't know

What's right. Please rescue me from all my woe,

For it is but a trifling thing for you

To undertake. For there is no-one who
Does not hate Helen – they say I betrayed
My spouse before I then in Phrygia stayed
In luxury. But if I went once more
To Sparta, they would find that I'm no whore.
Tricked by the gods, they'll find no traitoress
In me but show the world my righteousness. 900
My daughter, whom no man desires to wed,
I will betroth. My vagrant life I'll shed,
Enjoying home. And if this man should die
And be consumed with funeral flames, then I,
Though far away, will prize his memory,
But while he's living in security
Shall I still lose him? Ah, I beg of you,
Maiden, not that! Grant me this favour. Do
As your good father. For to imitate
One's father is an asset truly great 910
In children.

Chorus:

All your words are piteous,
And so are you. But I'm solicitous
To hear what Menelaus has to say
To save his life.

Menelaus:

Well, I refuse to play
The coward. I'll not fall before your knees
Or wet my eyes with blubbering, for these
Are craven traits that would dishonour me
And turn to nought my former bravery

In Troy, despite the fact that it is said
It's fitting for a well-born man to shed 920
Tears In misfortune. But if you maintain
A stranger seeking justly to regain
His wife ought to be saved, accordingly
Restore her and grant us immunity.
If not, as often in the past, you'll do
Me wrong. My honesty will get to you
Most closely, and those things that make me proud
Here at your father's tomb I'll speak out loud
As I bemoan his loss. [to the dead Proteus] Beneath this stone,
Where you lie dead, old man, restore my own 930
Dear wife, sent to you for security
By Zeus. I know you can't give her to me
Yourself, for you are dead. Your daughter, though,
Will think that you, now summoned from below,
With your great past, do not deserve to be
Tarnished, for she now holds authority.
I call on you, Hades, who now maintain
So many warriors' bodies I have slain
For Helen's sake, and you have been repaid,
So bring them back to earth or force this maid 940
To show herself to have more piety
Than Proteus and restore my wife to me.
If you decline, though, what she has omitted
I'll tell you, for by oath I am committed,
Maiden, to fight your brother – either I
Or he (to put it simply) has to die.
If single combat, though, he should decline

But hunts us down as by the tomb we pine
With hunger, I am bent on suicide,
But first I'll kill my wife, and side by side 950
We'll lie upon this tomb, blood trickling
Down to the ground below, betokening
A deathless grief to you, to Proteus blame.
Therefore your brother will not ever claim
Her as his wife – neither will anyone.
We'll go, not to my house, but where the sun
Will never shine. Why is it that I say
All this? If I turned to a woman's way
And wept instead of acting, I would be
More pitied. If you think it best, kill me. 960
You'll never kill nonentities, and so
Listen to what I say that you may go
Ahead and act with justice, while I may
Receive my wife.

Chorus:

 Maiden, judge in a way
That pleases all of us.

Theonoë:

 My inclination
Leans towards good and self-appreciation.
I've no intention to contaminate
My father's great renown or satiate
My brother so that I appear to be
Heinous. There is a mighty shrine in me 970
Preserving justice, which was kept alive
As Nereus' legacy, and I will strive

To keep it. So if Hera should decide
To serve you, my vote will be on her side.
Assist me, Aphrodite, though you play
No part in my life, for I'll always stay
A virgin. For the things that you have said
Against my father, who is lying dead,
Beneath this tomb, I say the very same
As you, because I would incur such shame 980
If I withheld her. For he'd reunite
The two of you if he still saw daylight.
To both the living and those who are laid
Beneath the earth reprisal must be paid.
The latter's minds are just as dead as they
Yet think forever as they fall away
Into the ether. So, in brief, I'll hold
My tongue about your plea nor be so bold
As to assist my brother's stupidity,
For I will help him, though he would not guess 990
At it, for I'll reform him. Find a way
Of action, for, by being mute, I'll stay
Out of your way. First, beg Cypris that she
Will send you home, and let it be your plea
That Hera to her willingness sticks fast
And has the same intent as in the past –
To save you both. Father, as far as I
Have power, may I never tell the lie
That you are impious!

Chorus:

Impiety

Is doomed, but those who act honourably 1000

Have hope.

Helen:

Husband, we have her aid. But now
Contribute your advice and tell me how
We may escape.

Menelaus:

Then listen. You came here
Some time ago, and you've become quite near
To friendship with the servants.

Helen:

Do you see
A serious hope to succour you and me?

Menelaus:

Could you persuade a stable-hand to let
Us have a chariot?

Helen:

I might; and yet
How will we get away? For we don't know
The countryside.

Menelaus:

Ah, yes, you're right, that's so. 1010
That's quite impossible. What if I hide
Within the house, committing regicide
With this two-edged sword?

Helen:

Well, Theonoë
Would not allow it.

Menelaus:

Yes, and certainly

There is no ship to make a getaway.

Helen:

Listen – even a woman may sometimes say

A prudent thing – are you prepared to act

The part of a dead man, although in fact

You yet are living still?

Menelaus:

An evil sign,

But if I profit by it, I'll resign 1020

Myself to it.

Helen:

And I will truly mourn

Your death, as women do with tresses shorn,

Before this wicked man.

Menelaus:

What remedy

Is this? It seems a little old to me.

Helen:

As though you died at sea I'll ask the man

To bury you.

Menelaus:

Supposing that you can

Persuade him, how shall we escape since we

Possess no ship and you've then buried me?

Helen:

I'll beg a ship from him and I'll convey

Your funeral-offerings so that they may 1030

Be cast into the sea.

Menelaus:

There's one thing, though,
Your wise plan's lacking which will make things go
Awry – What if the man should order you
To bury me on land?

Helen:

*"That we don't do
In Greece," I'll say, 'for those who die at sea."*

Menelaus:

A clever ruse! Then I will certainly
Sail with you and assist you, too, to store
The offerings on board the ship.

Helen:

What's more,
You must be there at hand with all the men
Who have survived the wreck.

Menelaus:

Be certain, then, 1040
That if the ship's at anchor, they'll be there,
Standing beside me, and each man must bear
A sword.

Helen:

You must direct it all. O may
We have fair winds to speed us on our way
On a fast ship.

Menelaus:

We will. The gods will bring
An end to all my tragic suffering.
And yet from whom will you say that you knew

That I was dead?

Helen:

From you. Allege that you
Alone escaped the shipwreck and descried
The younger son of Atreus as he died. 1050

Menelaus:

And certainly these rags of mine will show
There was a wreck.

Helen:

They're opportune, although
They then seemed less so. Thus may that distress
Be metamorphosed into happiness.

Menelaus:

Should I go with you or sit quietly
Beside the tomb?

Helen:

Stay here, because if he
Says something harsh to you, your own steel blade
And this tomb will be quite enough to shade
You from his words. I'll go inside and there
I'll cut off all my tresses and I'll tear 1060
My cheeks with my sharp nails, and I will don
A dark robe, for this strife I've taken on
Is great. My plan discovered, I must die,
But if I am victorious, then I
Will sail to Sparta, saving you as well.
O Lady Hera, who with Lord Zeus dwell,
Save these two wretches from their misery
As we now stretch our arms out in our plea

To your star-spangled mansion. And I pray,
Cypris, to you as well, who took away 1070

The prize of beauty which came at the cost
Of my own marriage. May I not be lost
Completely! For you have maltreated me
Before already with great savagery
By giving up my counterfeit, although
Not me myself, to foreigners. And so
Either in my own country let me die
If you desire to kill me. Tell me why
You're so insatiable in harming me
With arts of love, deceit and treachery 1080
And visit bloody spells on families.
If you were moderate, you'd sweetly please
All men, I'll not deny.

Chorus:

Sweet nightingale,
Warbling in your leafy haunts, all hail!
Let your fawn throat assist my elegy
As I sing of poor Helen's misery
And of the Trojan women's tearful fate
Beneath Greek spears. At an alarming rate
Paris brought Helen, his unhappy bride,
From Sparta, with Queen Cypris as his guide. 1090
Many Achaeans breathed their last below
The spears and stones in Troy, thus doomed to go
To Hades, and their wives in lamentation
Cut off their hair, lost in their desolation.
In just one ship one man set up a flame

Upon Euboea, killing, as they came,
So many Grecian warriors, who died
On Kephareus's rocks, close by the tide
Of the Aegean. Such was the deceit
That he inflicted on the Grecian fleet. 1100
Malea's peaks sheltered them not at all
As they were tossed about beneath the squall,
While Menelaus sped across the seas,
Bearing a prize from the hostilities
In Troy, far from his home – in fact, no prize
At all, for she was strife that would arise
Among the Greeks, a holy phantom sent
By Hera. What do we believe is meant
By god? What is not god? What's in between?
What mortal says he's found it once he's been 1110
Searching the farthest limit, where he sees,
Leaping hither and yon, the vagaries
Of holy matters? Helen, we proclaim
You throughout Hellas for your very name:
Daughter of winged Zeus, begotten through
The womb of Leda, it is said that you
Betrayed, were faithless, godless and without
A thought for law. I don't know if men doubt
The truth of this, although I am aware
That the gods' words are true. You men who dare 1120
To win through war a virtuous reputation
And put an end to mortal tribulation
Are fools, for if bloodshed is to decide
Such things, then strife will evermore abide

With men. So many warriors lie dead
In Priam's land, when dialogue instead
Could have prevailed. But now they are below
In Hades' keeping, piling woe on woe:
The fires on the walls were to produce
Destruction like the thunderbolt of Zeus. 1130

Theoklymenos:

Father, I laid you in the passageway
So that I could address you every day.
You servants, take the hounds and nets inside.
There are so many times I've had to chide
Myself, for don't we execute all men
Of evil? Now I've been informed again
A Greek has openly come to this land,
Unseen. A spy? Or maybe he has planned
To hunt for Helen. He will surely die
If only I can catch him. Ah, but I 1140

Find all in ruins. For the progeny
Of Tyndareus has left the tomb, and she
Has been transported from the land. Hey, you,
You servants, free the horses and undo
The bars and fetch my chariot that I may
Not let the wife I crave be borne away.
But wait! [enter Helen] I see her here – she has not fled.
[to Helen] Why this black robe? Why is your noble head
Shorn of its tresses? And why do you weep?
Are you in mourning? Do you in your sleep 1150
Have nightmares? Did you hear somebody say
Something inside the house that brought dismay

To you?

Helen:

My lord – for now I call you thus –

I am destroyed by these calamitous
Events.

Theoclymenos:

But what calamity has occurred?

Helen:

My husband's dead. There – I have said the word!

Theoclymenos:

That does not bring me happiness, although
I'll profit by it. But how do you know?
Did Theonoë tell you?

Helen:

It was she

And someone who was near to him when he 1160
Perished.

Theoclymenos:

Has someone come to make it clear
To me?

Helen:

Oh, yes indeed, someone came here.
I wish the man in Hell!

Theoclymenos:

Then who and where
Is he? I want the truth.

Helen:

He's over there,
Crouched by the tomb.

Theoclymenos:

How poorly is he dressed!

Helen:

Indeed he is, and I am most distressed

To think my husband looks the same as he.

Theoclymenos:

What is this fellow's nationality?

Where does he come from?

Helen:

He's a Greek, one who

Sailed with my husband.

Theoclymenos:

How did he tell you 1170

Your Menelaus died?

Helen:

A piteous death –

He drowned.

Theoclymenos:

Where did he take his final breath?

Helen:

Near where on Libya's rocks he had been tossed.

Theoclymenos:

Yet how is it that this man has not lost

His life as well as he?

Helen:

A common man

Is sometimes blessed with more good fortune than

His better.

Theoclymenos:

But the wreck he left behind -

-

Where did he leave it?

Helen:

Where ruin might find

The man – not Menelaus.

Theoclymenos:

He is dead,

But what ship brought him here?

Helen:

The fellow said 1180

Some sailors saved him from the angry sea.

Theoclymenos:

But tell me, where is that accursed banshee

Sent in your place to Troy.

Helen:

Well, if you mean

The image of a cloud, it since has been

Cast in the air.

Theoclymenos:

O Troy, you died in vain.

I too have shared adversity and pain

With Priam's race! Is he unburied still?

Helen:

He is. Oh, how I grieve for all the ill

I've borne!

Theoclymenos:

Is that why you have shorn away

Your fair locks?

Helen:

Yes, for loved ones always stay 1190

Inside one's heart.

Theoclymenos:

It's right that you should grieve –

Helen:

And yet it's possible, I might conceive,

Your sister's wrong.

Theoclymenos:

Oh, no! Will you stay here

And live beside the tomb?

Helen:

Why do you jeer

At me? Leave him alone!

Theoclymenos:

But it is plain

You're faithful to your husband and maintain

A distance from me.

Helen:

No more – let us be

Wed to each other now.

Theoclymenos:

Ah, finally!

But I commend you for the fact that you

Have tarried.

Helen:

Do you know what you must do? 1200

Let us forget the past.

Theoclymenos:

What stipulation

Shall we employ? For one consideration

Deserves another.

Helen:

So let harmony

Exist between us – reconcile with me.

Theoclymenos:

I'll end our quarrel – let it fly away.

Helen:

Now, since you are a friend indeed, I pray –

Theoclymenos:

For what?

Helen:

My husband's burial.

Theoclymenos:

But where

Is there a tomb for someone who's not there?

Will you inter a shadow, then, instead?

Helen:

It is the Grecian custom for the dead 1210

Who died at sea –

Theoclymenos:

To do what? For the race

Of Pelops is adept in such a case

As that.

Helen:

To carry out the ceremony

With robes.

Theoclymenos:

Prepare the tomb, then, as you see

Fit.

Helen:

That is not the way in Greece.

Theoclymenos:

How, though?

For all the Grecian customs I don't know.

Helen:

We take the choice effects of him who's died

Back out to sea.

Theoclymenos:

And what shall I provide

For the dead man?

Helen:

This man knows, but not I –

For I was fortunate in days gone by 1220

And don't know of such things.

Theoclymenos [to Menelaus]:

Stranger, you've brought

Good news to me.

Menelaus:

For him and me, though, nought

Of good is here.

Theoclymenos:

For those who've died at sea

What's the procedure here?

Menelaus:

Accordingly,

Depending on their wealth.

Theoclymenos:

For her sake say

What you require.

Menelaus:

Well, firstly you must pay

An offering of blood to him who's died.

Theoclymenos:

What kind of blood? Explain, and I'll abide

By that.

Menelaus:

Decide yourself – that will suffice.

Theoclymenos:

Barbarians will mainly sacrifice

1230

A horse or bull.

Menelaus:

Whatever it is, take care

That it is generous.

Theoclymenos:

I have my share

Of rich beasts.

Menelaus:

Then a decked-out couch must be

Borne in procession.

Theoclymenos:

You can count on me.

What else?

Menelaus:

Bronze arms, for he was gratified

By war.

Theoclymenos:

And these things, too, we will provide,
For they are worthy of Pelops's race.

Menelaus:

Then all the lovely flowers on the face
Of Earth.

Theoclymenos:

How will they reach the sea from land?

Menelaus:

Some oarsmen with a ship must be on hand. 1240

Theoclymenos:

How far out will she go?

Menelaus:

That one may see
The foam she trails only with difficulty.

Theoclymenos:

Why do you keep that custom in your land?

Menelaus:

That filth is not washed back onto the strand.

Theoclymenos:

There'll be a safe Phoenician ship for you.

Menelaus:

Well done, for that will please Menelaus, too.

Theoclymenos:

Could you not do it all without his spouse?

Menelaus:

The task belongs to those of his own house –
His mother, wife and children.

Theoclymenos:

I heard you

Declare that she must bury him.

Menelaus:

That's true, 1250

In order that, for piety's sake, the dead
Are not robbed of the due they're owed.

Theoclymenos:

You've said

Enough – for it is favourable to me
That I should stimulate that piety
In my new wife. And therefore go inside
The house. View the effects and then decide
Which ones you want. And I do not intend
To leave you empty-handed when I send
You on your way – you've shown a kindly heart
To her and, for your good news, when we part 1260
I'll give you clothes replacing what you wear –
Those rags – and food. I see how ill you fare
And trust you'll now reach home successfully.
[to Helen] And you, poor wretch, don't sorrow hopelessly –
Your spouse is dead, unable to return
To life.

Menelaus:

Young woman, you will have to learn
To be content, your husband at your side,
And put out of your mind the one who died.
If I reach home and safety, I will see
That you will lose your former infamy, 1270
If you prove a good wife.

Helen:

That will I do:

My husband won't find fault with me: and you
Will be at hand to know I will indeed. [to Menelaus]
Poor man, go in! Change clothes and bathe! A deed
Of charity I'll show immediately
To you. For you'll perform the ceremony
More piously if I reward you well.

Chorus:

Some time ago across the wooded dell
And streams and thundering waves Demeter ran,
Seeking her stolen child, whose name no man 1280
May speak. The castanets made a shrill sound
As, swift as whirlwinds, in a rapid bound
They followed the goddess as on she flew
Upon her chariot, pulled on by two
Wild beasts. Her daughter had been snatched away
Out of the maiden chorus. In array
Of armour stood Athena with her spear,
And Artemis with her bow, and, with a clear
Prospect from Heaven, Zeus originated
A different fate. The goddess terminated 1290
Her anxious, agonizing wandering
In search of her lost daughter, traversing
The snow-capped summit of Mt. Ida where
The many nymphs cavort; in sorrow there
She dropped down in the rocky woods where snow
Lay deep; since she refused to let crops grow,
She killed our race. And she would not provide

Rich tendrils for the herds and far and wide
Our towns were dying. All our shrines were bare
Of sacrifices, and she took great care 1300
To halt our fountains in retaliation
For her lost child. She made a termination
Of feasts for gods and men. Appeasingly
Zeus said, as she was fuming gloomily,
“Graces, cry out and from her angry heart
Remove the grief. You Muses, too, take part
With song and dance.” Then Cypris took the sound
Of rumbling bronze and forced it to resound,
Accompanying the drum. Then the goddess
Smiled and received the flute with happiness 1310
At its loud, deep-toned note. [to Helen] Young lady, you
Have offered sacrifices neither true
Nor holy to the gods, awakening
Demeter’s anger by not honouring
Her sacrifices. Mighty is the sway
Of fawn-skin robes in their dappled array,
And the green ivy that is tied around
The sacred thyrsus and the whirling sound
Of the bull-roarer circling in the air
And, as the Bacchants dance, their streaming hair.1320
You gloried only in your pulchritude,
As all night those festivals continued. [enter Helen]
Helen:
All’s well within: the child of Proteus,
Who in our trickery is helping us,
Said nothing to her brother at all about

My husband's coming here – "Without a doubt,"
She said when asked about him, "he is dead
And buried." Now the armour that I'd said
Was to be dropped at sea my husband snatched
And then into the shield-strap he attached 1330
His noble arm, a spear in his right hand,
As though for Menelaus he had planned
His funeral rites. He's well-armed just in case
A thousand foreigners he'll have to face
Upon the ship. I gave him robes to take
The place of those tatters he wore in the wake
Of his shipwreck and bathed him finally.
But now I must be silent, for I see
The man who thinks he soon will be my spouse –
How wrong he is! - approaching from the house. 1340
Be quiet, too, I pray, so that we may
Escape and rescue you as well some day. [enter Theoclymenos and Menelaus]

Theoclymenos:

Advance in order, as the stranger said,
Servants, with those possessions of the dead!
But, Helen, you, if you agree with me,
Stay here since to the dead man you will be
As useful here as there. I fear you'll throw
Yourself into the waves in sudden woe
For your lost husband.

Helen:

Ah, but I must be
Faithful in honouring his memory. 1350
I'd even die with Menelaus, though

How would he thank me if I acted so?
So give me your permission – let me pay
My own respects to him in person. May
The gods grant you the things I wish for you
For your assistance, and this stranger too.
I'll be a loyal wife when we are wed
Because of your fine service to my dead
Husband. Your deed will bring you much avail.
Now let may have a ship that we may sail 1360
And take these gifts and thank you thoroughly.

Theoclymenos [to a servant]:

You, go get them a ship immediately –
Sidonian, fifty-oared, and men to row.

Helen:

He who conducts the rites – will he also
Command the ship?

Theoclymenos:

He will, most certainly.

The sailors must obey him.

Helen:

Say for me

The order once more so they understand
Clearly.

Theoclymenos:

I repeat, then, my command –
A third time, too, if you desire it.

Helen:

From it, and my plans, may you benefit. 1370

Theoclymenos:

Don't mar your cheeks with tears.

Helen:

My thankfulness

You'll hear today.

Theoclymenos:

There is but nothingness

Among the dead.

Helen:

But whether we could see

My spouse on earth or if eternally

He lies below, I still will say the same.

Theoclymenos:

And as a husband you will find no blame

In me, as with your former spouse.

Helen:

I know.

I only need good luck.

Theoclymenos:

If you but show

Me kindness, you shall have it.

Helen:

You don't need

To teach me kindness to my friends indeed. 1380

Theoclymenos:

Shall I aid you by sending everything

With you?

Helen:

No – do not be an underling,

My lord.

Theoclymenos:

Come, then: it is no care to me

How things are done by the posterity

Of Pelops. Your spouse did not pass away

Here - thus my house is pure. Let someone say

To my top men, therefore, that they should bring

The wedding-trappings there. The earth must ring

With song and dance that all may envy me.

Now, stranger, go and make delivery 1390

Of these gifts for her previous spouse, then cast

Them into the wide sea, returning fast

To see the wedding of my queen and me.

You'll be my banquet-guest: subsequently

You may return to your own home or stay,

Enjoying life right here.

Menelaus:

Dear Lord Zeus! They

Call you All-Wise. Relieve our misery

As up this rocky hill our troubles we

Now haul. With but your fingertip we may

Achieve our long-lost goal. Too much dismay 1400

We've borne. I've called on you gods with both woe

And joy many times, but please don't let me go

Through life in sorrow, but let me progress

In a straight course. If you would only bless

Me with one favour, I would be content

Hereafter.

Chorus:

Hail, Phoenician vessel, sent

From Sidon, mother of the oar-blades she
Who leads the dancing dolphins on the sea
When there's no breeze and Ocean's grey-green child
Gives out these words in accents calm and mild: 1410
"Spread out your sails! Each sailor with his oar,
Speed Helen on her way to that fine shore
Where Perseus once lived." Perhaps you'll find there
Leucippus' daughters by the stream or where
Pallas's temple stands, when finally
You join the dance or night-long revelry
Of Hyacinthus – him whom Phoebus slew
With a discus which in rivalry he threw
To win the prize. Then after that contest
Zeus's son ordered that that day be blest 1420
In Spartan land with sacrifices. You
May find the child you left behind you, too –
Unwed Hermione. Would we could fly
Like Libyan birds that gather in the sky,
Leaving the winter rain and following
Their veteran leader's chirping as they wing
Above the arid crops! Wingèd allies
Of all the scudding clouds up in the skies,
Go on beneath the Pleiades in flight
Until you reach Orion of the night, 1430
And by Eurotas say the progeny
Of Atreus has sacked Troy successfully.
Now may you hither come, Tyndaridae,
Over your horses' path across the sky,
Beneath the whirling, bright stars! You who dwell

In Heaven, come athwart the grey-green swell,
Skimming the dark grey surging of the sea!
Send breezes! Cast away the infamy
Of Helen's marriage and her punishment
From Ida's contest! But she never went 1440
To Troy or saw the towers of Ilium. [enter Messenger]

Messenger:

You've heard so much bad news, and yet I've come
With more.

Theoclymenos:

What is it, then?

Messenger:

Attempt to woo

Another woman – this you'll have to do
For Helen's left the country.

Theoclymenos:

Borne away

On wings up in the sky? Or does she stay
On earth?

Messenger:

Menelaus took her. It was he
Who told you of his own fatality.

Theoclymenos:

What's that?? What ship has borne her from the land?

Messenger:

The one they had received at your command. 1450

The sailors went with them, in brief to tell

My news.

Theoclymenos:

To think that one man could excel
Over so many! How? I need to know.

Messenger:

When Helen left the royal house to go
Down to the seashore, treading delicately,
She mourned her husband very cleverly.
Once there, we then began to organize
The ship for her first voyage with her size
Of fifty oars with a full complement
Of crew to ply them all. Then we were sent 1460
To several tasks in sequence, one to set
The mast in place, another one to get
The oars prepared. And then additionally
We lowered the rudders by the bars. While we
Did this, the men of Hellas who had been
Menelaus' fellow-passengers were seen
To eye us carefully. Near us they drew,
Wearing the rags that shipwrecked men must do,
With rough good looks. Menelaus craftily
Spoke to them of his spurious misery: 1470
"Unhappy men, how have you made it here?
You're from the wreck of the Greek ship, I fear.
You're here to help inter the progeny
Of Atreus, are you? For a ceremony
Without a grave this lady plans." Then they
Wept feignedly before making their way
Down to the vessel so that they might bring
The objects as a spurious offering
For Menelaus. We had doubts and thought

That many extra passengers were brought 1480
Aboard, but we styed mum, because of your
Command, but everything's full of furore
Because you told the foreigner to be
The captain of the ship. We easily
Boarded the other victims, because they
Weren't heavy, but the bull would not obey
Our urging it, but bellowed as it reared
Its back and rolled its eyes about and peered
Along its horns. We dared not touch it. So
Lord Menelaus yelled fortissimo, 1490
"Sackers of Troy, in the Achaean way
Pick up the bull and toss it straightaway
Into the prow, as offering to the dead."
And then they did exactly as he'd said.
Menelaus stroked the horse on brow and neck,
Thus coaxing it to calmly go on deck.
And when the task of loading was complete,
Fair Helen climbed aboard and took her seat
Among the benches, her spouse by her side,
Who those within the palace thought had died.
The oarsmen took their places, too, although,
As they sat down, they kept their swords below 1500
Their cloaks. Across the ship we then could hear
The boatswain's voice. Then, neither far nor near,
The boatswain asked the stranger, "Sir should we
Sail further? For the vessel's mastery
Is yours," and he said, "No", in his right hand
A sword. He stepped onto the prow to stand

Above the bull; of a dead man he made
No mention, cut its throat across and prayed:
“Poseidon, Nereus’ daughters too, I pray,
Convey my wife and me safely away 1510
To Nauplion.” And then into the sea
There fell a stream of blood. An augury
Auspicious for him. Just then someone made
The observation, “We have been betrayed!
Let us sail back! Let’s turn the ship about!”
The son of Atreus, though, let out a shout:
“My friends, the pick of Hellas, why delay
To gather up your weaponry and slay
These foreigners and cast them in the sea?”
The boatswain, though, yelled out contrarily, 1520
“Take planks, break up the benches, tear away
The oars out of their locks, you men, and slay
These foreigners.” Then they all leapt upright,
Some with oar-blades, others with swords, held tight.
The ship ran red and Helen from the stern
Urged them: “Where is your Trojan fame? Now earn
It once again!” Many men fell, some rose,
But they who didn’t? You could see that those
Were dead. Armed, Menelaus eagerly
Kept a look-out and rushed wherever he 1530
Considered where his men were struggling.
Then we dived off as he was emptying
The ship of oarsmen’s benches. Then he told
The navigator of the ship to hold
A direct course for Greece. So then the mast
They set up, and the winds’ favouring blast

Sped them upon their way. Those two are gone,
But I escaped by climbing down upon
The anchor to the sea below. And when
I was near dead, one of some fishermen 1540
Saved me and brought me here that I might bring
This news. It is the most expedient thing
To have, among all of humanity,
A very circumspect uncertainty.

Chorus:

My lord, it's quite beyond my expectation
That he'd be here without our realization.

Theoclymenos:

I've been deceived by female trickery.
My bride has run away from me. If we
Had chased them, I'd have tried to apprehend
Them both immediately: now I intend 1550
To take revenge upon Theonoë
Who saw him here and yet did not tell me.
Her oracles no longer will betray
Another man. [enter a servant]

Servant:

Why do you rush away,

Lord? Murder?

Theoclymenos:

Justice calls. Out of my way!

Servant:

I won't. I won't let go your mantle. Stay!
You plan a dreadful deed.

Theoclymenos:

What? Mastery

Over your master, slave?

Servant:

Yes, certainly,

For I see sense.

Theoclymenos:

No, I do not think so.

Just let me –

Servant:

No, I will not let you go.

1560

Theoclymenos:

I'll kill my sister.

Servant:

For her piety??

Theoclymenos:

She has betrayed me.

Servant:

But most righteously.

Theoclymenos:

To someone else she gave away my bride.

Servant:

Ah, yes, but someone able to provide

A greater right.

Theoclymenos:

Who else has rights?

Servant:

The man

Her father gave her to.

Theoclymenos:

But Fortune's plan

Gave her to me.

Servant:

And yet necessity

Took her away.

Theoclymenos:

I'll not let you judge me.

Servant:

I'm wiser.

Theoclymenos:

You're my subject, then, are you?

Servant:

Oh, certainly I am – subject to do 1570

What's right.

Theoclymenos:

Is that a death wish?

Servant:

Slaughter me,

For you won't kill your sister, certainly,

While I'm alive. It is most glorious

To die for those who have command of us. [enter the Dioscuri]

Dioscuri:

Restrain your anger, o king of this land,

For it's unethical. Hear our command!

We're Leda's progeny – Helen as well,

Who fled your home for somewhere else to dwell.

You're angry at a marriage not designed

For you. By Theonoë you're not maligned. 1580

Her father and the gods she has agreed

To venerate. For it has been decreed

That she should live here temporarily,

No longer, because Troy was utterly

Destroyed. Her name is with the gods, and now
She has to leave here to renew her vow
To Menelaus. Therefore stay your hand
From Theonoë, and understand
She's wise in this affair. Long ago we'd
Have taken matters in our hands and freed 1590
Our sister, sure of the divinity
Zeus granted us, but our authority
Was less than Fate and the gods who have mandated
That things should happen as they have been fated.
Sister, sail with your spouse, for we'll provide
A favourable breeze as on we ride
And send you home. And when the final bend
Of life you reach, your journey at its end,
You will be called a goddess, and you'll share
Libations with us, and our friends will bear
Your gifts – and thus shall Zeus's will be done,
And where your course's boundary the son
Of Maia set up in the air, where he
Took you from Sparta so you would not be
Paris's wife – this island stretched along
The Attic coast – shall then be named among
All mortals for you. For the nomad man
You married all the gods have formed a plan
That he'll dwell in the islands of the blest:
The gods don't hate the well-born, but the rest 1610
Of mortals suffer more.

Theoclymenos:

I now will end

My quarrel with your sister nor intend

To kill my own. So if the gods believe
That it is right, allow Helen to leave.
For she is self-controlled, the very best,
And therefore for her noble mind be blest,
For she possesses that great quality
That in most women is a rarity.

Chorus:

Ah, many are the forms of divinity:
Each brings about quite unexpectedly 1620
So many things, and many things also
Have been expected to occur, although
They didn't. For what's hoped for there's a way
The gods can find, as happened here today.

