

IPHIGENEIA IN AULIS

Agamemnon:

Thestius' daughter Leda's progeny
Were Clytaemnestra, who was wed to me,
Phoebe and Helen whom the choice young men
Of Greece arrived to woo, but each one then
Made dreadful threats against his rival's life
If he failed to achieve her as his wife.
Her father Tyndareus met with distress
About the best way to enjoy success –
To offer her or not. He thought maybe
The suitors all should pledge a guarantee, 10
Join hands and offer a burnt offering
And pour libations, thereby fastening
Themselves to honour: thus they would be bound
To aid the man who wins her if she's found
By someone else who then takes her away,
Robbing her husband, and in armed array
Destroy the city whether he may be
Greek or barbarian. The guarantee
Once pledged, whereby the old man had beguiled
Them very cleverly, he let his child 20
Decide among those eager men the one
To whom Love's breezes would cause her to run.
That man was Menelaus – would that she
Had never taken him! Subsequently,
From the land of Phrygia to Sparta came
The man who, as it goes in Argive fame,

Was judge of the goddesses' pulchritude,
 His robes ablaze with gold, gorgeously hued,
 Decked out indeed in foreign delicacy;
 Once he knew Menelaus absent, he 30
 Bore her away in mutual delight
 Up to his steading on Mt. Ida's height.
 Goaded to frenzy, Menelaus flew
 Throughout Hellas, invoking what was due
 To the old oath of Tyndareus, and he
 Called for reprisal of his injury.
 Then, brandishing their spears, the Grecian host,
 Dressed all in armour, sailed the Aulis coast
 Along its narrow straits, with cavalry
 And countless chariots, and they chose me 40
 To lead them, for I was the wronged man's brother –
 Would that distinction had gone to another!
 But we remained in Aulis, weatherbound.
 Perplexed, we questioned Calchas and we found,
 Out of the prophet's very mouth, just this –
 That we should sacrifice to Artemis
 My child Iphigeneia (the goddess
 Dwells in this land) – thus we'd achieve success
 By razing Troy. Then to Talthylus,
 When I heard that, I loudly shouted thus: 50
 "Disband the entire army", for my daughter
 I could not ever bring myself to slaughter.
 My brother, though, with every reason he
 Could think of, finally persuaded me
 To face that dreadful deed, and so I penned

A letter to my wife that she should send
To me our daughter, making out that she
Would wed Achilles, whose nobility
I magnified: and he refused, I said,
To sail to Troy with us unless he'd wed 50

A bride of our bloodline. This was the spur
I offered to my wife, inuring her
To this sham marriage. That this wasn't true
Of all the army only four men knew –
Calchas, Odysseus, Menelaus and me.
However, what I wrote improperly
I in this message countermand aright,
Which you, old man, beneath the shade of night
Saw me write and reseal. Up now, away

To Argos with it, and I will relay 70
To you what I have written here within,
For you are loyal to my wife and kin.
Come here, old man.

Old Man:

I come. What news, o king?

Agamemnon:

Will you not hurry?

Old Man:

I am hurrying.

I sleep but little – old age watches me
Keenly.

Agamemnon:

That shooting star – what can it be?

Old Man:

It's Sirius, moving near the Pleiades'

Seven-fold track.

Agamemnon:

The birds are still, the seas

Are calm, the winds are hushed and peacefulness

Over Euripus holds command.

Old Man:

Ah yes, 80

But why, then, do you wander restlessly

Outside your tent? All is serenity

In Aulis, and the ramparts are yet bare

Of watchmen. Let's go in.

Agamemnon:

Would I could share

Your sheltered life, unknown and wholly free

Of status, yet I feel no jealousy

Of those in office.

Old Man:

Yet it's there we place

Our whole existence.

Agamemnon:

There, though, we must face

Danger. Honour is sweet but brings us woe

When near. At one time, if gods' claims should go 90

Unsatisfied, they bring us miseries:

At other times, the peevish fantasies

Of men destroy our life.

Old Man:

Such thoughts professed

By one who is a ruler bring unrest
To me. All good things in this world aren't due
To you – that's not why you were born: no, you
Must feel delight and sorrow equally –
You're mortal! That is what the gods decree
Despite your hopes. Once you have spread your light
Abroad, the letter in your hands you write, 100
Erase the words, seal, but then opening
The scroll again and then surrendering
Yourself to tears, you fling it down and leave
Nothing undone that makes a man conceive
That you're insane. My king, what troubles you?
Tell me, for he who hears your tale is true
And loyal, for Tyndareus once sent me
As your part- dowry: thus with constancy
I'll deck the bride out.

Agamemnon:

 This is what I penned:

“Daughter of Leda, here to you I send
Another letter –”

Old Man:

 Say on, make it clear
That I may speak what you have written here
With true accord.

Agamemnon:

 “I'm telling you to stay
Your hand and not to send your child away
To many-bayed Euboea and the sound
Of waveless Aulis. For there will be found

Another time to celebrate when she
Is wed."

Old Man:

How will Achilles, after he
Is cheated of your daughter's hand, restrain
His wrath against you and your queen? Be plain, 120
For there's a danger here.

Agamemnon:

Achilles, though,
Lends but his name in this -he does not now
About the marriage or my strategy
Whereby I claimed I'll wed my progeny
To him.

Old Man:

A dreadful scheme to wed the son
Of a goddess will form a union
With your own daughter, though you'll bring her here
As sacrifice for Greece.

Agamemnon:

Alas, I fear
I am distraught. Surrender not a thing
To old age but leave quickly.

Old Man:

Yes, my king, 130
I will.

Agamemnon:

By woodland fountains don't delay
Or be beguiled by sleep.

Old Man:

I'm on my way.

Agamemnon:

At every crossroads cast your eyes around
Lest any wagon passes you that's bound
For the ships with Iphigeneia.

Old Man:

That I'll do.

Agamemnon:

Start from the bolted gates and then, if you
Should meet the escort, turn it back, then drive
At breakneck speed until you my arrive
Where dwell the Cyclopes.

Old Man:

How shall I be

Credited by your wife and progeny? 140

Agamemnon:

Preserve the ablet's seal. Away! Away!
The dawn grows grey and lights the lamp of day
And Sun's four horses' fire. Succour me
I my distress. [exit old man] There's no prosperity
Forever for a man, for there's no-one
Who's ever blithe until his day is done.

Vhorus:

I've come to sandy Aulis, travelling
Euripus's narrow straits, abandoning
My city of Colchis, the tributary
Of far-famed Arethusa near the sea, 150
So that the Grecian troops I might behold
And ships rowed by our heroes, for we're told

By our own husbands that our noble king
And fair-haired Menelaus are leading
Our thousand ships to Troy, for it's their aim
To take back Helen, for that herdsman came,
That Paris, and seduced her from the banks
Of green Eurotas, she whom he gained thanks
To Aphrodite, who at the lush spring
Received the prize after outrivalling

160

Hera and Pallas. Then I sped my course
Across the grove of Artemis, the source
Of many offerings. With modesty
My cheek was red through eagerness to see
The soldiers' camp, the tents, the steeds. I spied
Two men in council sitting side by side –
Oileus' son Ajax and Ajax the son
Of Telamon - both of these two had done
The most illustrious service for the men
Of Salamis; Protesilaus then

170

And Palamedes, too, the progeny
Of Nauplius, whom Poseidon, Lord of the Sea,
Fathered, I saw at checkers; Diomedes, too,
I saw while he was training as he threw
The discus; likewise that phenomenon
To all mankind I noticed – Ares' son,
Meriones, standing by him. Odysseus
From lofty Ithaca I saw; Nireus,
The fairest Greek, I saw; then Peleus's son,
The swift Achilles (for that man can run
Much faster than the wind), whom Thetis bore

And Chiron trained I saw upon the shore
 Racing full-armoured, straining hard to beat
 A four-horse team upon his flashing feet;
 Eumelus, too, I saw, the charioteer,
 Pheres' grandson, as he let out a cheer,
 Goaded the lovely steeds as on they flew,
 Their bits formed of chased gold: the centre two,
 That bore the yoke, were piebald; while they faced
 The turning-post before them as they raced, 190
 The horses on each side of them possessed
 Mottled fetlocks. Close by, keeping abreast
 Of the rail around the axle-box, the son
 Of Peleus still sustained his speedy run,
 Though armed. Next I sought out the countless fleet,
 A wonder to behold – it gave me sweet
 Delight as with my girlish eyes I gazed.
 At the brave Myrmidons I was amazed –
 Full fifty swift cruisers on their left wing
 They held, while at the stern stood twinkling 200
 Gold Nereids Achilles designated
 As their ensign. Near them, Argive ships waited
 In equal numbers. All of them were led
 By Mecisteus's son, who had been bred
 By his grandfather Talaus, along
 With Sthenelus, Capaneus' son; this throng
 Was joined by sixty Attican coursers, led
 By Theseus' son and having at their head
 A wingèd chariot with the goddess
 Pallas, drawn by her horses which possess

Uncloven hooves, a lucky thing to see
For mariners. And there an argosy
Of fifty Boeotian ships I saw decked out
With ensigns – at the stern of each, about
Its beak, was Cadmus holding in his hand
A golden snake, and he who had command
Of them was earth-born Leitus. Furthermore,
Phocian ships lay moored upon the shore.
From Locris Oileus' son had come as well,
Leaving illustrious Thronium's citadel, 220
With a like number. Atreus' son had sent
From Mycenae a well-manned complement
Of five-score galleys under joint command
With Adrastus, his comrade, to demand,
On the behalf of Greece, vengeance on her
Who'd fled her home to wed a foreigner.
The king of Pylos, Nestor's prows displayed
His neighbour Alpheus as an ensign, made
Four-footed like a bull. Moreover, there
Were twelve Aenianian ships under the care 230
Of King Gouneus. The lords of Elis, too,
Were there, called the Epeians by those who
Knew them. Eurytus was the lord of these,
Who likewise led the subjects of Meges,
The son of Phyeus, who had left behind
The Echinades, where sailors can't find
A landing: all these were the Taphian men
Of war with their white oar-blades. Finally then,
Ajax of Salamis joined his right wing

To the left of those close by, encircling 240

Them with his twelve ships which were easily
Controlled; I heard, then saw their crews. So he
Who tries with his barbaric ships to cope
With him will entertain but little hope
Of safe return. Such was the armament
Of ships I saw, but of the complement
Of soldiers I, back home, had come to know
Some things, and though it was some time ago
I can recall them.

Old Man:

[as Menelaus grabs a letter from him] Lord, you have no right

To do a thing like that.

Menelaus:

Out of my sight! 250

You're taking much too far your loyalty
To Agamemnon.

Old Man:

You're reproaching me

With what is to my credit.

Menelaus:

You shall feel

Regretfulness if you should try to deal
In things that don't concern you.

Old Man:

Wrongfully

You opened it, for it was given me
To carry.

Menelaus:

And you're wrong to bring such woe
To all the Grecian population.

Old Man:

Go,
Discuss this point with others. Give it me.

Menelaus:

I won't let go.

Old Man:

And I will equally 260
Hold tightly to it.

Menelaus:

Why then, I will break
Your head.

Old Man:

To die, though, for my master's sake
Would be a noble thing.

Menelaus:

Give it to me –
You're too prolix for one in slavery.

Old Man:

He wrongs me, lord, for he has snatched away
Your letter from my grasp and will not pay
Heed to the law.

Agamemnon:

What is this altercation
Out here?

Menelaus:

My story has more implication
Than his.

Agamemnon:

Why drag him hither forcibly?

What quarrel have you with him?

Menelaus:

Look at me, 270

Straight in my face.

Agamemnon:

What? Should I, then, in fear

Keep my eyes closed?

Menelaus:

You see this letter here,

The bearer of great shame?

Agamemnon:

I do. Let go

Of it and give the scroll to me.

Menelaus:

Oh no,

Not till I've shown the contents to the men

Of the Greek army.

Agamemnon:

Have you broken, then,

The seal and therefore know what was taboo?

Menelaus:

Oh yes, I did, and it will injure you

That I now know your secret trickery.

Agamemnon:

Where did you get it? Such ignominy! 280

Menelaus:

I waited for your daughter.

Agamemnon:

Ah, to spy

On me! How shameful!

Menelaus:

By my wish was I

Spurred on. I'm not your slave.

Agamemnon:

Such infamy!

May I not rule my house?

Menelaus:

No – presently

And in the past and in the future, too,

You think base thoughts.

Agamemnon:

On evil matters you

Make such refinements. Ah, such cleverness

In speaking smacks so much of loathsomeness.

Menelaus:

A fickle mind, though, makes you loathsome, too.

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Untrue to friends. I'm eager to test you,

But do not in your anger turn your face

From truth – I on my part won't strain the case.

Do you recall when you were keen to lead

The Greeks to Troy, although you tried indeed

To hide your zeal? Oh, you were humble then,

Taking the hands of all the Grecian men,

Holding the door for all who wished to go,

Having some words for each of them, although

Some men were loath, and by this strategy

You hoped to win from them their loyalty. 300

That gained, you changed your methods, for you then

Were unapproachable to all the men

Who used to be your friends, infrequently

At home. A prosperous man should never be

Prepared to change his manners, for he should

Be very loyal to his brotherhood

Of friends, since you may aid them markedly

By reason of your own prosperity.

This was my first reproof, for on the strand

I'd seen your villainy. When in this land 310

You and the army of the Greeks appeared,

You were of no account – indeed you feared

The chance dealt by the gods, for there was need

Of favourable winds that they might speed

You on to Troy. The men urged you to send

The fleet away so that we might not spend

Unfruitful hours here in Aulis. Oh,

What consternation and dismay you'd show

That you, who are commander of a fleet

A thousand strong, could not make Troy replete 320

With soldiers! You asked me to give my view

Of your predicament – "What should I do?

What strategy can I devise and where

Can I discover such a scheme?" – to spare

Yourself from losing your authority

And being stripped of the celebrity

That you have gained. When Calchas, after this,

Bade you to sacrifice to Artemis

Your daughter, you were pleased and gave consent,
And thus the Grecian fleet could then be sent 330

To Troy: now you are writing willingly
To Clytaemnestra that she should agree
To send your daughter, telling her she'd wed
Achilles. Now, though, you've been found instead
Changing your tune and have been writing her
That you will never be the murderer
Of your Iphigeneia. This same air
Heard you say these same words, and everywhere

Many have done it, too. In power, they
Work hard then in dishonour go away, 340

Now owing to a senseless citizenry,
Now rightly for their inability
To guard the state. How greatly I lament
For poor Hellas, for it was her intent
To trounce the wretched aliens, but she
Has let them all escape. What mockery!
Oh, may I never choose one to hold sway
Over his state and soldiery by way
Of courage: no, it's reason that we need,

For any man is able to succeed 350
With mere wit.

Chorus:

When two brothers disagree
And come to blows, it's terrible to see.

Agamemnon:

I'll scold you, too, not in a shameless way
But soberly, just as a brother may:

A good man is respectful. Why do you
 Have bloodshot eyes? Why this hullabaloo
 Of rage? Who wrongs you? For what do you yearn?
 You want a virtuous wife? Well, in my turn
 I can't supply one. For the one that you
 Once had you did not manage well. So do 360
 I have to pay the price for your great shame,
 I who have done no wrong? Or does my fame
 Gall you? Oh no, you wish to cast aside
 Reason and pride and hold your comely bride
 Tight in your arms. A person who is bad
 Has pleasures like himself. So am I mad
 Simply for changing plans? No, I would fain
 Think *you* are mad for wanting to regain
 The wicked wife Paris was to seduce
 (A happy gift from Heaven). To Tyndareus 390
 The silly suitors, in their zeal to wed
 The woman, swore an oath, but they were led
 By Hope, I think, and she brought it about,
 Not you through strength. So go and fight it out
 With them – they're looking forward foolishly
 To the contest – for She's a deity
 With insight, recognizing oaths when they
 Aren't pledged aright. No, I will never slay
 My children, nor will you enhance your life
 With justice for your vengeance on a wife 380
 Who's wicked, while I weep both day and night
 For doing what is contrary to right,
 Slaying my child. My answer's short and plain

She's sick, just like you, through some godly plan.

Menelaus:

Boast of your sceptre, then! Hah, you betray

Your brother. I will seek some other way, 400

Some other friends.

Messenger:

Lord Agamemnon, king,

I have arrived from Argos and I bring

Iphigeneia (for that is her name

At home). Your consort Clytaemnestra came

With us, Orestes, too, your little lad,

A sight, I'm sure, to make Your Highness glad

After so long. They have been travelling

For many days, and by the lovely spring

They're cooling their sore feet, their mounts as well,

For we have turned them loose there for a spell 410

To graze upon the field. I've come to you

To ready you for them: the army knew

About your child's arrival – speedily

The news spread, and they all came rapidly

To see her, for all fortunates delight

In world-wide fame, a gratifying sight

For everyone: "What's going on?" they say.

"Are we observing someone's wedding-day?

Or has King Agamemnon, hankering

To see his daughter, ordered men to bring 420

Her here?" From others, too, you might hear this:

"Are they devoting her to Artemis,

Aulis's queen, so that she may be wed?

What groom will lead her to the marriage-bed?"

Prepare the baskets, place the garlands round

Your heads; and let the wedding-hymn resound,

Lord Menelaus. Let the flutes ring out

Throughout the tents as dancers reel about

And stamp their feet. This is a happy day

For the young maid.

Agamemnon:

Go in. My thanks I pay. 430

The rest will all be well [exit Messenger] What misery

Am I enveloped in, what cruelty!

What shall I say? And where shall I begin?

Ye gods, such dreadful straits I've fallen in!

I've been outdone by some divinity

Who's shown himself much cleverer than me.

A humble birth provides such usefulness

Since humble folk can display their distress

And weep. To nobles, too, comes misery,

But we are governed by our dignity, 440

Slaves to our subjects. I'm ashamed to weep

But at the same time I'm ashamed to keep

From weeping at what's brought me such dismay.

Enough of this! For what am I to say

