

# Iphigenia at Aulis

**Euripides**

**TRANSLATED BY EDWARD P. COLERIDGE**

Characters in the Play:

Agamemnon

Attendant, an old man

Chorus of Women of Chalcis

Menelaus

Clytaemnestra

Iphigenia

Achilles

Messenger

(The sea-coast at Aulis. Enter Agamemnon and Attendant.)

Agamemnon Old man, come hither and stand before my dwelling.

Attendant I come; what new schemes now, king Agamemnon?

Agamemnon Thou shalt hear.

Attendant I am all eagerness. 'Tis little enough sleep old age allows me and keenly it watches o'er my eyes.

Agamemnon What can that star be, steering his course yonder?

Attendant Sirius, still shooting o'er the zenith on his way near the Pleiads' sevenfold track.

Agamemnon The birds are still at any rate and the sea is calm; hushed are the winds, and silence broods o'er this narrow firth.

Attendant Then why art thou outside thy tent, why so restless, my lord Agamemnon? All is yet quiet here in Aulis, the watch on the walls is not yet astir. Let us go in.

Agamemnon I envy thee, old man, aye, and every man who leads a life secure, unknown and unrenowned; but little I envy those in office.

Attendant And yet 'tis there we place the be-all and end-all of existence.

Agamemnon Aye, but that is where the danger comes; and ambition, sweet though it seems, brings sorrow with its near approach. At one time the unsatisfied claims of Heaven upset our life, at another the numerous peevish fancies of our subjects shatter it.

Attendant I like not these sentiments in one who is a chief. It was not to enjoy all blessings that Atreus begot thee, O Agamemnon; but thou must needs experience joy and sorrow alike, mortal as thou art. E'en though thou like it not, this is what the gods decree; but thou, after letting thy taper spread its light abroad, writest the letter which is still in thy hands and then erasest the same words again, sealing and re-opening the scroll, then flinging the tablet to the ground with floods of tears and leaving nothing undone in thy aimless behaviour to stamp thee mad. What is it troubles thee? what news is there affecting thee, my liege? Come, share with me thy story; to a loyal and trusty heart wilt thou be telling it; for Tyndareus sent me that day to form part of thy wife's dowry and to wait upon the bride with loyalty.

Agamemnon Leda, the daughter of Thestius, had three children, maidens, Phoebe, Clytaemnestra my wife, and Helen; this last it was who had for woers the foremost of the favoured sons of Hellas; but terrible threats of spilling his rival's

blood were uttered by each of them, should he fail to win the maid. Now the matter filled Tyndareus, her father, with perplexity; at length this thought occurred to him; the suitors should swear unto each other and join right hands thereon and pour libations with burnt sacrifice, binding themselves by this curse, "Whoever wins the child of Tyndareus for wife, him will we assist, in case a rival takes her from his house and goes his way, robbing her husband of his rights; and we will march against that man in armed array and raze his city to the ground, Hellene no less than barbarian."

Now when they had once pledged their word and old Tyndareus with no small cleverness had beguiled them by his shrewd device, he allowed his daughter to choose from among her suitors the one towards whom the breath of love might fondly waft her. Her choice fell on Menelaus; would she had never taken him! Anon there came to Lacedaemon from Phrygia's folk the man who, legend says, adjudged the goddesses' dispute; in robes of gorgeous hue, ablaze with gold, in true barbaric pomp; and he, finding Menelaus gone from home, carried Helen off with him to his steading on Ida, a willing paramour. Goaded to frenzy Menelaus flew through Hellas, invoking the ancient oath exacted by Tyndareus and declaring the duty of helping the injured husband. Whereat the chivalry of Hellas, brandishing their spears and donning their harness, came hither to the narrow straits of Aulis with armaments of ships and troops, with many a steed and many a car, and they chose me to captain them all for the sake of Menelaus, since I was his brother. Would that some other had gained that distinction instead of me! But after the army was gathered and come together, we still remained at Aulis weather-bound; and Calchas, the seer, bade us in our perplexity sacrifice my own begotten child Iphigenia to Artemis, whose home is in this land, declaring that if we offered her, we should sail and sack the Phrygians' capital, but if we forbore, this was not for us. When I heard this, I commanded Talthybius with loud proclamation to disband the whole host, as I could never bear to slay daughter of mine. Whereupon my brother, bringing every argument to bear, persuaded me at last to face the crime; so I wrote in a folded scroll and sent to my wife, bidding her despatch our daughter to me on the pretence of wedding Achilles, at the same time magnifying his exalted rank and saying that he refused to sail with the Achaeans, unless a bride of our lineage should go to Phthia. Yes, this was the inducement I offered my wife, inventing, as I did, a sham marriage for the maiden. Of all the Achaeans we alone know the real truth, Calchas, Odysseus, Menelaus

and myself; but that which I then decided wrongly, I now rightly countermand again in this scroll, which thou, old man, hast found me opening and resealing beneath the shade of night. Up now and away with this missive to Argos, and I will tell thee by word of mouth all that is written herein, the contents of the folded scroll, for thou art loyal to my wife and house.

Attendant Say on and make it plain, that what my tongue utters may accord with what thou hast written.

Agamemnon “Daughter of Leda, in addition to my first letter I now send thee word not to despatch thy daughter to Euboea’s embosomed wing, to the to the waveless bay of Aulis; for after all we will celebrate our child’s wedding at another time.”

Attendant And how will Achilles, cheated of his bride, curb the fury of his indignation against thee and thy wife?

Agamemnon Here also is a danger.

Attendant Tell me what thou meanest.

Agamemnon It is but his name, not himself, that Achilles is lending, knowing nothing of the marriage or of my scheming or my professed readiness to betroth my daughter to him for a husband’s embrace.

Attendant A dreadful venture thine, king Agamemnon! thou that, by promise of thy daughter’s hand to the son of the goddess, wert for bringing the maid hither to be sacrificed for the Danai.

Agamemnon Woe is me! ah woe! I am utterly distraught; bewilderment comes o’er me. Away hurry thy steps, yielding nothing to old age.

Attendant In haste I go, my liege.

Agamemnon Sit not down by woodland founts; scorn the witcheries of sleep.

Attendant Hush!

Agamemnon And when thou passest any place where roads diverge, cast thine eyes all round, taking heed that no mule-wain pass by on rolling wheels, bearing my daughter hither to the ships of the Danai, and thou see it not.

Attendant It shall be so.

Agamemnon Start then from the bolted gates, and if thou meet the escort,

start them back again, and drive at full speed to the abodes of the Cyclopes.

Attendant But tell me, how shall my message find credit with thy wife or child?

Agamemnon Preserve the seal which thou bearest on this scroll. Away! already the dawn is growing grey, lighting the lamp of day yonder and the fire of the sun's four steeds; help me in my trouble.

(Exit Attendant.)

None of mortals is prosperous or happy to the last, for none was ever born to a painless life.

(Exit Agamemnon.)

(Enter Chorus of Women of Chalcis.)

Chorus To the sandy beach of sea-coast Aulis I came after a voyage through the tides of Euripus, leaving Chalcis on its narrow firth, my city which feedeth the waters of far-famed Arethusa near the sea, that I might behold the army of the Achaeans and the ships rowed by those god-like heroes; for our husbands tell us that fair-haired Menelaus and high-born Agamemnon are leading them to Troy on a thousand ships in quest of the lady Helen, whom herdsman Paris carried off from the banks of reedy Eurotas, his guerdon from Aphrodite, when that queen of Cyprus entered beauty's lists with Hera and Pallas at the gushing fount.

Through the grove of Artemis, rich with sacrifice, I sped my course, the red blush mantling on my cheeks from maiden modesty, in my eagerness to see the soldiers' camp, the tents of the mail-clad Danai, and their gathered steeds. Two chieftains there I saw met together in council; one was Aias, son of Oileus; the other Aias, son of Telamon, crown of glory to the men of Salamis; and I saw Protesilaus and Palamedes, sprung from the son of Poseidon, sitting there amusing themselves with intricate figures at draughts; Diomedes too at his

favourite sport of hurling quoits; and Meriones, the War-god's son, a marvel to mankind, stood at his side; likewise I beheld the offspring of Laertes, who came from his island hills, and with him Nireus, handsomest of all Achaeans; Achilles next, that nimble runner, swift on his feet as the wind, whom Thetis bore and Chiron trained; him I saw upon the beach, racing in full armour along the shingle and straining every nerve to beat a team of four horses, as he sped round the track on foot; and Eumelus, the grandson of Pheres, their driver, was shouting when I saw him, goading on his goodly steeds, with their bits of chased goldwork; whereof the centre pair, that bore the yoke, had dappled coats picked out with white, while the trace-horses, on the outside, facing the turning-post in the course, were bays with spotted fetlocks. Close beside them Peleus' son leapt on his way, in all his harness, keeping abreast the rail by the axle-box.

Next I sought the countless fleet, a wonder to behold, that I might fill my girlish eyes with gazing, a sweet delight. The warlike Myrmidons from Phthia held the right wing with fifty swift cruisers, upon whose sterns, right at the ends, stood Nereid goddesses in golden effigy, the ensign of Achilles' armament. Near these were moored the Argive ships in equal numbers, o'er which Mecisteus' son, whom Taulaus his grandsire reared, and Sthenelus, son of Capaneus, were in command; next in order, Theseus' son was stationed at the head of sixty ships from Attica, having the goddess Pallas set in a winged car drawn by steeds with solid hoof, a lucky sight for mariners. Then I saw Boeotia's fleet of fifty sails decked with ensigns; these had Cadmus at the stern holding a golden dragon at the beaks of the vessels, and earth-born Leitus was their admiral. Likewise there were ships from Phocis; and from Locris came the son of Oileus with an equal contingent, leaving famed Thronium's citadel; and from Mycenae, the Cyclopes' town, Atreus' son sent a hundred well-manned galleys, his brother being with him in command, as friend with friend, that Hellas might exact on her, who had fled her home to wed a foreigner. Also I saw upon Gerenian Nestor's prows twelve from Pylos the sign of his neighbor Alpheus, four-footed like a bull. Moreover there was a squadron of Aenianian sail under King and next the lords of Elis, stationed near them, whom all the people named Epeians; and Eurytus was lord of these; likewise he led the Taphian warriors with the white oar-blades, the subjects of Meges, son of Phyleus, who had left the isles of the Echinades, where sailors cannot land. Lastly, Aias, reared in Salamis, was joining his right wing to the left of those near whom he was posted, closing the line with his outermost ships —

twelve barques obedient to the helm — as I heard and then saw the crews; no safe return shall he obtain, who bringeth his barbaric boats to grapple Aias. There I saw the naval armament, but some things I heard at home about the gathered host, whereof I still have a recollection.

(Enter Menelaus and Attendant.)

Attendant (As Menelaus wrests a letter from him) Strange daring thine, Menelaus, where thou hast no right.

Menelaus Stand back! thou carriest loyalty to thy master too far.

Attendant The very reproach thou hast for me is to my credit.

Menelaus Thou shalt rue it, if thou meddle in matters that concern thee not.

Attendant Thou hadst no right to open a letter, which I was carrying.

Menelaus No, nor thou to be carrying sorrow to all Hellas.

Attendant Argue that point with others, but surrender that letter to me.

Menelaus I shall not let go.

Attendant Nor yet will I let loose my hold.

Menelaus Why then, this staff of mine will be dabbling thy head with blood ere long.

Attendant To die in my master's cause were a noble death.

Menelaus Let go! thou art too wordy for a slave.

Attendant (Seeing Agamemnon approaching) Master, he is wronging me; he snatched thy letter violently from my grasp, Agamemnon, and will not heed the claims of right.

(Enter Agamemnon.)

Agamemnon How now? what means this uproar at the gates, this indecent brawling?

Menelaus My tale, not his, has the better right to be spoken.

Agamemnon Thou, Menelaus! what quarrel hast thou with this man, why art thou haling him hence?

(Exit Attendant.)

Menelaus Look me in the face! Be that the prelude to my story.

Agamemnon Shall I, the son of Atreus, close my eyes from fear?

Menelaus Seest thou this scroll, the bearer of a shameful message?

Agamemnon I see it, yes; and first of all surrender it.

Menelaus No, not till I have shewn its contents to all the Danai.

Agamemnon What! hast thou broken the seal and dost know already what thou shouldst never have known?

Menelaus Yes, I opened it and know to thy sorrow the secret machinations of thy heart.

Agamemnon Where didst thou catch my servant? Ye gods what a shameless heart thou hast!

Menelaus I was awaiting thy daughter's arrival at the camp from Argos.

Agamemnon What right hast thou to watch my doings? Is not this a proof of shamelessness?

Menelaus My wish to do it gave the spur, for I am no slave to thee.

Agamemnon Infamous! Am I not to be allowed the management of my own house?

Menelaus No, for thou thinkest crooked thoughts, one thing now, another formerly, and something different presently.

Agamemnon Most exquisite refining on evil themes! A hateful thing the tongue of cleverness!

Menelaus Aye, but a mind unstable is an unjust possession, disloyal to friends. Now I am anxious to test thee, and seek not thou from rage to turn aside

from the truth, nor will I on my part overstrain the case. Thou rememberest when thou wert all eagerness to captain the Danaï against Troy, making a pretence of declining, though eager for it in thy heart; how humble thou wert then! taking each man by the hand and keeping open doors for every fellow townsman who cared to enter, affording each in turn a chance to speak with thee, even though some desired it not, seeking by these methods to purchase popularity from all bidders; then when thou hadst secured the command, there came a change over thy manners; thou wert no longer so cordial as before to whilom friends, but hard of access, seldom to be found at home. But the man of real worth ought not to change his manners in the hour of prosperity, but should then show himself most staunch to friends, when his own good fortune can help them most effectually. This was the first cause I had to reprove thee, for it was here I first discovered thy villainy; but afterwards, when thou camest to Aulis with all the gathered hosts of Hellas, thou wert of no account; no! the want of a favourable breeze filled thee with consternation at the chance dealt out by Heaven. Anon the Danaï began demanding that thou shouldst send the fleet away instead of vainly toiling on at Aulis; what dismay and confusion was then depicted in thy looks, to think that thou, with a thousand ships at thy command, hadst not occupied the plains of Priam with thy armies! And thou wouldst ask my counsel, "What am I to do? what scheme can I devise? where find one?" to save thyself being stripped of thy command and losing thy fair fame. Next when Calchas bade thee offer thy daughter in sacrifice to Artemis, declaring that the Danaï should then sail, thou wert overjoyed, and didst gladly undertake to offer the maid, and of thine own accord — never allege compulsion! — thou art sending word to thy wife to despatch thy daughter hither on pretence of wedding Achilles. This is the same air that heard thee say it; and after all thou turnest round and hast been caught recasting thy letter to this effect, "I will no longer be my daughter's murderer." Exactly so! Countless others have gone through this phase in their conduct of public affairs; they make an effort while in power, and then retire dishonourably, sometimes owing to the senselessness of the citizens, sometimes deservedly, because they are too feeble of themselves to maintain their watch upon the state. For my part, I am more sorry for our unhappy Hellas, whose purpose was to read these worthless foreigners a lesson, while now she will let them escape and mock her, thanks to thee and thy daughter. May I never then appoint a man to rule my country or lead its warriors because his of kinship! Ability is what the general

must have; since any man, with ordinary intelligence, can govern a state.

Chorus For brethren to come to words and blows, whene'er they disagree, is terrible.

Agamemnon I wish to rebuke thee in turn, briefly, not lifting mine eyes too high in shameless wise, but in more sober fashion, as a brother; for it is a good man's way to be considerate. Prithee, why this burst of fury, these bloodshot eyes? who wrongs thee? what is it thou wantest? Thou art fain to win a virtuous bride. Well, I cannot supply thee; for she, whom thou once hadst, was ill controlled by thee. Am I then, a man who never went astray, to suffer for thy sins? or is it my popularity that galls thee? No! it is the longing thou hast to keep a fair wife in thy embrace, casting reason and honour to the winds. A bad man's pleasures are like himself Am I mad, if I change to wiser counsels, after previously deciding amiss? Thine is the madness rather in wishing to recover a wicked wife, once thou hadst lost her — a stroke of Heaven-sent luck. Those foolish suitors swore that oath to Tyndareus in their longing to wed; but Hope was the goddess that led them on, I trow, and she it was that brought it about rather than thou and thy mightiness. So take the field with them; they are ready for it in the folly of their hearts; for the deity is not without insight, but is able to discern where oaths have been wrongly pledged or forcibly extorted. I will not slay my children, nor shall thy interests be prospered by justice in thy vengeance for a worthless wife, while I am left wasting, night and day, in sorrow for what I did to one of my own flesh and blood, contrary to all law and justice. There is thy answer shortly given, clear and easy to understand; and if thou wilt not come to thy senses, I shall do the best for myself.

Chorus This differs from thy previous declaration, but there is good in it — thy child's reprieve.

Menelaus Ah me, how sad my lot! I have no friends then after all.

Agamemnon Friends thou hast, if thou seek not their destruction.

Menelaus Where wilt thou find any proof that thou art sprung from the same sire as I?

Agamemnon Thy moderation, not thy madness do I share by nature.

Menelaus Friends should sympathize with friends in sorrow.

Agamemnon Claim my help by kindly service, not by paining me.

Menelaus So thou hast no mind to share this trouble with Hellas?

Agamemnon No, Hellas is diseased like thee according to some god's design.

Menelaus Go vaunt thee then on thy sceptre, after betraying thine own brother! while seek some different means and other friends.

(Enter Messenger.)

Messenger Agamemnon, lord of all Hellenes! I am come and bring thee thy daughter, whom thou didst call Iphigenia in thy home; and her mother, thy wife Clytemnestra, is with her, and the child Orestes, a sight to gladden thee after thy long absence from thy palace; but, as they had been travelling long and far, they are now refreshing their tender feet at the waters of a fair spring, they and their horses, for we turned these loose in the grassy meadow to browse their fill; but I am come as their forerunner to prepare thee for their reception; for the army knows already of thy daughter's arrival, so quickly did the rumour spread; and all the folk are running together to the sight, that they may see thy child; for Fortune's favourites enjoy a worldwide fame and have all eyes fixed on them. "Is it a wedding?" some ask, "or what is happening? or has king Agamemnon from fond yearning summoned his daughter hither?" From others thou wouldst have heard: "They are presenting the maiden to Artemis, queen of Aulis, previous to marriage; who can the bridegroom be, that is to lead her home?"

Come, then, begin the rites — that is the next step — by getting the baskets ready; crown your heads; prepare the wedding-hymn, thou and prince Menelaus with thee; let flutes resound throughout the tents with noise of dancer's feet; for this is a happy day, that is come for the maid.

Agamemnon Thou hast my thanks; now go within; for the rest it will be well, as Fate proceeds.

(Exit Messenger.)

Ah, woe is me! unhappy wretch, what can I say? where shall I begin? Into

what cruel straits have I been plunged! Fortune has outwitted me, proving far cleverer than any cunning of mine. What an advantage humble birth possesses! for it is easy for her sons to weep and tell out all their sorrows; while to the high-born man come these same sorrows, but we have dignity throned o'er our life and are the people's slaves. I, for instance, am ashamed to weep, nor less, poor wretch, to check my tears at the awful pass to which I am brought. Oh! what am I to tell my wife? how shall I welcome her? with what face meet her? for she too has undone me by coming uninvited in this my hour of sorrow; yet it was but natural she should come with her daughter to prepare the bride and perform the fondest duties, where she will discover my villainy. And for this poor maid — why maid? Death, methinks, will soon make her his bride — how I pity her! Thus will she plead to me, I trow: “My father will thou slay me? Be such the wedding thou thyself mayst find, and whosoever is a friend to thee!” while Orestes, from his station near us, will cry in childish accents, inarticulate, yet fraught with meaning. Alas! to what utter ruin Paris, the son of Priam, the cause of these troubles, has brought me by his union with Helen!

Chorus I pity her myself, in such wise as a woman, and she a stranger, may bemoan the misfortunes of royalty.

Menelaus (Offering his hand) Thy hand, brother! let me grasp it.

Agamemnon I give it; thine is the victory, mine the sorrow.

Menelaus By Pelops our reputed grandsire and Atreus our father I swear to tell thee the truth from my heart, without any covert purpose, but only what I think. The sight of thee in tears made me pity thee, and in return I shed a tear for thee myself; I withdraw from my former proposals, ceasing to be a cause of fear to thee; yea, and I will put myself in thy present position; and I counsel thee, slay not thy child nor prefer my interests to thine; for it is not just that thou shouldst grieve, while I am glad, or that thy children should die, while mine still see the light of day. What is it, after all, I seek? If I am set on marriage, could I not find a bride as choice elsewhere? Was I to lose a brother — the last I should have lost — to win a Helen, getting bad for good? I was mad, impetuous as a youth, till I perceived, on closer view, what slaying children really meant. Moreover I am filled with compassion for the hapless maiden, doomed to bleed that I may wed, when I reflect that we are kin. What has thy daughter to do with Helen? Let the army be disbanded and leave Aulis; dry those streaming eyes, brother, and provoke me not

to tears. Whatever concern thou hast in oracles that affect thy child, let it be none of mine; into thy hands I resign my share therein. A sudden change, thou'lt say, from my fell proposals! A natural course for me; affection for my brother caused the change. These are the ways of a man not void of virtue, to pursue on each occasion what is best.

Chorus A generous speech, worthy of Tantalus, the son of Zeus! Thou dost not shame thy ancestry.

Agamemnon I thank thee, Menelaus, for this unexpected suggestion; 'tis an honourable proposal, worthy of thee.

Menelaus Sometimes love, sometimes the selfishness of their families causes a quarrel between brothers; I loathe a relationship of this kind which is bitterness to both.

Agamemnon 'Tis useless, for circumstances compel me to carry out the murderous sacrifice of my daughter.

Menelaus How so? who will compel thee to slay thine own child?

Agamemnon The whole Achaean army here assembled.

Menelaus Not if thou send her back to Argos.

Agamemnon I might do that unnoticed, but there will be another thing I cannot.

Menelaus What is that? Thou must not fear the mob too much.

Agamemnon Calchas will tell the Argive host his oracles.

Menelaus Not if he be killed ere that — an easy matter.

Agamemnon The whole tribe of seers is a curse with its ambition.

Menelaus Yes, and good for nothing and useless, when amongst us.

Agamemnon Has the thought, which is rising in my mind, no terrors for thee?

Menelaus How can I understand thy meaning, unless thou declare it?

Agamemnon The son of Sisyphus knows all.

Menelaus Odysseus cannot possibly hurt us.

Agamemnon He was ever shifty by nature, siding with the mob.

Menelaus True, he is enslaved by the love of popularity, a fearful evil.

Agamemnon Bethink thee then, will he not arise among the Argives and tell them the oracles that Calchas delivered, saying of me that I undertook to offer Artemis a victim, and after all am proving false? Then, when he has carried the army away with him, he will bid the Argives slay us and sacrifice the maiden; and if I escape to Argos, they will come and destroy the place, razing it to the ground, Cyclopean walls and all. That is my trouble. Woe is me! to what straits Heaven has brought me at this pass! Take one precaution for me, Menelaus, as thou goest through the host, that Clytemnestra learn this not, till I have taken my child and devoted her to death, that my affliction may be attended with the fewest tears. (Turning to the Chorus) And you, ye stranger dames, keep silence.

(Exeunt Agamemnon and Menelaus.)

Chorus Happy they who find the goddess come in moderate might, sharing with self-restraint in Aphrodite's gift of marriage and enjoying calm and rest from frenzied passions, wherein the Love-god, golden-haired, stretches his charmed bow with arrows twain, and one is aimed at happiness, the other at life's confusion. O lady Cypris, queen of beauty! far from my bridal bower I ban the last. Be mine delight in moderation and pure desires, and may I have a share in love, but shun excess therein.

Men's natures vary, and their habits differ, but true virtue is always manifest. Likewise the training that comes of education conduces greatly to virtue; for not only is modesty wisdom, but it has also the rare grace of seeing by its better judgment what is right; whereby glory, ever young, is shed o'er life by reputation. A great thing it is to follow virtue's footsteps — for women in their secret loves; while in men again an inborn sense of order, shown in countless ways, adds to a city's greatness.

Thou camest, O Paris, to the place where thou wert reared to herd the kine amid the white heifers of Ida, piping in foreign strain and breathing on thy reeds an echo of the Phrygian airs Olympus played. Full-uddered cows were browsing at the spot where that verdict 'twixt goddesses was awaiting thee the cause of thy going to Hellas to stand before the ivory palace, kindling love in Helen's tranced

eyes and feeling its flutter in thine own breast; whence the fiend of strife brought Hellas with her chivalry and ships to the towers of Troy.

Oh! great is the bliss the great enjoy. Behold Iphigenia, the king's royal child, and Clytaemnestra, the daughter of Tyndareus; how proud their lineage! how high their pinnacle of fortune! These mighty ones, whom wealth attends, are very gods in the eyes of less favoured folk.

Halt we here, maidens of Chalcis, and lift the queen from her chariot to the ground without stumbling, supporting her gently in our arms, with kind intent, that the renowned daughter of Agamemnon but just arrived may feel no fear; strangers ourselves, avoid we aught that may disturb or frighten the strangers from Argos.

(Enter Clytaemnestra and Iphigenia.)

Clytaemnestra I take this as a lucky omen, thy kindness and auspicious greeting, and have good hope that it is to a happy marriage I conduct the bride.

(To Attendants) Take from the chariot the dowry I am bringing for my daughter and convey it within with careful heed.

My daughter, leave the horse-drawn car, planting thy faltering footstep delicately. (To the Chorus) Maidens, take her in your arms and lift her from the chariot, and let one of you give me the support of her hand, that I may quit my seat in the carriage with fitting grace.

Some of you stand at the horses' heads; for the horse has a timid eye, easily frightened; here take this child Orestes, son of Agamemnon, babe as he still is.

What! sleeping, little one, tired out by thy ride in the chariot? Awake to bless thy sister's wedding; for thou, my gallant boy, shalt get by this marriage a kinsman gallant as thyself, the Nereid's godlike offspring. Come hither to thy mother, my daughter, Iphigenia, and seat thyself beside me, and stationed near show my happiness to these strangers; yes, come hither and welcome the sire thou lovest so dearly.

Hail! my honoured lord, king Agamemnon! we have obeyed thy commands and are come.

(Enter Agamemnon.)

Iphigenia (Throwing herself into Agamemnon's arms) Be not wroth with me, mother, if I run from thy side and throw myself on my father's breast.

O my father! I long to outrun others and embrace thee after this long while; for I yearn to see thy face; be not wroth with me.

Clytaemnestra Thou mayst do so, daughter; for of all the children I have born, thou hast ever loved thy father best.

Iphigenia I see thee, father, joyfully after a long season.

Agamemnon And I thy father thee; thy words do equal duty for both of us.

Iphigenia All hail, father! thou didst well in bringing me hither to thee.

Agamemnon I know not how I am to say yes or no to that, my child.

Iphigenia Ha! how wildly thou art looking, spite of thy joy at seeing me.

Agamemnon A man has many cares when he is king and general too.

Iphigenia Be mine, all mine to-day; turn not unto moody thoughts.

Agamemnon Why so I am, all thine to-day; I have no other thought.

Iphigenia Then smooth thy knitted brow, unbend and smile.

Agamemnon Lo! my child, my joy at seeing thee is even as it is.

Iphigenia And hast thou then the tear-drop streaming from thy eyes?

Agamemnon Aye, for long is the absence from each other, that awalts us.

Iphigenia I know not, dear father mine, I know not of what thou art speaking.

Agamemnon Thou art moving my pity all the more by speaking so sensibly.

Iphigenia My words shall turn to senselessness, if that will cheer thee more.

Agamemnon (Aside) Ah, woe is me! this silence is too much. (To Iphigenia) Thou hast my thanks.

Iphigenia Stay with thy children at home, father.

Agamemnon My own wish! but to my sorrow I may not humour it.

Iphigenia Ruin seize their warring and the woes of Menelaus!

Agamemnon First will that, which has been my life-long ruin, bring ruin unto others.

Iphigenia How long thou wert absent in the bays of Aulis!

Agamemnon Aye, and there is still a hindrance to my sending the army forward.

Iphigenia Where do men say the Phrygians live, father?

Agamemnon In a land where I would Paris, the son of Priam, ne'er had dwelt.

Iphigenia 'Tis a long voyage thou art bound on, father, after thou leavest me.

Agamemnon Thou wilt meet thy father again, my daughter.

Iphigenia Ah! would it were seemly that thou shouldst take me as a fellow-voyager!

Agamemnon Thou too hast a voyage to make to a haven where thou wilt remember thy father.

Iphigenia Shall I sail thither with my mother or alone?

Agamemnon All alone, without father or mother.

Iphigenia What! hast thou found me a new home, father!

Agamemnon Enough of this! 'tis not for girls to know such things.

Iphigenia Speed home from Troy, I pray thee, father, as soon as thou hast triumphed there.

Agamemnon There is a sacrifice I have first to offer here.

Iphigenia Yea, 'tis thy duty to heed religion with aid of holy rites.

Agamemnon Thou wilt witness it, for thou wilt be standing near the laver.

Iphigenia Am I to lead the dance then round the altar, father?

Agamemnon (Aside) I count thee happier than myself because thou knowest nothing. (To Iphigenia) Go within into the presence of maidens, after thou hast given me thy hand and one sad kiss, on the eve of thy lengthy sojourn far from thy father's side.

Bosom, cheek, and golden hair! ah, how grievous ye have found Helen and the

Phrygians' city! I can no more; the tears come welling to my eyes, the moment I touch thee.

(Exit Iphigenia.)

(Turning to Clytaemnestra) Herein I crave thy pardon, daughter of Leda, if I showed excessive grief at the thought of resigning my daughter to Achilles; for though we are sending her to taste of bliss, still it wrings a parent's heart, when he, the father who has toiled so hard for them, commits his children to the homes of strangers.

Clytaemnestra I am not so void of sense; bethink thee, I shall go through this as well, when I lead the maiden from the chamber to the sound of the marriage-hymn; wherefore I chide thee not; but custom will combine with time to make the smart grow less.

As touching him, to whom thou hast betrothed our daughter, I know his name, 'tis true, but would fain learn his lineage and the land of his birth.

Agamemnon There was one Aegina, the daughter of Asopus.

Clytaemnestra Who wedded her? some mortal or a god?

Agamemnon Zeus, and she bare Aeacus, the prince of Cenone.

Clytaemnestra What son of Aeacus secured his father's halls?

Agamemnon Peleus, who wedded the daughter of Nereus.

Clytaemnestra With the god's consent, or when he had taken her in spite of gods?

Agamemnon Zeus betrothed her, and her guardian gave consent.

Clytaemnestra Where did he marry her? amid the billows of the sea?

Agamemnon In Chiron's home, at sacred Pelion's foot.

Clytaemnestra What! the abode ascribed to the race of Centaurs?

Agamemnon It was there the gods celebrated the marriage feast of Peleus.

Clytaemnestra Did Thetis or his father train Achilles?

Agamemnon Chiron brought him up, to prevent his learning the ways of the wicked.

Clytaemnestra Ah wise the teacher, still wiser the father, who intrusted his son to such hands.

Agamemnon Such is the future husband of thy daughter.

Clytaemnestra A blameless lord; but what city in Hellas is his?

Agamemnon He dwells on the banks of the river Apidanus, in the borders of Phthia.

Clytaemnestra Wilt thou convey our daughter thither?

Agamemnon He who takes her to himself will see to that.

Clytaemnestra Happiness attend the pair! Which day will he marry her?

Agamemnon As soon as the full moon comes to give its blessing.

Clytaemnestra Hast thou already offered the goddess a sacrifice to usher in the maiden's marriage?

Agamemnon I am about to do so; that is the very thing I was engaged in.

Clytaemnestra Wilt thou celebrate the marriage-feast thereafter?

Agamemnon Yes, when I have offered a sacrifice required by Heaven of me.

Clytaemnestra But where am I to make ready the feast for the women?

Agamemnon Here beside our gallant Argive ships.

Clytaemnestra Finely here! but still I must; good come of it for all that!

Agamemnon I will tell thee, lady, what to do; so obey me now.

Clytaemnestra Wherein? for I was ever wont to yield thee obedience.

Agamemnon Here, where the bridegroom is, will!

Clytaemnestra Which of my duties will ye perform in the mother's absence?

Agamemnon Give thy child away with help of Danai.

Clytaemnestra And where am I to be the while?

Agamemnon Get thee to Argos, and take care of thy unwedded daughters.

Clytaemnestra And leave my child? Then who will raise her bridal torch?

Agamemnon I will provide the proper wedding torch.

Clytaemnestra That is not the custom; but thou thinkest lightly of these things.

Agamemnon It is not good thou shouldst be alone among a soldier-crowd.

Clytaemnestra It is good that a mother should give her own child away.

Agamemnon Aye, and that those maidens at home should not be left alone.

Clytaemnestra They are in safe keeping, pent in their maiden-bowers.

Agamemnon Obey.

Clytaemnestra Nay, by the goddess-queen of Argos! go, manage matters out of doors; but in the house it is my place to decide what is proper for maidens at their wedding. (Exit.)

Agamemnon Woe is me! my efforts are baffled; I am disappointed in my hope, anxious as I was to get my wife out of sight; foiled at every point, I form my plots and subtle schemes against my best-beloved. But I will go, in spite of all, with Calchas the priest, to inquire the goddess's good pleasure, fraught with ill-luck as it is to me, and with trouble to Hellas. He who is wise should keep in his house a good and useful wife or none at all.

(Exit.)

Chorus They say the Hellenes' gathered host will come in arms aboard their ships to Simois with its silver eddies, even to Ilium, the plain of Troy beloved by Phoebus; where famed Cassandra, I am told, whene'er the god's resistless prophecies inspire her, wildly tosses her golden tresses, wreathed with crown of verdant bay. And on the towers of Troy and round her walls shall Trojans stand, when sea-borne troops with brazen shields row in on shapely ships to the channels of the Simois, eager to take Helen, the sister of that heavenly pair whom Zeus begat, from Priam, and bear her back to Hellas by toil of Achaea's shields and spears; encircling Pergamus, the Phrygians' town, with murderous war around her stone-built towers, dragging men's heads backward to cut their throats, and sacking the citadel of Troy from roof to base, a cause of many tears to maids and

Priam's wife; and Helen, the daughter of Zeus, shall weep in bitter grief, because she left her lord.

Oh! ne'er may there appear to me or to my children's children the prospect which the wealthy Lydian dames and Phrygia's brides will have, as at their looms they hold converse: "Say who will pluck this fair blossom from her ruined country, tightening his grasp on lovely tresses till the tears flow? 'Tis all through thee, the offspring of the long-necked swan; if indeed it be a true report that Leda bare thee to a winged bird, when Zeus transformed himself thereto, or whether, in the pages of the poets, fables have carried these tales to men's ears idly, out of season."

(Enter Achilles.)

Achilles Where in these tents is Achaea's general? Which of his servants will announce to him that Achilles, the son of Peleus, is at his gates seeking him? For this delay at the Euripus is not the same for all of us; there be some, for instance, who, though still unwed, have left their houses desolate and are idling here upon the beach, while others are married and have children; so strange the longing for this expedition that has fallen on their hearts by Heaven's will. My own just plea must I declare, and whoso else hath any wish will speak for himself. Though I have left Pharsalia and Peleus, still I linger here by reason of these light breezes at the Euripus, restraining my Myrmidons, while they are ever instant with me saying, "Why do we tarry, Achilles? how much longer must we count the days to the start for Ilium? do something, if thou art so minded; else lead home thy men, and wait not for the tardy action of these Atridae."

(Enter Clytaemnestra.)

Clytaemnestra Hail to thee, son of the Nereid goddess! I heard thy voice from within the tent and therefore came forth.

Achilles O modesty revered! who can this lady be whom I behold, so richly dowered with beauty's gifts?

Clytaemnestra No wonder thou knowest me not, seeing I am one thou hast

never before set eyes on; I praise thy reverent address to modesty.

Achilles Who art thou, and wherefore art thou come to the mustering of the Danai — thou, a woman, to a fenced camp of men?

Clytaemnestra The daughter of Leda I; my name Clytaemnestra; and my husband king Agamemnon.

Achilles Well and shortly answered on all important points! but it ill befits that I should stand talking to women.

Clytaemnestra Stay; why seek to fly? Give me thy hand, a prelude to a happy marriage.

Achilles What is it thou sayest? I give thee my hand? Were I to lay a finger where I have no right, I could ne'er meet Agamemnon's eye.

Clytaemnestra The best of rights hast thou, seeing it is my child thou wilt wed, O son of the sea-goddess, whom Nereus begat.

Achilles What wedding dost thou speak of? words fail me, lady; can thy wits have gone astray and art thou inventing this?

Clytaemnestra All men are naturally shy in the presence of new relations, when these remind them of their wedding.

Achilles Lady, I have never wooed daughter of thine, nor have the sons of Atreus ever mentioned marriage to me.

Clytaemnestra What can it mean? thy turn now to marvel at my words, for thine are passing strange to me.

Achilles Hazard a guess; that we can both do in this matter; for it may be we are both correct in our statements.

Clytaemnestra What! have I suffered such indignity? The marriage I am courting has no reality, it seems; I am ashamed of it.

Achilles Some one perhaps has made a mock of thee and me; pay no heed thereto; make light of it.

Clytaemnestra Farewell; I can no longer face thee with unfaltering eyes, after being made a liar and suffering this indignity.

Achilles 'Tis "farewell" too I bid thee, lady; and now I go within the tent to

seek thy husband.

Attendant (Calling through the tent-door) Stranger of the race of Aeacus, stay awhile! Ho there! thee I mean, O goddess-born, and thee, daughter of Leda.

Achilles Who is it calling through the half-opened door? what fear his voice betrays!

Attendant A slave am I; of that I am not proud, for fortune permits it not.

Achilles Whose slave art thou? not mine; for mine and Agamemnon's goods are separate.

Attendant I belong to this lady who stands before the tent, a gift to her from Tyndareus her father.

Achilles I am waiting; tell me, if thou art desirous, why thou hast stayed me.

Attendant Are ye really all alone here at the door?

Clytaemnestra To us alone wilt thou address thyself; come forth from the king's tent.

Attendant (Coming out) O Fortune and my own foresight, preserve whom I desire!

Achilles That speech will save them in the future; it has a certain pompous air.

Clytaemnestra Delay not for the sake of touching my right hand, if there is aught that thou wouldst say to me.

Attendant Well, thou knowest my character and my devotion to thee and thy children.

Clytaemnestra I know thou hast grown old in the service of my house.

Attendant Likewise thou knowest it was in thy dowry king Agamemnon received me.

Clytaemnestra Yes, thou camest to Argos with me, and hast been mine this long time past.

Attendant True; and though I bear thee all goodwill, I like not thy lord so well.

Clytaemnestra Come, come, unfold whate'er thou hast to say.

Attendant Her father, he that begat her, is on the point of slaying thy daughter with his own hand.

Clytaemnestra How? Out upon thy story, old dotard! thou art mad.

Attendant Severing with a sword the hapless maid's white throat.

Clytaemnestra Ah, woe is me! Is my husband haply mad?

Attendant Nay; sane, except where thou and thy daughter are concerned; there he is mad.

Clytaemnestra What is his reason? what vengeful fiend impels him?

Attendant Oracles — at least so Calchas says, in order that the host may start

Clytaemnestra Whither? Woe is me, and woe is thee, thy father's destined victim!

Attendant To the halls of Dardanus, that Menelaus may recover Helen.

Clytaemnestra So Helen's return then was fated to affect Iphigenia?

Attendant Thou knowest all; her father is about to offer thy child to Artemis.

Clytaemnestra But that marriage — what pretext had it for bringing me from home?

Attendant An inducement to thee to bring thy daughter cheerfully, to wed her to Achilles.

Clytaemnestra On a deadly errand art thou come, my daughter, both thou, and I, thy mother.

Attendant Piteous the lot of both of you — and fearful Agamemnon's venture.

Clytaemnestra Alas! I am undone; my eyes can no longer stem their tears.

Attendant What more natural than to weep the loss of thy children?

Clytaemnestra Whence, old man, dost say thou hadst this news?

Attendant I had started to carry thee a letter referring to the former writing.

Clytaemnestra Forbidding or combining to urge my bringing the child to her death?

Attendant Nay, forbidding it, for thy lord was then in his sober senses.

Clytaemnestra How comes it then, if thou wert really bringing me a letter, that thou dost not now deliver into my hands?

Attendant Menelaus snatched it from me — he who caused this trouble.

Clytaemnestra Dost thou hear that, son of Peleus, the Nereid's child?

Achilles I have been listening to the tale of thy sufferings, and I am indignant to think I was used as a tool.

Clytaemnestra They will slay my child; they have tricked her with thy marriage.

Achilles Like thee I blame thy lord, nor do I view it with mere indifference.

Clytaemnestra No longer will I let shame prevent my kneeling to thee, a mortal to one goddess-born; why do I affect reserve? whose interests should I consult before my child's? (Throwing herself before Achilles)

Oh! help me, goddess-born, in my sore distress, and her that was called thy bride — in vain, 'tis true, yet called she was. For thee it was I wreathed her head and led her forth as if to marriage, but now it is to slaughter I am bringing her. On thee will come reproach because thou didst not help her; for though not wedded to her, yet wert thou the loving husband of my hapless maid in name at any rate. By thy beard, right hand, and mother too I do implore thee; for thy name it was that worked my ruin, and thou art bound to stand by that. Except thy knees I have no altar whereunto to fly; and not a friend stands at my side. Thou hast heard the cruel abandoned scheme of Agamemnon; and I, a woman, am come, as thou seest, to a camp of lawless sailor-folk, bold in evil's cause, though useful when they list; wherefore if thou boldly stretch forth thine arm in my behalf, our safety is assured; but if thou withhold it, we are lost.

Chorus A wondrous thing is motherhood, carrying with it a potent spell, wherein all share, so that for their children's sake they will endure affliction.

Achilles My proud spirit is stirred to range aloft, but it has learnt to grieve in misfortune and rejoice in high prosperity with equal moderation. For these are the men who can count on ordering all their life aright by wisdom's rules. True, there are cases where 'tis pleasant not to be too wise, but there are others, where some store of wisdom helps. Brought up in godly Chiron's halls myself, I learnt to keep a single heart; and provided the Atridae lead aright, I will obey them; but when they

cease therefrom, no more will I obey. Nay, but here and in Troy I will show the freedom of my nature, and, as far as in me lies, do honour to Ares with my spear. Thee, lady, who hast suffered so cruelly from thy nearest and dearest, will I, by every effort in a young man's power, set right, investing thee with that amount of pity, and never shall thy daughter, after being once called my bride, die by her father's hand; for I will not lend myself to thy husband's subtle tricks; no! for it will be my name that kills thy child, although it wieldeth not the steel. Thy own husband is the actual cause, but I shall no longer be guiltless, if, because of me and my marriage, this maiden perishes, she that hath suffered past endurance and been the victim of affronts most strangely undeserved. So am I made the poorest wretch in Argos; I a thing of naught, and Menelaus counting for a man! No son of Peleus I, but the issue of a vengeful fiend, if my name shall serve thy husband for the murder. Nay! by Nereus, who begat my mother Thetis, in his home amid the flowing waves, never shall king Agamemnon touch thy daughter, no! not even to the laying of a finger-tip upon her robe; else will Sipylus, that frontier town of barbarism, the cradle of those chieftains' line, be henceforth a city indeed, while Phthia's name will nowhere find mention. Calchas, the seer, shall rue beginning the sacrifice with his barley-meal and lustral water. Why, what is a seer? A man who with luck tells the truth sometimes, with frequent falsehoods, but when his luck deserts him, collapses then and there. It is not to secure a bride that I have spoken thus — there be maids unnumbered eager to have my love — no! but king Agamemnon has put an insult on me; he should have asked my leave to use my name as a means to catch the child, for it was I chiefly who induced Clytaemnestra to betroth her daughter to me; verily I had yielded this to Hellas, if that was where our going to Ilium broke down; I would never have refused to further my fellow soldiers' common interest. But, as it is, I am as naught in the eyes of those chieftains, and little they reckon of treating me well or ill. My sword shall soon know if any one is to snatch thy daughter from me, for then will I make it reek with the bloody stains of slaughter, ere it reach Phrygia. Calm thyself then; as a god in his might I appeared to thee, without being so, but such will I show myself for all that.

Chorus Son of Peleus, thy words are alike worthy of thee and that sea-born deity, the holy goddess.

Clytaemnestra Ah! would I could find words to utter thy praise without excess, and yet not lose the graciousness thereof by stinting it; for when the good are praised, they have a feeling, as it were, of hatred for those who in their praise

exceed the mean. But I am ashamed of intruding a tale of woe, since my affliction touches myself alone and thou art not affected by troubles of mine; but still it looks well for the man of worth to assist the unfortunate, even when he is not connected with them. Wherefore pity us, for our sufferings cry for pity; in the first place, I have harboured an idle hope in thinking to have thee wed my daughter; and next, perhaps, the slaying of my child will be to thee an evil omen in thy wooing hereafter, against which thou must guard thyself. Thy words were good, both first and last; for if thou wilt it so, my daughter will be saved. Wilt have her clasp thy knees in suppliant wise? 'Tis no maid's part; yet if it seem good to thee, why come she shall with the modest look of free-born maid; but if I shall obtain the self-same end from thee without her coming, then let her abide within, for there is dignity in her reserve; still reserve must only go as far as the case allows.

Achilles Bring not thou thy daughter out for me to see, lady, nor let us incur the reproach of the ignorant; for an army, when gathered together without domestic duties to employ it, loves the evil gossip of malicious tongues. After all, should ye supplicate me, ye will attain a like result as if I had ne'er been supplicated; for I am myself engaged in a mighty struggle to rid you of your troubles. One thing be sure thou hast heard; I will not tell a lie; if I do that or idly mock thee, may I die, but live if I preserve the maid.

Clytaemnestra Bless thee for ever succouring the distressed!

Achilles Hearken then to me, that the matter may succeed.

Clytaemnestra What is thy proposal? for hear thee I must.

Achilles Let us once more urge her father to a better frame of mind.

Clytaemnestra He is something of a coward, and fears the army too much.

Achilles Still argument o'erthroweth argument.

Clytaemnestra Cold hope indeed; but tell me what I must do.

Achilles Entreat him first not to slay his children, and if he is stubborn, come to me. For if he consents to thy request, my intervention need go no further, since this consent insures thy safety. I too shall show myself in a better light to my friend, and the army will not blame me, if I arrange the matter by reason rather than force; while, should things turn out well, the result will prove satisfactory both to thee and thy friends, even without my interference.

Clytaemnestra How sensibly thou speakest! I must act as seemeth best to thee; but should I fail of my object, where am I to see thee again? whither must I turn my wretched steps and find thee ready to champion my distress?

Achilles I am keeping watch to guard thee, where occasion calls, that none see thee passing through the host of Danai with that scared look. Shame not thy father's house; for Tyndareus deserveth not to be ill spoken of, being a mighty man in Hellas.

Clytaemnestra 'Tis even so. Command me; I must play the slave to thee. If there are gods, thou for thy righteous dealing wilt find them favourable; if there are none, what need to toil?

(Exeunt Achilles and Clytaemnestra.)

Chorus What wedding-hymn was that which raised its strains to the sound of Libyan flutes, to the music of the dancer's lyre, and the note of the pipe of reeds?

'Twas in the day Pieria's fair-tressed choir came o'er the slopes of Pelion to the marriage-feast of Peleus, beating the ground with print of golden sandals at the banquet of the gods, and hymning in dulcet strains the praise of Thetis and the son of Aeacus, o'er the Centaurs' hill, down through the woods of Pelion.

There was the Dardanian boy, Phrygian Ganymede, whom Zeus delights to honour, drawing off the wine he mixed in the depths of golden bowls; while, along the gleaming sand, the fifty daughters of Nereus graced the marriage with their dancing, circling in a mazy ring.

Came too the revel-rout of Centaurs, mounted on horses, to the feast of the gods and the mixing-bowl of Bacchus, leaning on fir-trees, with wreaths of green foliage round their heads; and loudly cried the prophet Chiron, skilled in arts inspired by Phoebus; "Daughter of Nereus, thou shalt bear a son"— whose name he gave —"a dazzling light to Thessaly; for he shall come with an army of spearmen to the far-famed land of Priam, to set it in a blaze, his body cased in a suit of golden mail forged by Hephaestus, a gift from his goddess-mother, even from Thetis who bore him."

Then shed the gods a blessing on the marriage of the high-born bride, who

was first of Nereus' daughters, and on the wedding of Peleus. But thee, will Argives crown, wreathing the lovely tresses of thy hair, like a dappled mountain hind brought from some rocky cave or a heifer undefiled, and staining with blood thy human throat; though thou wert never reared like these amid the piping and whistling of herdsmen, but at thy mother's side, to be decked one day by her as the bride of a son of Inachus. Where now does the face of modesty or virtue avail aught? seeing that godlessness holds sway, and virtue is neglected by men and thrust behind them, lawlessness o'er law prevailing, and mortals no longer making common cause to keep the jealousy of gods from reaching them.

Clytaemnestra (Reappearing from the tent) I have come from the tent to look out for my husband, who went away and left its shelter long ago; while that poor child, my daughter, hearing of the death her father designs for her, is in tears, uttering in many keys her piteous lamentation. (Catching sight of Agamemnon) It seems I was speaking of one not far away; for there is Agamemnon, who will soon be detected in the commission of a crime against his own child.

(Enter Agamemnon.)

Agamemnon Daughter of Leda, 'tis lucky I have found thee outside the tent, to discuss with thee in our daughter's absence subjects not suited for the ears of maidens on the eve of marriage.

Clytaemnestra What, pray, is dependent on the present crisis?

Agamemnon Send the maiden out to join her father, for the lustral water stands there ready, and barley-meal to scatter with the hand on the cleansing flame, and heifers to be slain in honour of the goddess Artemis, to usher in the marriage, their black blood spouting from them.

Clytaemnestra Though fair the words thou usest, I know not how I am to name thy deeds in terms of praise.

Come forth, my daughter; full well thou knowest what is in thy father's mind; take the child Orestes, thy brother, and bring him with thee in the folds of thy robe.

(Enter Iphigenia.)

Behold child, she comes, in obedience to thy summons. Myself will speak the rest alike for her and me.

Agamemnon My child, why weepest thou and no longer lookest cheerfully? why art thou fixing thine eyes upon the ground and holding thy robe before them?

Clytaemnestra Alas! with which of my woes shall I begin? for I may treat them all as first, or put them last or midway anywhere.

Agamemnon How now? I find you all alike, confusion and alarm in every eye.

Clytaemnestra My husband, answer frankly the questions I ask thee.

Agamemnon There is no necessity to order me; I am willing to be questioned.

Clytaemnestra Dost thou mean to slay thy child and mine?

Agamemnon (Starting) Ha! these are heartless words, unwarranted suspicions!

Clytaemnestra Peace! answer me that question first.

Agamemnon Put a fair question and thou shalt have a fair answer.

Clytaemnestra I have no other questions to put; give me no other answers.

Agamemnon O fate revered, O destiny, and fortune mine!

Clytaemnestra Aye, and mine and this maid's too; the three share one bad fortune.

Agamemnon Whom have I injured?

Clytaemnestra Dost thou ask me this question? A thought like that itself amounts to thoughtlessness.

Agamemnon Ruined! my secret out!

Clytaemnestra I know all; I have heard what thou art bent on doing to me. Thy very silence and those frequent groans are a confession; tire not thyself by telling it.

Agamemnon Lo! I am silent; for, if I tell thee a falsehood, needs must I add effrontery to misfortune.

Clytaemnestra Well, listen; for I will now unfold my meaning and no longer employ dark riddles. In the first place — to reproach thee first with this — it was not of my own free will but by force that thou didst take and wed me, after slaying Tantalus, my former husband, and dashing my babe on the ground alive, when thou hadst torn him from my breast with brutal violence. Then, when those two sons of Zeus, who were likewise my brothers, came flashing on horseback to war with thee, Tyndareus, my aged sire, rescued thee because of thy suppliant prayers, and thou in turn hadst me to wife. Once reconciled to thee upon this footing, thou wilt bear me witness I have been a blameless wife to thee and thy family, chaste in love, an honour to thy house, that so thy coming in might be with joy and thy going out with gladness. And 'tis seldom a man secures a wife like this, though the getting of a worthless woman is no rarity. Besides three daughters, of one of whom thou art heartlessly depriving me, I am the mother of this son of thine. If anyone asks thee thy reason for slaying her, tell me, what wilt thou say? or must say it for thee? "It is that Menelaus may recover Helen." An honourable exchange, indeed, to pay a wicked woman's price in children's lives! 'Tis buying what we most detest with what we hold most dear. Again, if thou go forth with the host, leaving me in thy halls, and art long absent at Troy, what will my feelings be at home, dost think? when I behold each vacant chair and her chamber now deserted, and then sit down alone in tears, making ceaseless lamentation for her, "Ah! my child, he that begat thee hath slain thee himself, he and no one else, nor was it by another's hand . . . to thy home, after leaving such a price to be paid; for it needs now but a trifling pretext for me and the daughters remaining to give thee the reception it is right thou shouldst receive. I adjure thee by the gods, compel me not to sin against thee, nor sin thyself. Go to; suppose thou sacrifice the child; what prayer wilt thou utter, when 'tis done? what will the blessing be that thou wilt invoke upon thyself as thou art slaying our daughter? an ill returning maybe, seeing the disgrace that speeds thy going forth. Is it right that I should pray for any luck to attend thee? Surely we should deem the gods devoid of sense, if we harboured a kindly feeling towards murderers. Shalt thou embrace thy children on thy coming back to Argos? Nay, thou hast no right. Will any child of thine e'er face thee, if thou have surrendered one of them to death? Has this ever entered into thy calculations, or does thy one duty consist in carrying a sceptre about and marching at the head of an army? when thou mightest have made this fair proposal among the Argives; "Is it your wish, Achaeans, to sail for Phrygia's shores? Why then, cast lots whose

daughter has to die.” For that would have been a fair course for thee to pursue, instead of picking out thy own child for the victim and presenting her to the Danaï; or Menelaus, inasmuch as it was his concern, should have slain Hermione for her mother. As it is, I, who still am true to thee, must lose my child; while she, who went astray, will return with her daughter, and live in happiness at Sparta. If I am wrong in aught herein, answer me; but if my words have been fairly urged, do not still slay thy child, who is mine too, and thou wilt be wise.

Chorus Hearken to her Agamemnon, for to join in saving thy children’s lives is surely a noble deed; none would gainsay this.

Iphigenia Had I the eloquence of Orpheus, my father, to move the rocks by chanted spells to follow me, or to charm by speaking whom I would, I had resorted to it. But as it is, I’ll bring my tears — the only art I know; for that I might attempt. And about thy knees, in suppliant wise, I twine my limbs these limbs thy wife here bore. Destroy me not before my time, for sweet is to look upon the light, and force me not to visit scenes below. I was the first to call thee father, thou the first to call me child; the first was I to sit upon thy knee and give and take the fond caress. And this was what thou then wouldst say, “Shall I see thee, my child, living a happy prosperous life in a husband’s home one day, in a manner worthy of myself?” And I in my turn would ask, as I hung about thy beard, whereto I now am clinging, “How shall I see thee? Shall I be giving thee a glad reception in my halls, father, in thy old age, repaying all thy anxious care in rearing me?”

I remember all we said, ’tis thou who hast forgotten and now wouldst take my life. By Pelops, I entreat thee spare me, by thy father Atreus and my mother here, who suffers now a second time the pangs she felt before when bearing me! What have I to do with the marriage of Paris and Helen? why is his coming to prove my ruin, father? Look upon me; one glance, one kiss bestow, that this at least I may carry to my death as a memorial of thee, though thou heed not my pleading.

(Holding up the babe to ORESTES) Feeble ally though thou art, brother, to thy loved ones, yet add thy tears to mine and entreat our father for thy sister’s life; even in babes there is a natural sense of ill. O father, see this speechless supplication made to thee; pity me; have mercy on my tender years! Yea, by thy beard we two fond hearts implore thy pity, the one a babe, a full-grown maid the other. By summing all my pleas in one, I will prevail in what I say. To gaze upon yon light is man’s most cherished gift; that life below is nothingness, and whoso

longs for death is mad. Better live a life of woe than die a death of glory!

Chorus Ah, wretched Helen! Awful the struggle that has come to the sons of Atreus and their children, thanks to thee and those marriages of thine.

Agamemnon While loving my own children, I yet understand what should move my pity and what should not; I were a madman else. 'Tis terrible for me to bring myself to this, nor less terrible is it to refuse, daughter; for I must fare the same. Ye see the vastness of yon naval host, and the numbers of bronze clad warriors from Hellas, who can neither make their way to Ilium's towers nor raze the far-famed citadel of Troy, unless I offer thee according to the word of Calchas the seer. Some mad desire possesses the host of Hellas to sail forthwith to the land of the barbarians, and put a stop to the rape of wives from Hellas, and they will slay my daughters in Argos as well as you and me, if I disregard the goddess's behests. It is not Menelaus who hath enslaved me to him, child, nor have I followed wish of his; nay, 'tis Hellas, for whom I must sacrifice thee whether I will or no; to this necessity I bow my head; for her freedom must be preserved, as far as any help of thine, daughter, or mine can go; nor must they, who are the sons Hellas, be pillaged of their wives by barbarian robbery.

(Agamemnon rushes from the stage,)

Clytaemnestra My child! Ye stranger ladies!

Woe is me for this thy death! Thy father flies, surrendering thee to Hades.

Iphigenia Woe is me, O mother mine! for the same strain hath fallen to both of us in our fortune. No more for me the light of day! no more the beams of yonder sun! Woe for that snow-beat glen in Phrygia and the hills of Ida, where Priam once exposed a tender babe, torn from his mother's arms to meet a deadly doom, e'en Paris, called the child of Ida in the Phrygians' town. Would Priam ne'er had settled him, the herdsman reared amid the herds, beside that water crystal-clear, where are fountains of the Nymphs and their meadow rich with blooming flowers, where hyacinths and rose-buds blow for goddesses to gather! Hither one day came Pallas and Cypris of the subtle heart, Hera too and Hermes messenger of Zeus — Cypris, proud of the longing she causes; Pallas of her prowess; and Hera of her royal marriage with king Zeus — to decide a hateful strife about their beauty; but it is

my death, maidens — fraught, 'tis true, with glory to the Danai — that Artemis has received as an offering, before they begin the voyage to Ilium.

O mother, mother! he that begat me to this life of sorrow has gone and left me all alone. Ah! woe is me! a bitter, bitter sight for me was Helen, evil Helen! to me now doomed to bleed and die, slaughtered by an impious sire.

I would this Aulis had never received in its havens here the sterns of their bronze-beaked ships, the fleet which was speeding them to Troy; and would that Zeus had never breathed on the Euripus a wind to stop the expedition, tempering, as he doth, a different breeze to different men, so that some have joy in setting sail, and sorrow some, and others hard constraint, to make some start and others stay and others furl their sails! Full of trouble then, it seems, is the race of mortals, full of trouble verily; and 'tis ever Fate's decree that man should find distress. Woe! woe to thee, thou child of Tyndareus, for the suffering and anguish sore, which thou art causing the Danai!

Chorus I pity thee for thy cruel fate — a fate I would thou ne'er hadst met!

Iphigenia O mother that bare me! I see a throng of men approaching.

Clytaemnestra It is the goddess-born thou seest, child, for whom thou camest hither.

Iphigenia (Calling into the tent) Open the tent-door to me, servants, that I may hide myself.

Clytaemnestra Why seek to fly, my child?

Iphigenia I am ashamed to face Achilles.

Clytaemnestra Wherefore?

Iphigenia The luckless ending to our marriage causes me to feel abashed.

Clytaemnestra No time for affectation now in face of what has chanced. Stay then; reserve will do no good, if only we can —

(Enter Achilles.)

Achilles Daughter of Leda, lady of sorrows!

Clytaemnestra No misnomer that.

Achilles A fearful cry is heard among the Argives.

Clytaemnestra What is it? tell me.

Achilles It concerns thy child.

Clytaemnestra An evil omen for thy words.

Achilles They say her sacrifice is necessary.

Clytaemnestra And is there no one to say a word against them?

Achilles Indeed I was in some danger myself from the tumult.

Clytaemnestra In danger of what? kind sir.

Achilles Of being stoned.

Clytaemnestra Surely not for trying to save my daughter?

Achilles The very reason.

Clytaemnestra Who would have dared to lay a finger on thee?

Achilles The men of Hellas, one and all.

Clytaemnestra Were not thy Myrmidon warriors at thy side?

Achilles They were the first who turned against me.

Clytaemnestra My child! we are lost, undone, it seems.

Achilles They taunted me as the man whom marriage had enslaved.

Clytaemnestra And what didst thou answer them?

Achilles I craved the life of her I meant to wed —

Clytaemnestra Justly so.

Achilles The wife her father promised me.

Clytaemnestra Aye, and sent to fetch from Argos.

Achilles But I was overcome by clamorous cries.

Clytaemnestra Truly the mob is a dire mischief.

Achilles But I will help thee for all that.

Clytaemnestra Wilt thou really fight them single-handed?

Achilles Dost see these warriors here, carrying my arms?

Clytaemnestra Bless thee for thy kind intent!

Achilles Well, I shall be blessed.

Clytaemnestra Then my child will not be slaughtered now?

Achilles No, not with my consent at any rate.

Clytaemnestra But will any of them come to lay hands on the maid?

Achilles Thousands of them, with Odysseus at their head.

Clytaemnestra The son of Sisyphus?

Achilles The very same.

Clytaemnestra Acting for himself or by the army's order?

Achilles By their choice — and his own.

Clytaemnestra An evil choice indeed, to stain his hands in blood!

Achilles But I will hold him back.

Clytaemnestra Will he seize and bear her hence against her will?

Achilles Aye, by her golden hair no doubt.

Clytaemnestra What must I do, when it comes to that?

Achilles Keep hold of thy daughter.

Clytaemnestra Be sure that she shall not be slain, as far as that can help her.

Achilles Believe me, it will come to this.

Iphigenia Mother, hear me while I speak, for I see that thou art wroth with thy husband to no purpose; 'tis hard for us to persist in impossibilities. Our thanks are due to this stranger for his ready help; but thou must also see to it that he is not reproached by the army, leaving us no better off and himself involved in trouble. Listen, mother; hear what thoughts have passed across my mind. I am resolved to die; and this I fain would do with honour, dismissing from me what is mean. Towards this now, mother, turn thy thoughts, and with me weigh how well I speak; to me the whole of mighty Hellas looks; on me the passage o'er the sea depends; on me the sack of Troy; and in my power it lies to check henceforth barbarian raids on happy Hellas, if ever in the days to come they seek to seize her

daughters, when once they have atoned by death for the violation of Helen's marriage by Paris. All this deliverance will my death insure, and my fame for setting Hellas free will be a happy one. Besides, I have no right at all to cling too fondly to my life; for thou didst not bear me for myself alone, but as a public blessing to all Hellas. What! shall countless warriors, armed with shields, those myriads sitting at the oar, find courage to attack the foe and die for Hellas, because their fatherland is wronged, and my one life prevent all this? What kind of justice is that? could I find a word in answer? Now turn we to that other point. It is not right that this man should enter the lists with all Argos or be slain for a woman's sake. Better a single man should see the light than ten thousand women. If Artemis is minded to take this body, am I, a weak mortal, to thwart the goddess? Nay, that were impossible. To Hellas I resign it; offer this sacrifice and make an utter end of Troy. This is my enduring monument; marriage, motherhood, and fame — all these is it to me. And it is but right, mother, that Hellenes should rule barbarians, but not barbarians Hellenes, those being slaves, while these are free.

Chorus Thou playest a noble part, maiden; but sickly are the whims of Fate and the goddess.

Achilles Daughter of Agamemnon I some god was bent on blessing me, could I but have won thee for my wife. In thee I reckon Hellas happy, and thee in Hellas; for this that thou hast said is good and worthy of thy fatherland; since thou, abandoning a strife with heavenly powers, which are too strong for thee, has fairly weighed advantages and needs. But now that I have looked into thy noble nature, I feel still more a fond desire to win thee for my bride. Look to it; for I would fain serve thee and receive thee in my halls; and witness Thetis, how I grieve to think I shall not save thy life by doing battle with the Danaï. Reflect, I say; a dreadful ill is death.

Iphigenia This I say, without regard to anyone. Enough that the daughter of Tyndareus is causing wars and bloodshed by her beauty; then be not slain thyself, sir stranger, nor seek to slay another on my account; but let me, if I can, save Hellas.

Achilles Heroic spirit! I can say no more to this, since thou art so minded; for thine is a noble resolve; why should not one avow the truth? Yet will I speak, for thou wilt haply change thy mind; that thou mayst know then what my offer is, I will go and place these arms of mine near the altar, resolved not to permit thy

death but to prevent it; for brave as thou art, at sight of the knife held at thy throat, thou wilt soon avail thyself of what I said. So I will not let thee perish through any thoughtlessness of thine, but will go to the temple of the goddess with these arms and await thy arrival there.

(Exit Achilles.)

Iphigenia Mother, why so silent, thine eyes wet with tears?

Clytaemnestra I have reason, woe is me! to be sad at heart.

Iphigenia Forbear; make me not a coward; here in one thing obey me.

Clytaemnestra Say what it is, my child, for at my hands thou shalt ne'er suffer injury.

Iphigenia Cut not off the tresses of thy hair for me, nor clothe thyself in sable garb.

Clytaemnestra Why, my child, What is it thou hast said? Shall I, when I lose thee —

Iphigenia “Lose” me, thou dost not; I am saved and thou renowned, as far as I can make thee.

Clytaemnestra How so? Must I not mourn thy death?

Iphigenia By no means, for I shall have no tomb heaped o'er me.

Clytaemnestra What, is not the act of dying held to imply burial?

Iphigenia The altar of the goddess, Zeus's daughter, will be my tomb.

Clytaemnestra Well, my child, I will let thee persuade me, for thou sayest well.

Iphigenia Aye, as one who prospereth and doeth Hellas service.

Clytaemnestra What message shall I carry to thy sisters?

Iphigenia Put not mourning raiment on them either.

Clytaemnestra But is there no fond message I can give the maidens from thee?

Iphigenia Yes, my farewell words; and promise me to rear this babe Orestes to manhood.

Clytaemnestra Press him to thy bosom; 'tis thy last look.

Iphigenia O thou that art most dear to me! thou hast helped thy friends as thou hadst means.

Clytaemnestra Is there anything I can do to pleasure thee in Argos?

Iphigenia Yes, hate not my father, thy own husband.

Clytaemnestra Fearful are the trials through which he has to go because of thee.

Iphigenia It was against his will he ruined me for the sake of Hellas.

Clytaemnestra Ah! but be employed base treachery, unworthy of Atreus.

Iphigenia Who will escort me hence, before my hair is torn?

Clytaemnestra I will go with thee.

Iphigenia No, not thou; thou say'st not well.

Clytaemnestra I will, clinging to thy robes.

Iphigenia Be persuaded by me, mother, stay here; for this is the better way alike for me and thee; but let one of these attendants of my father conduct me to the meadow of Artemis, where I shall be sacrificed.

Clytaemnestra Art gone from me, my child?

Iphigenia Aye, and with no chance of ever returning.

Clytaemnestra Leaving thy mother?

Iphigenia Yes, as thou seest, undeservedly.

Clytaemnestra Hold! leave me not!

Iphigenia I cannot let thee shed a tear. (Exit Clytaemnestra. To the Chorus) Be it yours, maidens, to hymn in joyous strains Artemis, the child of Zeus, for my hard lot; and let the order for a solemn hush go forth to the Danaï. Begin the sacrifice with the baskets, let the fire blaze for the purifying meal of sprinkling, and my father pace from left to right about the altar; for I come to bestow on Hellas safety crowned with victory. Lead me hence, me the destroyer of Ilium's

town and the Phrygians; give me wreaths to cast about me; bring them hither; here are my tresses to crown; bring lustral water too. Dance to Artemis, queen Artemis the blest, around her fane and altar; for by the blood of my sacrifice I will blot out the oracle, if it needs must be.

O mother, lady revered! for thee shall my tears be shed, and now; for at the holy rites I may not weep.

Sing with me, maidens, sing the praises of Artemis, whose temple faces Chalcis, where angry spearmen madly chafe, here in the narrow havens of Aulis, because of me.

O Pelasgia, land of my birth, and Mycenae, my home!

Chorus Is it on Perseus' citadel thou callest, that town Cyclopean workmen build?

Iphigenia To be a light to Hellas didst thou rear me, and so I say not No to death.

Chorus Thou art right; no fear that fame will e'er desert thee!

Iphigenia Hail to thee, bright lamp of day and light of Zeus! A different life, different lot is henceforth mine. Farewell I bid thee, light beloved!

(Exit Iphigenia.)

Chorus Behold the maiden on her way, the destroyer of Ilium's town and its Phrygians, with garlands twined about her head, and drops of lustral water on her, soon to besprinkle with her gushing blood the altar of a murderous goddess, what time her shapely neck is severed.

For thee fair streams of a father's pouring and lustral waters are in store, for thee Achaea's host is waiting, eager to reach the citadel of Ilium. But let us celebrate Artemis, the daughter of Zeus, queen among the gods, as if upon some happy chance.

O lady revered, delighting in human sacrifice, send on its way to Phrygia's land the host of the Hellenes, to Troy's abodes of guile, and grant that Agamemnon may wreath his head with deathless fame, a crown of fairest glory

for the spearmen of Hellas.

(Enter Messenger.)

Messenger Come forth, O Clytaemnestra, daughter of Tyndareus, from the tent, to hear my news.

(Enter Clytaemnestra.)

Clytaemnestra I heard thy voice and am come in sad dismay and fearful dread, not sure but what thou hast arrived with tidings of some fresh trouble for me besides the present woe.

Messenger Nay, rather would I unfold to thee a story strange and marvellous about thy child.

Clytaemnestra Delay not, then, but speak at once.

Messenger Dear mistress, thou shalt learn all clearly; from the outset will I tell it, unless my memory fail me somewhat and confuse my tongue in its account. As soon as we reached the grove of Artemis, the child of Zeus, and the meadows gay with flowers, where the Achaean troops were gathered, bringing thy daughter with us, forthwith the Argive host began assembling; but when king Agamemnon saw the maiden on her way to the grove to be sacrificed, he gave one groan, and, turning away his face, let the tears burst from his eyes, as he held his robe before them. But the maid, standing close by him that begot her, spake on this wise, "O my father, here am I to do thy bidding; freely I offer this body of mine for my country and all Hellas, that ye may lead me to the altar of the goddess and sacrifice me, since this is Heaven's ordinance. Good luck be yours for any help that I afford! and may ye obtain the victor's gift and come again to the land of your fathers. So then let none of the Argives lay hands on me, for I will bravely yield my neck without a word."

She spake; and each man marvelled, as he heard the maiden's brave, unflinching speech. But in the midst up stood Talthybius — for his this duty was —

and bade the host refrain from word or deed; and Calchas, the seer, drawing a sharp sword from out its scabbard laid it in a basket of beaten gold, crowning the maiden's head the while. Then the son of Peleus, taking the basket and with it lustral water in his hand, ran round the altar of the goddess uttering these words, "O Artemis, thou child of Zeus, slayer of wild beasts, that wheelest thy dazzling light amid the gloom, accept this sacrifice, which we, the host of the Achaeans and king Agamemnon with us, offer to thee, even pure blood from a beauteous maiden's neck; and grant us safe sailing for our ships and the sack of Troy's towers by our spears."

Meantime the sons of Atreus and all the host stood looking on the ground, while the priest, seizing his knife, offered up a prayer and was closely scanning the maiden's throat to see where he should strike. 'Twas no slight sorrow filled my heart, as I stood by with bowed head; when lo! a sudden miracle! Each one of us distinctly heard the sound of a blow, but none saw the spot where the maiden vanished. Loudly the priest cried out, and all the host took up the cry at the sight of a marvel all unlooked for, due to some god's agency, and passing all belief, although 'twas seen; for there upon the ground lay a hind of size immense and passing fair to see, gasping out her life, with whose blood the altar of the goddess was thoroughly bedewed. Whereon spake Calchas thus — his joy thou canst imagine—"Ye captains of this leagued Achaean host, do ye see this victim, which the goddess has set before her altar, a mountain roaming hind? This is more welcome to her by far than the maid, that she may not defile her altar by shedding noble blood. Gladly has she accepted it and is granting us a prosperous voyage for our attack on Ilium. Wherefore take heart, sailors, each man of you, and away to your ships, for to-day must we leave the hollow bays of Aulis and cross the Aegean main."

Then, when the sacrifice was wholly burnt to ashes in the blazing flame, he offered such prayers as were meet, that the army might win return; but me Agamemnon sends to tell thee this, and say what Heaven-sent luck is his, and how he hath secured undying fame throughout the length of Hellas. Now I was there myself and speak as an eye-witness; without a doubt thy child flew away to the gods. A truce then to thy sorrowing, and cease to be wroth with thy husband; for God's ways with man are not what we expect, and those whom he loves, he keepeth safe; yea, for this day hath seen thy daughter dead and brought to life again.

(Exit Messenger.)

Chorus What joy to hear these tidings from the messenger! He tells thee thy child is living still, among the gods.

Clytaemnestra Which of the gods, my child, hath stolen thee? How am I to address thee? How can I be sure that this is not an idle tale told to cheer me, to make me cease my piteous lamentation for thee?

Chorus Lo! king Agamemnon approaches, to confirm this story for thee.

(Enter Agamemnon.)

Agamemnon Happy may we be counted, lady, as far as concerns our daughter; for she hath fellowship with gods in very sooth. But thou must take this tender babe and start for home, for the host is looking now to sail. Fare thee well! 'tis long ere I shall greet thee on my return from Troy; may it be well with thee!

Chorus Son of Atreus, start for Phrygia's land with joy and so return, I pray, after taking from Troy her fairest spoils.

(Exeunt OMNES.)