

SOPHOCLES

AJAX

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Ajax

by Sophocles





Ajax by Sophocles

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Contents

Dramatis Personæ

Ajax

Dramatis Personæ

Athena.

Odysseus.

Aias.

Chorus of Salaminians.

Tecmessa, concubine of Aias.

Messenger.

Teucer, half-brother of Aias.

Menelaus.

Agamemnon.

NOTE

In translating the choric parts of the play, the aim has been to reproduce as closely as possible the metrical pattern and phrasing of the original, in such a way that one musical setting would fit both the Greek and the English words.

Ajax

Dawn. Before the tent of Aias.

ATHENA

Son of Laertes, ever do I behold thee
 Scheming to snatch some vantage o'er thy foes.
 And now among the tents that guard the ships
 Of Aias, camped at the army's outmost verge,
 Long have I watched thee hunting in his trail,
 And scanning his fresh prints, to learn if now
 He be within or forth. Skilled in the chase
 Thou seemest, as a keen-nosed Spartan hound.
 For the man but now has passed within, his face
 And slaughterous hands streaming with sweat and blood.
 No further need for thee to peer about
 Inside these doors. But say what eager quest
 Is thine, that I who know may give thee light.

ODYSSEUS

Voice of Athena, dearest of Gods to me,
 How clearly, though thou be invisible,
 Do I hear thy call, and seize it with my soul,
 As when a bronze-mouthed Tyrrhene trumpet sounds!
 Rightly thou judgest that on a foe's trail,
 Broad-shielded Aias, I range to and fro.
 Him, and no other, I have long been tracking.
 This very night against us he has wrought
 A deed incredible, if in truth 'tis he.
 For we know nothing sure, but drift in doubt.
 Gladly I assumed the burden of this task.
 For not long since we found that our whole spoil
 Had been destroyed, both herds and flocks, slaughtered
 By some man's hand, their guardians dead beside them.
 Now 'tis on him that all men lay this guilt:
 And a scout who had seen him swiftly bounding
 Across the plain alone with reeking sword,
 Informed me and bore witness. I forthwith,
 Darting in hot chase, now pick out his tracks,
 But now, bewildered, know not whose they are.
 Timely thou comest. As in past days, so
 In days to come I am guided by thy hand.

ATHENA

I know it, Odysseus: so on the path betimes
 A sentinel friendly to thy chase I came.

ODYSSEUS

Dear mistress, do I labour to good purpose?

ATHENA

Know 'twas by yonder man these deeds were wrought.

ODYSSEUS

And why did he so brandish a frenzied hand?

ATHENA

In grievous wrath for Achilles' panoply.

ODYSSEUS

Why then upon the flocks did he make this onslaught?

ATHENA

Your blood he deemed it was that stained his hand.

ODYSSEUS

Was this outrage designed against the Greeks?

ATHENA

He had achieved it too, but for my vigilance.

ODYSSEUS

What bold scheme could inspire such reckless daring?

ATHENA

By night he meant to steal on you alone.

ODYSSEUS

Did he come near us? Did he reach his goal?

ATHENA

He stood already at the two chiefs' doors.

ODYSSEUS

What then withheld his eager hand from bloodshed?

ATHENA

'Twas I restrained him, casting on his eyes
 O'ermastering notions of that baneful ecstasy,
 That turned his rage on flocks and mingled droves
 Of booty yet unshared, guarded by herdsmen.
 Then plunging amid the thronging horns he slew,
 Smiting on all sides; and one while he fancied
 The Atreidæ were the captives he was slaughtering,
 Now 'twas some other chief on whom he fell.
 And I, while thus he raved in maniac throes,
 Urged him on, drove him into the baleful toils.
 Thereafter, when he had wearied of such labours,
 He bound with thongs such oxen as yet lived,
 With all the sheep, and drove them to his tents,
 As though his spoil were men, not hornèd cattle.
 Now lashed together in the hut he tortures them.
 But to thee too will I expose this madness,
 That seeing thou mayst proclaim it to all the Greeks.
 Boldly await him here, nor apprehend
 Mischance; for I will turn aside his eyes,
 Foiling his vision lest he see thy face.

Hearken, thou who art pinioning with cords
 The wrists of captives; hither, I bid thee, come.
 Thou, Aias, hear me: come to thy tent's door.

ODYSSEUS

What dost thou, Athena? Do not summon him forth.

ATHENA

Abide in silence. Earn not the name of coward.

ODYSSEUS.

Nay, by the Gods, let him remain within.

ATHENA

What dost thou dread? Was he not once a man?

ODYSSEUS

Yes, and to me a foeman, and still is.

ATHENA

To mock foes, is not that the sweetest mockery?

ODYSSEUS

I am content he should remain indoors.

ATHENA

To look upon a madman art thou afeard?

ODYSSEUS

Had he been sane, no fear had made me shrink.

ATHENA

Even now he shall not see thee, near as thou art.

ODYSSEUS

How so, if still with the same eyes he sees?

ATHENA

His orbs will I make dark, though vision is theirs.

ODYSSEUS

Well, all is possible, when 'tis a god contrives.

ATHENA

Stand then silent, abiding as thou art.

ODYSSEUS

Stay I must; yet I fain would be far hence.

ATHENA

Ho, Aias! Once again I summon thee.

So slight is thy regard for thine ally?

*[Aias appears in the tent door, with a blood-stained
 scourge in his hand.]*

AIAS

Oh hail, Athena! Hail thou Zeus-born maid!

Nobly hast thou stood by me. Now will I crown thee
With trophies all of gold for this rich conquest.

ATHENA

Thy words are welcome. But now tell me this:
Hast thou dyed well thy sword in the Argive host?

AIAS

Such vaunt is mine. I disclaim not that glory.

ATHENA

Against the Atreidæ didst thou arm thy hand?

AIAS

So that Aias nevermore shall they insult.

ATHENA

The men are dead, if rightly I take thy meaning.

AIAS

Yes, dead. Now let them rob me of my arms.

ATHENA

'Tis well. And what then of Laertes' son?
In what plight does he stand? Or has he escaped thee?

AIAS

Wouldst thou know where is that accursed fox?

ATHENA

Even so—Odysseus, thine old adversary.

AIAS

Goddess, a most dear captive in my tent
He sits. I do not mean him to die yet.

ATHENA

Till thou hast done what, gained what further vantage?

AIAS

Till bound fast to a pillar beneath my roof—

ATHENA

What evil wilt thou inflict on the poor wretch?

AIAS

His back the scourge must crimson ere he dies.

ATHENA

Nay, do not torture so the wretched man.

AIAS

Athena, in all else will I do thy will;
But his shall be no other doom than this.

ATHENA

Thou then, since thy delight is to act thus,
Smite, spare not, abate nought of thy intent.

AIAS

To my work I return: and thus I charge thee,
As now, so always fight thou upon my side.

[*Exit Aias.*]

ATHENA

Seest thou, Odysseus, how great the strength of gods?
Whom couldst thou find more prudent than this man,
Or whom in act more valiant, when need called?

ODYSSEUS

I know none nobler; and I pity him
In his misery, albeit he is my foe,
Since he is yoked fast to an evil doom.
My own lot I regard no less than his.
For I see well, nought else are we but mere
Phantoms, all we that live, mere fleeting shadows.

ATHENA

Warned therefore by his fate, never do thou
Thyself utter proud words against the gods;
Nor swell with insolence, if thou shouldst vanquish
Some rival by main strength or by wealth's power.
For a day can bring all mortal greatness low,
And a day can lift it up. But the gods love
The wise of heart, the froward they abhor.

[*Exeunt Athena and Odysseus.*]

[*Enter Chorus of Salaminians.*]

CHORUS

Son of Telamon, lord of Salamis' isle,
On its wave-washed throne mid the breaking sea,
I rejoice when fair are thy fortunes:
But whene'er thou art smitten by the stroke of Zeus,
Or the vehement blame of the fierce-tongued Greeks,
Then sore am I grieved, and for fear I quake,
As a fluttering dove with a scared eye.
Even so by rumour murmuring loud
Of the night late-spent our ears are assailed.
'Tis a tale of shame, how thou on the plains
Where the steeds roam wild, didst ruin the Danaan
Flocks and herds,
Our spear-won booty as yet unshared,
With bright sword smiting and slaughtering.
Such now are the slanders Odysseus forges
And whispers abroad into all men's ears,
Winning easy belief: so specious the tale
He is spreading against thee; and each new hearer
Rejoices more than he who told,
Exulting in thy degradation.
For the shaft that is aimed at the noble of soul

Smites home without fail: but whoe'er should accuse *me*
 Of such misdeeds, no faith would he win.
 'Tis the strong whom creeping jealousy strikes.
 Yet small men reft of help from the mighty
 Can ill be trusted to guard their walls.
 Best prosper the lowly in league with the great;
 And the great have need to be served by the less.
 But none to the knowledge of such plain truths
 May lead minds witless and froward.
 Even such are the men who murmur against thee:
 And vainly without thine aid, O King,
 We strive to repell their accusing hate.
 For whene'er they are safe from the scorn of thy glance,
 They chatter and screech like birds in a flock:
 But smitten with dread of the powerful vulture,
 Doubtless at once, should'st thou but appear,
 They will cower down dumbly in silence.

Was it the Tauric Olympian Artemis,
 (Oh, the dread rumour of woe,
 Parent of my grievous shame!)
 Who drove thee forth to slaughter the herds of the people,
 In wrath perchance for some unpaid-for victory,
 Whether defrauded of glorious spoil, or offerings
 Due for a stag that was slain?
 Or did the bronze-clad Demon of battle, aggrieved
 On him who scorned the might of his succouring spear,
 Plot revenge by nightly deception?

Ne'er of itself had thy heart, son of Telamon,
 Strayed into folly so far
 As to murder flocks and herds.
 Escape from heaven-sent madness is none: yet Apollo
 And Zeus avert these evil rumours of the Greeks.
 But should the story be false, these crafty slanders
 Spread by the powerful kings,
 And by the child of the infamous Sisyphid line,
 No more, my master, thus in the tent by the sea
 Hide thy countenance, earning an ill fame.

Nay, but arise from thy seat, where'er so long wrapt in
 Brooding pause from the battle thou hast lurked: arise,
 Heaven-high kindle the flame of death.
 But the insolence of thy foes boldly
 Thus wanders abroad in the wind-swept glens.
 Meanwhile all men mocking
 With venomous tongues taunt thee:
 But grief in my heart wanes not.

[*Enter Tecmessa.*]

TECMESSA

Liegemen of Aias, ship-companions,
 Ye children of earth-sprung Erechthid race,
 Lamentation is now our portion, to whom
 Dear is the far-off house of Telamon,
 Now that the stern and terrible Aias
 Lies whelmed by a storm
 Of turbid wildering fury.

CHORUS To what evil change from the day's woe now
 Has night given birth?
 Thou daughter of Phrygian Teleutas, speak;
 For a constant love has valiant Aias
 Borne thee, his spear-won prisoner bride.
 Then hide from us nought that thou knowest.

TECMESSA

How to utter a tale of unspeakable things!
 For disastrous as death is the hap you will hear.
 In the darkness of night madness has seized
 Our glorious Aias: he is ruined and lost.
 Hereof in the tent may proof be seen;
 Sword-slain victims in their own blood bathed,
 By his hand sacrificially slaughtered.

CHORUS

What tidings of the fiery warrior tellest thou,
 Not to be borne, nor yet to be disputed,
 Rumoured abroad by the chiefs of the Danaan host,
 Mightily still spreading and waxing!
 Woe's me! I dread the horror to come. Yea, to a public death doomed
 Will he die, if in truth *his* be the hand that wielded
 The red sword that in frenzy hath slain the herds and mounted herdsmen.

TECMESSA

Ah me! Thence was it, thence that he came to me
 Leading his captive flock from the pastures!
 Thereof in the tent some did he slaughter,
 Others hewed he asunder with slashing sword;
 Then he caught up amain two white-footed rams,
 Sliced off from the one both the head and the tongue,
 And flings them away;
 But the other upright to a pillar he binds,
 Then seizing a heavy horse-harnessing thong
 He smites with the whistling doubled lash,
 Uttering fierce taunts which an evil fiend,
 No mere mortal could have taught him.

CHORUS

'Tis time that nów eách with shamefully muffled head
 Forth from the camp should creep with stealthy footsteps.
 Nay, on the ship let us muster, and benched at the oars
 Over the waves launch her in swift flight.

Such angry threats sound in our ears hurled by the brother princes,
 The Atreidæ: and I quake, fearing a death by stoning,
 The dread portion of all who would share our hapless master's ruin.

TECMESSA

Yet hope we: for ceased is the lightning's flash:
 His rage dies down like a fierce south-wind.
 But now, grown sane, new misery is his;
 For on woes self-wrought he gazes aghast,
 Wherein no hand but his own had share;
 And with anguish his soul is afflicted.

CHORUS

Nay, if 'tis ceased, there is good cause to hope.
 Once 'tis past, of less moment is his frenzy.

TECMESSA

And which, were the choice thine, wouldst thou prefer,
 To afflict thy friends and feel delight thyself,
 Or to share sorrow, grieving with their grief?

CHORUS

The twofold woe, lady, would be the greater.

TECMESSA

Then we, though plagued no more, are undone now.

CHORUS

What mean thy words? Their sense is dark to me.

TECMESSA

Yonder man, while his spirit was diseased,
 Himself had joy in his own evil plight,
 Though to us, who were sane, he brought distress.
 But now, since he has respite from his plague,
 He with sore grief is utterly cast down,
 And we likewise, no less than heretofore.
 Are there not here two woes instead of one?

CHORUS

Yes truly. And I fear, from some god came
 This stroke; how else? if, now his frenzy is ceased,
 His mind has no more ease than when it raged.

TECMESSA

'Tis even as I said, rest well assured.

CHORUS

But how did this bane first alight upon him?
 To us who share thy grief show what befell.

TECMESSA

Thou shalt hear all, as though thou hadst been present.
 In the middle of the night, when the evening braziers
 No longer flared, he took a two-edged sword,
 And fain would sally upon an empty quest.

But I rebuked him, saying: "What doest thou,
 Aias? Why thus uncalled wouldst thou go forth?
 No messenger has summoned thee, no trumpet
 Roused thee. Nay, the whole camp is sleeping still."
 But curtly he replied in well-worn phrase:
 "Woman, silence is the grace of woman."
 Thus schooled, I yielded; and he rushed out alone.
 What passed outside the tent, I cannot tell.
 But in he came, driving lashed together
 Bulls, and shepherd dogs, and fleecy prey.
 Some he beheaded, the wrenched-back throats of some
 He slit, or cleft their chines; others he bound
 And tortured, as though men they were, not beasts.
 Last, darting through the doors, as to some phantom
 He tossed words, now against the Atreidæ, now
 Taunting Odysseus, piling up huge jeers
 Of how he had gone and wreaked his scorn upon them.
 Soon he rushed back within the tent, where slowly
 And hardly to his reason he returned.
 And gazing round on the room filled with havoc,
 He struck his head and cried out; then amidst
 The wrecks of slaughtered sheep a wreck he fell,
 And sat clutching his hair with tight-clenched nails.
 There first for a long while he crouched speechless;
 Then did he threaten me with fearful threats,
 If I revealed not all that had befallen him,
 Asking what meant the plight wherein he lay.
 And I, friends, terror-stricken, told him all
 That had been done, so far as I had knowledge.
 Forthwith he broke forth into bitter wailing,
 Such as I ne'er had heard from him before.
 For always had he held that such laments
 Befitted cowards only, and low-souled men:
 But uttering no shrill cries, he would express
 His grief in low groans, as of a moaning bull.
 But now prostrate beneath so great a woe,
 Not tasting food nor drink, he sits among
 The sword-slain beasts, motionless where he sank.
 And plainly he meditates some baleful deed,
 For so portend his words and lamentations.
 But, friends!—'twas for this cause I came forth—
 Enter and help, if help at all you can:
 For by friends' words men so bestead are won.

CHORUS

Child of Teleutas, fearful are thy tidings,
 That our prince has been maddened by his griefs.

AIAS [*Within*]

Alas! Woe, woe!

TECMESSA

Soon, I fear, worse will follow. Heard you not?
'Twas Aias. Oh, how dreadful was that cry.

AIAS

Alas! Woe, woe!

CHORUS

He seems either still frenzied, or else grieving
For his past frenzies, now he sees their work.

AIAS

Alas! My son, my son!

TECMESSA

Woe's me! Eurusakes, 'tis for thee he calls.
What can he purpose?—Where are thou?—Ah, woe!

AIAS

Teucer, come!—Where is Teucer? Will he never
Come back from cattle-raiding?—while I perish!

CHORUS

He seems in his right mind. But open the doors.
Perhaps even the sight of me may sober him.

*[She opens the doors. Aias is revealed sitting among
the slain beasts.]*

TECMESSA

See, I have opened. You may now behold
What he has done, and in what plight he lies.

AIAS

Alas!

My shipmates and friends, you that alone to me
Loyal and true remain, of all friends alone,
Behold how great a billow lately rising from the storm of blood
Surging around engulphs me!

CHORUS

Ah me, too true, it seems, was thy report.
This sight reveals the work of no sane mind.

AIAS

Alas!

My mates, skilled and tried in brave seamanship,
Ye who embarking drove the wave-cleaving oar,
In you, in you alone I see a help and refuge from despair.
Smite me, and spill my blood too.

CHORUS.

Keep silence from dread words; nor curing ill
By ill, so swell the misery of this curse.

AIAS

Behold now the bold, the man stout of heart,

Who ne'er shrank in fight agáinst fóes—behold
 How I have spent my rage on beasts that feared no harm
 Ah me, the mockery! To what shame am I brought low!

TECMESSA

Aias, my master, I entreat thee, speak not so.

AIAS

Away hence, I command thee! Take thyself elsewhere.
 Aiai! Aiai!

CHORUS

Oh, by the Gods, we pray thee, yield to wisdom's voice.

AIAS

Oh, wretch that I was to allow
 Those cursed foes to slip from my hands, and assaulting
 Horned kine and goodly flocks, madly to spill
 Their life in streams of dark blood!

CHORUS

Why still be afflicted, now the deed is done past cure?
 Never can these things be as though they had not been.

AIAS

Thou áll-spýing knave, of áll deéds of shame
 The prompt, easy tool, Odysseus the wise!
 Villain, of all the camp the most foul and vile!
 Huge laughter doubtless shakes thee now for sheer delight.

CHORUS

As God appoints, so every man laughs or laments.

AIAS

Would I might meet him, crushed and broken though I be.
 Alas! Woe, woe!

CHORUS

Speak no proud words. Seest thou not to what woe thou art sunk?

AIAS

Zeus, of my fathers the sire,
 Might I but kill that hateful and crafty dissembler,
 Yea, and those two brother kings, partners in pride,
 Then last myself too perish!

TECMESSA

If thus thou prayest, pray therewith for me, that I
 Die with thee. Why, when thou art dead, should I live on?

AIAS

Alas!
 Shadow that art my light!
 Erebus, oh to me verily bright as day!
 Receive, receive me yóur hábitant.
 Receive me now no more worthy to seek help of the gods,
 Nor any more from fellow mortal men to claim kindness:

No, but she the strong
 Zeus-born deity
 Miserably tortures me.
 Whither should I then flee?
 Whither seek for rest?
 Since my former glory is gone, my friends,
 With yonder victims, yonder spoils by frenzy won,
 Since all the host with swords uplifted
 Sternly would slay me.

TECMESSA

Ah, woe is me! from such a noble warrior
 To hear such words as once he ne'er had deigned to speak!

AIAS

Alas!
 Billowy paths of foam,
 Eddying caves, and ye coppices by the shore,
 A weary, weary time tarrying here
 Beneath the walls of Troy me have you kept, but from this hour
 Alive you shall not keep me. Truth I speak: let none doubt it.
 O Scamander's wave,
 Stream whose neighbouring flow
 Oft have the Argives blest,
 Never, nevermore
 Me shall you behold,
 Me, (a proud word will I utter now)
 Whose peer in battle Troy has never seen yet come
 From Hellas' land: but now dishonoured
 Thus am I prostrate.

CHORUS

In truth I know not how to restrain thy speech, nor yet
 To suffer it; so grievous is thy couch of woe.

AIAS

Aiai! Who ever would have thought my name
 Would harmonise so aptly with my woes?
 For now well may I wail that sound out twice,
 Yea thrice; such woeful destinies are mine,
 Whose father from this land of Ida won
 Fame's noblest guerdon over the whole host,
 And crowned with praises only sailed back home;
 But I, his son, who to the self-same Troy
 Came after him, in might no less than he,
 Nor rendering meaner service by my deeds,
 Dishonoured by the Argives perish thus.
 Yet this methinks I know for truth, were now
 Achilles living and called on to adjudge
 As the award of valour his own arms,
 No man's hand would have grasped them before mine.
 But now the Atreidæ to a scheming knave

Have dealt them, thrusting by my valiant deeds.
 And if these eyes, these wits had not in frenzy
 Swerved from my purpose, never would they thus
 Pervert judgment against another man.
 But the irresistible fierce-eyed goddess, even
 As I was arming my right hand to slay them,
 Foiled me, smiting me with a maddening plague,
 So that I stained my hand butchering these cattle.
 Thus my foes mock me, escaped beyond my reach,
 Through no goodwill of mine: but if a god
 Thwart vengeance, even the base may escape the nobler.
 And what should I now do, who manifestly
 To Heaven am hateful; whom the Greeks abhor,
 Whom every Trojan hates, and this whole land?
 Shall I desert the beached ships, and abandoning
 The Atreidæ, sail home o'er the Ægean sea?
 With what face shall I appear before my father
 Telamon? How will *he* find heart to look
 On me, stripped of my championship in war,
 That mighty crown of fame that once was his?
 No, that I dare not. Shall I then assault
 Troy's fortress, and alone against them all
 Achieve some glorious exploit and then die?
 No, I might gratify the Atreidæ thus.
 That must not be. Some scheme let me devise
 Which may prove to my aged sire that I,
 His son, at least by nature am no coward.
 For 'tis base for a man to crave long life
 Who endures never-varying misery.
 What joy can be in day that follows day,
 Bringing us close then snatching us from death?
 As of no worth would I esteem that man
 Who warms himself with unsubstantial hopes.
 Nobly to live, or else nobly to die
 Befits proud birth. There is no more to say.

CHORUS

The word thou hast uttered, Aias, none shall call
 Bastard, but the true offspring of thy soul.
 Yet pause. Let those who love thee overrule
 Thy resolution. Put such thoughts aside.

TECMESSA

O my lord Aias, of all human ills
 Greatest is fortune's wayward tyranny.
 Of a free father was I born the child,
 One rich and great as any Phrygian else.
 Now am I a slave; for so the gods, or rather
 Thy warrior's hand, would have it. Therefore since
 I am thy bedfellow, I wish thee well,
 And I entreat thee by domestic Zeus,

And by the embraces that have made me thine,
 Doom me not to the cruel taunts of those
 Who hate thee, left a bond-slave in strange hands.
 For shouldst thou perish and forsake me in death,
 That very day assuredly I too
 Shall be seized by the Argives, with thy son
 To endure henceforth the portion of a slave.
 Then one of my new masters with barbed words
 Shall wound me scoffing: "See the concubine
 Of Aias, who was mightiest of the host,
 What servile tasks are hers who lived so daintily!"
 Thus will men speak, embittering my hard lot,
 But words of shame for thee and for thy race.
 Nay, piety forbid thee to forsake
 Thy father in his drear old age—thy mother
 With her sad weight of years, who many a time
 Prays to the gods that thou come home alive.
 And pity, king, thy son, who without thee
 To foster his youth, must live the orphaned ward
 Of loveless guardians. Think how great a sorrow
 Dying thou wilt bequeath to him and me.
 For I have nothing left to look to more
 Save thee. By thy spear was my country ravaged;
 And by another stroke did fate lay low
 My mother and my sire to dwell with Hades.
 Without thee then what fatherland were mine?
 What wealth? On thee alone rests all my hope.
 O take thought for me too. Do we not owe
 Remembrance, where we have met with any joy?
 For kindness begets kindness evermore.
 But he who from whose mind fades the memory
 Of benefits, noble is he no more.

CHORUS

Aias, would that thy soul would feel compassion,
 As mine does; so wouldst thou approve her words.

AIAS

Verily my approval shall she win,
 If only she find heart to do my bidding.

TECMESSA

Dear Aias, in all things will I obey.

AIAS.

Then bring me here my son, for I would see him.

TECMESSA

Nay, but I sent him from me in my fears.

AIAS

During my late affliction, is that thy meaning?

TECMESSA

Lest by ill chance he should meet thee and so perish.

AIAS

Yes, that would have been worthy of my fate.

TECMESSA

That at least I was watchful to avert.

AIAS

I praise thine act and the foresight thou hast shown.

TECMESSA

Since that is so, what shall I do to serve thee?

AIAS

Let me speak to him and behold his face.

TECMESSA

He is close by in the attendants' charge.

AIAS

Why is his coming then so long delayed?

TECMESSA

My son, thy father calls thee.—Bring him thither
Whichever of you is guiding the child's steps.

AIAS

Is the man coming? Has he heard thy call?

TECMESSA

See, he is here already with the child.

[Enter Attendant with Eurusakes.]

AIAS

Lift him up, lift him hither. He will not shrink
In terror at sight of yonder new-spilt blood,
If he be rightly mine, his father's son.
Early must he be broken to his sire's
Stern rugged code, and grow like-natured with him.
son, mayst thou prove happier than thy father,
In all else like him, and thou'lt prove not base.
Yet even now might I envy thee herein,
That of these woes thou hast no sense at all.
For the life that is unconscious is most sweet—
Until we learn what joy and sorrow are.
But that once learnt, then midst thy father's foes
Thou must show what thou art, and of what breed.
Till then be nurtured on soft airs, cherishing
Thy tender life, and be thy mother's joy.
None of the Greeks, I know, will do thee wrong
With cruel outrage, even though I be gone.
So trusty a guardian will I leave thee, Teucer,
Who will not stint his loving care, though now
He is gone far away, in chase of foes.

But you, my warriors, comrades in seafaring,
 On you too I impose this task of love;
 And fail not to announce my will to Teucer,
 That to my home he take the child and show him
 To Telamon and my mother Eriboia,
 That henceforth he may comfort their old age.
 And charge him that no game-steward make my arms
 A prize for the Greeks—nor he who ruined me.
 But this take thou, my son Eurusakes;
 Hold it and wield it by its firm-stitched thong,
 This sevenfold spear-proof shield, whence comes thy name.
 But else with me my arms shall be interred.
 Come, take the child hence quickly, and bolt the doors:
 And let there be no weeping and lamenting
 Before the hut. Women love tears too well.
 Close quickly. It is not for a skilful leech
 To drone charms o'er a wound that craves the knife.

CHORUS

I am fearful, listening to this eager mood.
 The sharp edge of thy tongue, I like it not.

TECMESSA

O my lord Aias, what art thou purposing?

AIAS

Question me not. To be discreet is best.

TECMESSA

Ah me, heavy is my heart. Now by thy child,
 By the gods, I entreat, forsake us not.

AIAS

Vex me no further. Know'st thou not that I
 To the gods owe no duty any more?

TECMESSA

Utter no proud words.

AIAS

Speak to those who listen.

TECMESSA

Wilt thou not heed?

AIAS

Too much thou hast spoken already.

TECMESSA

Yes, through my fears, O king.

AIAS

Close the doors quickly.

TECMESSA For the gods' love, relent.

AIAS

'Tis a foolish hope,
If thou shouldst now propose to school my mood.

*[The doors are closed upon Aias. Exit Tecmessa
with Eurusakes.]*

CHORUS

O famed Salamis, thou amidst
Breaking surges abidest ever
Blissful, a joy to the eyes of all men.
But I the while long and wearily tarrying
Through countless months still encamped on the fields of Ida
In misery here have made my couch,
By time broken and worn,
In dread waiting the hour
When I shall enter at last the terrible shadow abode of Hades.

Now dismays me a new despair,
This incurable frenzy (woe, ah
Woe's me!) cast by the gods on Aias,
Whom thou of old sentest forth from thy shores, a strong
And valiant chief; but now, to his friends a sore grief,
Devouring his lonely heart he sits.
His once glorious deeds
Are now fallen and scorned,
Fallen to death without love from the loveless and pitiless sons of Atreus.

His mother, 'tis most like, burdened with many days,
And whitened with old age, when she shall hear how frenzy
Has smitten his soul to ruin,
Ailino! ailino!
Will break forth her despair, not as the nightingale's
Plaintive, tender lament, no, but in passion's wailing
Shrill-toned cries; and with firece strokes
Wildly smiting her bosom,
In grief's anguish her hands will rend her grey locks.

Yea, better Hell should hide one who is sick in soul,
Though there be none than he sprung from a nobler lineage
Of the war-weary Greeks, yet
Strayed from his inbred mood
Now amidst alien thoughts dwells he a stranger.
Hapless father! alas, bitter the tale that waits thee,
Thy son's grievous affliction.
No life save his alone
Of Aiakid kings such a curse has ever haunted.

[Enter Aias with a sword.]

AIAS

All things the long and countless lapse of time

Brings forth, displays, then hides once more in gloom.
 Nought is too strange to look for; but the event
 May mock the sternest oath, the firmest will.
 Thus I, who late so strong, so stubborn seemed
 Like iron dipped, yet now grow soft with pity
 Before this woman, whom I am loath to leave
 Midst foes a widow with this orphaned child.
 But I will seek the meadows by the shore:
 There will I wash and purge these stains, if so
 I may appease Athena's heavy wrath.
 Then will I find some lonely place, where I
 May hide this sword, beyond all others cursed,
 Buried where none may see it, deep in earth.
 May night and Hades keep it there below.
 For from that hour my hand accepted it,
 The gift of Hector, deadliest of my foes,
 Nought from the Greeks towards me hath sped well.
 So now I find that ancient proverb true,
 Foes' gifts are no gifts: profit bring they none.
 Therefore henceforth I study to obey
 The Gods, and reverence the sons of Atreus.
 Our rulers are they: we must yield. How else?
 For to authority yield all things most dread
 And mighty. Thus must Winter's snowy feet
 Give place to Summer with her wealth of fruits;
 And from her weary round doth Night withdraw,
 That Day's white steeds may kindle heaven with light.
 After fierce tempest calm will ever lull
 The moaning sea; and Sleep, that masters all,
 Binds life awhile, yet loosens soon the bond.
 And who am I that I should not learn wisdom?
 Of all men I, whom proof hath taught of late
 How so far only should we hate our foes
 As though we soon might love them, and so far
 Do a friend service, as to one most like
 Some day to prove our foe; since oftenest men
 In friendship but a faithless haven find.
 Thus well am I resolved. Thou, woman, pass
 Within, and pray the gods that all things so
 May be accomplished as my heart desires.
 And you, friends, heed my wishes as she doth;
 And when he comes, bid Teucer he must guard
 My rights at need, and withal stand your friend.
 For now I go whither I needs must pass.
 Do as I bid. Soon haply you shall hear,
 With me, for all this misery, 'tis most well.

[*Exit.*]

CHORUS

I thrill with rapture, flutter on wings of ecstasy.

Io, Io. Pan, Pan!
 O Pan, Pan! from the stony ridge,
 Snow-bestrewn of Cyllene's height
 Appear roving across the waters,
 O dance-ordering king of gods,
 That thou mayst join me in flinging free
 Fancy measures of Nysa and of Knosos.
 Yea for the dance I now am eager.
 And over the far Icarian billows come, king Apollo,
 From Delos in haste, come thou,
 Thy kindly power here in our midst revealing.
 Ares hath lifted horror and anguish from our eyes.
 Io, Io! Now again,
 Now, Zeus, can the bright and blithe
 Glory of happier days return
 To our swift-voyaging ships, for now
 Hath Aias wholly forgot his grief,
 And all rites due to the gods he now
 Fain would meetly perform with loyal worship.
 Mighty is time to dwindle all things.
 Nought would I call too strange for belief, when Aias thus beyond hope
 Hath learnt to repent his proud feuds,
 And lay aside anger against the Atreidæ.

[Enter Messenger.]

MESSENGER

My friends, these tidings I would tell you first:
 Teucer is present, from the Mysian heights
 But now returned, and in the central camp
 By all the Greeks at once is being reviled.
 As he drew near they knew him from afar,
 Then gathering around him one and all
 With taunts assailed him from this side and that,
 Calling him kinsman of that maniac.
 That plotter against the host, saying that nought
 Should save him; stoned and mangled he must die.
 And so they had come to such a pitch that swords
 Plucked from their sheaths stood naked in men's hands.
 Yet when the strife ran highest, it was stayed
 By words from the elders and so reconciled.
 But where is Aias? I must speak with him.
 He whom it most concerns must be told all.

CHORUS

He is not within, but has just now gone forth
 With a new purpose yoked to a new mood.

MESSENGER

Alas! Alas!
 Then too late on this errand was I sped
 By him who sent me; or I have proved too slow.

CHORUS

What urgent need has been neglected here?

MESSENGER

Teucer forbade that Aias should go forth
Outside his hut, till he himself should come.

CHORUS

Well, he is gone. To wisest purpose now
His mind is turned, to appease heaven's wrath.

MESSENGER

These words of thine are filled with utter folly,
If there was truth in Calchas' prophecy.

CHORUS

What prophecy? And what know you of this thing?

MESSENGER

Thus much I know, for by chance I was present.
Leaving the circle of consulting chiefs
Where sat the Atreidæ, Calchas went aside,
And with kind purpose grasping Teucer's hand
Enjoined him that by every artifice
He should restrain Aias within his tents
This whole day, and not leave him to himself,
If he wished ever to behold him alive.
For on this day alone, such were his words,
Would the wrath of divine Athena vex him.
For the overweening and unprofitable
Fall crushed by heaven-sent calamities,
(So the seer spoke,) whene'er one born a man
Has conceived thoughts too high for man's estate:
And this man, when he first set forth from home,
Showed himself foolish, when his father spoke to him
Wisely: "My son, seek victory by the spear;
But seek it always with the help of heaven."
Then boastfully and witlessly he answered:
"Father, with heaven's help a mere man of nought
Might win victory: but I, albeit without
Their aid, trust to achieve a victor's glory."
Such was his proud vaunt. Then a second time
Answering divine Athena, when she urged him
To turn a slaughterous hand upon his foes,
He gave voice to this dire, blasphemous boast:
"Goddess, stand thou beside the other Greeks.
Where I am stationed, no foe shall break through."
By such words and such thoughts too great for man
Did he provoke Athena's pitiless wrath.
But if he lives through this one day, perchance,
Should heaven be willing, we may save him yet.
So spoke the seer; and Teucer from his seat
No sooner risen, sent me with this mandate

For you to observe. But if we have been forestalled,
That man lives not, or Calchas is no prophet.

CHORUS

Woful Tecmessa, woman born to sorrow,
Come forth and hear this man who tells of a peril
That grazes us too close for our mind's ease.

[*Enter Tecmessa.*]

TECMESSA

Why alas do you break my rest again
After brief respite from relentless woes?

CHORUS

Give hearing to this messenger, who brings
Tidings that grieve me of how Aias fares.

TECMESSA

Ah me, what sayest thou, man? Are we undone?

MESSENGER

I know not of *thy* fortune; but for Aias,
If he be gone abroad, my mind misgives.

TECMESSA

Yes, he is gone. I am racked to know thy meaning.

MESSENGER

Teucer commands you to keep him within doors,
And not to let him leave his tent alone.

TECMESSA

And where is Teucer, and why speaks he thus?

MESSENGER

He has but now returned, and he forbodes
That this going-forth will prove fatal to Aias.

TECMESSA

Woe's me, alas! From whom has he learned this?

MESSENGER

From the seer, Thestor's son, this very day,
Which is fraught either with his death or life.

TECMESSA

Ah me, pay friends, avert this threatening doom!
Speed some of you to hasten Teucer hither:
Others go search the bays, some west, some east,
And track my lord's ill-omened going-forth.
Yes, now I know I have been deceived by him,
And from his former favour quite cast out.
Alas, child, what shall I do? Sit still I must not:
But far as I have strength I too will go.
Let us start quickly: 'tis no time for loitering,
If we would save one who is in haste to die.

CHORUS

I am ready, as not words alone shall prove,
But speed of act and foot to make words good.

*[The scene changes to a lonely place by the sea-shore,
Aias alone.]*

AIAS

The slayer stands so that his edge may cleave
Most surely, (if there be leisure for such thought,)
Being the gift of Hector, of all friends
Most unloved, and most hateful to my sight.
Then it is planted in Troy's hostile soil,
New-sharpened on the iron-biting whet.
And heedfully have I planted it, that so
With a swift death it prove to me most kind.
Thus have I made all ready. Next be thou
The first, Zeus, to aid me, as is right.
It is no mighty boon that I shall crave.
Send some announcer of the evil news
To Teucer, that he first may lift me up,
When I have fallen upon this reeking sword,
Lest ere he come some enemy should espy me
And cast me forth to dogs and birds a prey.
This, O Zeus, I entreat thee, and likewise call
On Hermes, guide to the underworld, to lay me
Asleep without a struggle, at one swift bound,
When I have thrust my heart through with this sword.
Next I call on those maidens ever-living
And ever watchful of all human miseries,
The dread swift-striding Erinues, that they mark
How by the Atreidæ I have been destroyed:
And these vile men by a vile doom utterly
May they cut off, even as they see me here.
Come, O ye swift avenging Erinues,
Spare not, touch with affliction the whole host.
And thou, whose chariot mounts up the steep sky,
Thou Sun, when on the land where I was born
Thou shalt look down, check thy gold-spangled rein,
And announce my disasters and my doom
To my aged sire and her who nurtured me.
She, woful woman, when she hears these tidings
Will wail out a loud dirge through all the town.
But I waste labour with this idle moan.
The act must now be done, and that with speed.
O Death, Death, come now and look upon me.—
No, 'tis there I shall meet and speak to thee.
But thee, bright daylight which I now behold,
And Helios in his chariot I accost
For this last time of all, and then no more.
O sunlight! O thou hallowed soil, my own

Salamis, stablished seat of my sire's hearth,
 And famous Athens, with thy kindred race,
 And you, ye springs and streams, and Trojan plains,
 Farewell, all ye who have sustained my life.
 This is the last word Aias speaks to you.
 All else in Hades to the dead will I say.

[He falls upon his sword.]

[Enter Semi-Chorus. 1.]

SEMI-CHORUS 1

'Tis toil on toil, and toil again.

Where! where!

Where have not my footsteps been?

And still no place reveals the secret of my search.

But hark!

There again I hear a sound.

[Enter Semi-Chorus. 2.]

SEMI-CHORUS 2

'Tis we, the ship-companions of your voyage.

SEMI-CHORUS 1

Well how now?

SEMI-CHORUS 2

We have searched the whole coast westward from the ship.

SEMI-CHORUS 1

You have found nought?

SEMI-CHORUS 2

A deal of toil, but nothing more to see.

SEMI-CHORUS 1

Neither has he been found along the path

That leads from the eastern glances of the sun.

CHORUS From whom, oh from whom? what hard son of the waves,

Plying his weary task without thought of sleep,

Or what Olympian nymph of hill or stream that flows

Down to the Bosphorus' shore,

Might I have tidings of my lord

Wandering somewhere seen

Fierce of mood? Grievous it is

When I have toiled so long, and ranged far and wide

Thus to fail, thus to have sought in vain.

Still the afflicted hero nowhere may I find.

TECMESSA

Alas, woe, woe!

CHORUS

Whose cry was it that broke from yonder copse?

[Enter Tecmessa.]

TECMESSA

Alas, woe is me!

CHORUS

It is the hapless spear-won bride I see,
Tecmessa, steeped in that wail's agony.

TECMESSA

I am lost, destroyed, made desolate, my friends.

CHORUS

What is it? Speak.

TECMESSA

Aias, our master, newly slaughtered lies
Yonder, a hidden sword sheathed in his body.

CHORUS

Woe for my lost hopes of home!
Woe's me, thou hast slain me, my king,
Me thy shipmate, hapless man!
Woful-souled woman too!

TECMESSA

Since thus it is with him, 'tis mine to wail.

CHORUS

By whose hand has he wrought this luckless deed?

TECMESSA

By his own hand, 'tis evident. This sword
Whereon he fell, planted in earth, convicts him.

CHORUS

Woe for my blind folly! Lone in thy blood thou lyest, from friends' help afar.
And I the wholly witless, the all unwary,
Forbore to watch thee. Where, where
Lyeth the fatally named, intractable Aias?

TECMESSA

None must behold him. I will shroud him wholly
In this enfolding mantle; for no man
Who loved him could endure to see him thus
Through nostrils and through red gash spouting up
The darkened blood from his self-stricken wound.
Ah me, what shall I do? What friend shall lift thee?
Where is Teucer? Timely indeed would he now come,
To compose duly his slain brother's corpse.
hapless Aias, who wast once so great,
Now even thy foes might dare to mourn thy fall.

CHORUS

'Twas fate's will, alas, 'twas fate then for thou
Stubborn of soul at length to work out a dark
Doom of ineffable miseries. Such the dire
Fury of passionate hate

I heard thee utter fierce of mood
 Railing at Atreus' sons
 Night by night, day by day.
 Verily then it was the sequence of woes
 First began, when as the prize of worth
 Fatally was proclaimed the golden panoply.

TECMESSA
 Alas, woe, woe!

CHORUS
 A loyal grief pierces thy heart, I know.

TECMESSA
 Alas, woe, woe!

CHORUS
 Woman, I marvel not that thou shouldst wail
 And wail again, reft of a friend so dear.

TECMESSA
 'Tis thine to surmise, mine to feel, too surely.

CHORUS
 'Tis even so.

TECMESSA
 Ah, my child, to what bondage are we come,
 Seeing what cruel taskmasters will be ours.

CHORUS
 Ah me, at what dost thou hint?
 What ruthless, unspeakable wrong
 From the Atreidæ fearest thou?
 But may heaven avert that woe!

TECMESSA
 Ne'er had it come to this save by heaven's will.

CHORUS
 Yes, too great to be borne this heaven-sent burden.

TECMESSA
 Yet such the woe which the dread child of Zeus,
 Pallas, has gendered for Odysseus' sake.

CHORUS
 Doubtless the much-enduring hero in his dark spy's soul exults mockingly,
 And laughs with mighty laughter at these agonies
 Of a frenzied spirit. Shame! Shame!
 Sharers in glee at the tale are the royal Atreidæ.

TECMESSA
 Well, let them mock and glory in his ruin.
 Perchance, though while he lived they wished not for him,
 They yet shall wail him dead, when the spear fails them.
 Men of ill judgment oft ignore the good

That lies within their hands, till they have lost it.
 More to their grief he died than to their joy,
 And to his own content. All his desire
 He now has won, that death for which he longed.
 Why then should they deride him? 'Tis the gods
 Must answer for his death, not these men, no.
 Then let Odysseus mock him with empty taunts.
 Aias is no more with them; but has gone,
 Leaving to me despair and lamentation.

TEUCER

Alas, woe, woe!

CHORUS

Keep silence! Is it Teucer's voice I hear
 Lifting a dirge over this tragic sight?

[Enter Teucer.]

TEUCER

O brother Aias, to mine eyes most dear,
 Can it be thou hast fared as rumour tells?

CHORUS

Yes, he is dead, Teucer: of that be sure.

TEUCER

Alas, how then can I endure my fate!

CHORUS

Since thus it is . . .

TEUCER

O wretched, wretched me!

CHORUS

Thou hast cause to moan.

TEUCER

O swift and cruel woe!

CHORUS

Too cruel, Teucer!

TEUCER

Woe is me! But say—
 His child—where shall I find him? Tell me where.

CHORUS

Alone within the tent.

TEUCER (*to Tecmessa*)

Then with all speed
 Go, bring him thither, lest some foe should snatch him
 Like a whelp from a lioness bereaved.
 Away! See it done quickly! All men are wont
 To insult over the dead, once they lie low.

[*Exit Tecmessa.*]

CHORUS

Yes, Teucer, while he lived, did he not charge thee
To guard his son from harm, as now thou dost?

TEUCER

O sight most grievous to me of all sights
That ever I have looked on with my eyes!
And hatefullest of all paths to my soul
This path that now has led me to thy side,
O dearest Aias, when I heard thy fate,
While seeking thee I tracked thy footsteps out.
For a swift rumour, as from some god, ran
Through the Greek host that thou wast dead and gone.
While yet far off I heard it, and groaned deep
In anguish; now I see, and my life dies.
Ay me!
Uncover. Let me behold woe's very worst.
O ghastly sight! victim of ruthless courage!
What miseries hast thou dying sown for me!
Whither, among what people, shall I go,
Who in thy troubles failed to give thee succour?
Oh doubtless Telamon, thy sire and mine,
With kind and gracious face is like to greet me,
Returned without thee: how else?—he who is wont
Even at good news to smile none the sweeter.
What will he keep back? What taunt not hurl forth
Against the bastard of a spear-won slave,
Him who through craven cowardice betrayed
Thee, beloved Aias—or by guile, that so
I might inherit thy kingdom and thy house.
So will he speak, a passionate man, grown peevish
In old age, quick to wrath without a cause.
Then shall I be cast off, a banished man,
Proclaimed no more a freeman but a slave.
Such is the home that waits me; while at Troy
My foes are many, my well-wishers few.
All this will be my portion through thy death.
Ah me, what shall I do? How draw thee, brother,
From this fell sword, on whose bright murderous point
Thou hast breathed out thy soul? See how at last
Hector, though dead, was fated to destroy thee!
Consider, I pray, the doom of these two men.
Hector, with that same girdle Aias gave him
Was lashed fast to Achilles' chariot rail
And mangled till he had gasped forth his life.
And 'twas from him that Aias had this gift,
The blade by which he perished and lies dead.
Was it not some Erinus forged this sword,
And Hades the grim craftsman wrought that girdle?
I at least would maintain that the gods plan
These things and all things ever for mankind.

But whosoever's judgment likes not this,
Let him uphold his doctrine as I mine.

CHORUS

Speak no more, but take counsel how to inter
Our dear lord, and what now it were best to say:
For 'tis a foe I see. Perchance he comes
To mock our misery, villain that he is.

TEUCER

What chieftain of the host do you behold?

CHORUS

Menelaus, for whose sake we voyaged hither.

TEUCER

'Tis he. I know him well, now he is near.

[*Enter Menelaus.*]

MENELAUS

You, Sir, I warn you, raise not yonder corpse
For burial, but leave it as it lies.

TEUCER

For what cause do you waste such swelling words?

MENELAUS

'Tis *my* will, and *his* will who rules the host.

TEUCER

Let us know then what pretext you allege.

MENELAUS

We hoped that we had brought this man from home
To be a friend and champion for the Greeks:
But a worse than Phrygian foe on trial we found him.
Devising death for the whole host, by night
He sallied forth against us, armed for slaughter.
And had not some god baffled this exploit,
Ours would have been the lot which now is his:
While we lay slain by a most shameful doom,
He would have still been living. But his outrage,
Foiled by a god, has fallen on sheep and herds.
Wherefore there lives no man so powerful
That he shall lay this corpse beneath a tomb;
But cast forth somewhere upon the yellow sands
It shall become food for the sea-shore birds.
Then lift not up your voice in threatening fury.
If while he lived we could not master him,
Yet in death will we rule him, in your despite,
Guiding him with our hands, since in-his life
At no time would he hearken to my words.
Yet 'tis a sign of wickedness, when a subject
Deigns not to obey those placed in power above him.
For never can the laws be prosperously

Stabllshed in cities where awe is not found;
 Nor may a camp be providently ruled
 Without the shield of dread and reverence.
 Yea, though a man be grown to mighty bulk,
 Let him look lest some slight mischance o'erthrow him.
 He with whom awe and reverence abide,
 Doubt not, will flourish in security.
 But where outrage and licence are not checked,
 Be sure that state, though sped by prosperous winds,
 Some day at last will founder in deep seas.
 Yes, fear should be established in due season.
 Dream not that we can act as we desire,
 Yet avoid payment of the price in pain.
 Well, fortune goes by turns. This man was fiery
 And insolent once: 'tis mine now to exult.
 I charge thee, bury him not, lest by that act
 Thou thyself shouldst be digging thine own grave.

CHORUS

Menelaus, do not first lay down wise precepts,
 Then thyself offer outrage to the dead.

TEUCER

Never, friends, shall I marvel any more,
 If one of low birth acts injuriously,
 When they who are accounted nobly born
 Can utter such injurious calumnies.
 [*To Menelaus.*]
 Come, once more speak. You say you *brought* him hither?
Took him to be a champion of the Greeks?
 Did he not sail as his own master, freely?
 How are *you* his chieftain? How have *you* the right
 To lord it o'er the folk he brought from home?
 As Sparta's lord you came, not as *our* master.
 In no way was it your prerogative
 To rule him, any more than he could you.
 As vassal of others you sailed hither, not
 As captain of us all, still less of Aias.
 Go, rule those whom you *may* rule: chastise *them*
 With proud words. But this man, though you forbid me,
 Aye, and your fellow-captain, by just right
 Will I lay in his grave, scorning your threats.
 It was not for the sake of your lost wife
 He came to Troy, like your toil-broken serfs,
 But for the sake of oaths that he had sworn,
 Not for yours. What cared *he* for nobodies?
 Then come again and bring more heralds hither,
 And the captain of the host. For such as you
 I would not turn my head, for all your bluster.

CHORUS

Such speech I like not, either, in peril's midst:
For harsh words rankle, be they ne'er so just.

MENELAUS

This Bowman, it seems, has pride enough to spare.

TEUCER

Yes, 'tis no mean craft I have made my own.

MENELAUS

How big would be your boasts, had you a shield!

TEUCER

Shieldless, I would outmatch you panoplied.

MENELAUS

How terrible a courage dwells within your tongue!

TEUCER

He may be bold of heart whose side right favours.

MENELAUS

Is it right that my assassin should be honoured?

TEUCER

Assassin? How strange, if, though slain, you live!

MENELAUS

Heaven saved me: I was slain in his intent.

TEUCER

Do not dishonour then the gods who saved you.

MENELAUS

What, I rebel against the laws of heaven?

TEUCER

Yes, if you come to rob the dead of burial.

MENELAUS

My own foes! How could I endure such wrong?

TEUCER

Did Aias ever confront you as your foe?

MENELAUS

He loathed me, and I him, as well you know.

TEUCER

Because to defraud him you intrigued for votes.

MENELAUS

It was the judges cast him, and not I.

TEUCER

Much secret villainy you could make seem fair.

MENELAUS

That saying will bring some one into trouble.

TEUCER

Not greater trouble than we mean to inflict.

MENELAUS

My one last word: this man must not have burial.

TEUCER

Then hear my answer: burial he shall have.

MENELAUS

Once did I see a fellow bold of tongue,
 Who had urged a crew to sail in time of storm;
 Yet no voice had you found in him, when winds
 Began to blow; but hidden beneath his cloak
 The mariners might trample on him at will.
 And so with you and your fierce railleries,
 Perchance a great storm, though from a little cloud
 Its breath proceed, shall quench your blatant outcry.

TEUCER

And I once saw a fellow filled with folly,
 Who gloried scornfully in his neighbour's woes.
 So it came to pass that someone like myself,
 And of like mood, beholding him spoke thus:
 "Man, act not wickedly towards the dead;
 Or, if thou dost, be sure that thou wilt rue it."
 Thus did he monish that infatuate man.
 And lo! yonder I see him; and as I think,
 He is none else but thou. Do I speak riddles?

MENELAUS

I go. It were disgrace should any know
 I had fallen to chiding where I might chastise.

TEUCER

Begone then. For to me 'twere worst disgrace
 That I should listen to a fool's idle blustering.

[*Exit Menelaus.*]

CHORUS

Soon mighty and fell will the strife be begun.
 But speedily now, Teucer, I pray thee,
 Seek some fit place for his hollow grave,
 Which men's memories evermore shall praise,
 As he lies there mouldering at rest.

[*Enter Tecmessa with Eurusakes.*]

TEUCER

Look yonder, where the child and wife of Aias
 Are hastening hither in good time to tend
 The funeral rites of his unhappy corpse.
 My child, come hither. Stand near and lay thy hand
 As a suppliant on thy father who begat thee.
 And kneel imploringly with locks of hair

Held in thy hand—mine, and hers, and last thine—
 The suppliant's treasure. But if any Greek
 By violence should tear thee from this corpse,
 For that crime from the land may he be cast
 Unburied, and his whole race from the root
 Cut off, even as I sever this lock.
 There, take it, boy, and keep it. Let none seek
 To move thee; but still kneel there and cling fast,
 And you, like men, no women, by his side
 Stand and defend him till I come again,
 When I have dug his grave, though all forbid.

[*Exit* Teucer.]

CHORUS

When will this agony draw to a close?
 When will it cease, the last of our years of exile?
 Years that bring me labour accurst of hurtling spears,
 Woe that hath no respite or end,
 But wide-spread over the plains of Troy
 Works sorrow and shame for Hellas' sons.

Would he had vanished away from the earth,
 Rapt to the skies, or sunk to devouring Hades,
 He who first revealed to the Greeks the use of arms
 Leagued in fierce confederate war!
 Ah, toils eternally breeding toils!
 Yea, he was the fiend who wrought man's ruin.

The wretch accurst, what were his gifts?
 Neither the glad, festival wreath,
 Nor the divine, mirth-giving wine-cup;
 No music of flutes, soothing and sweet:
 Slumber by night, blissful and calm,
 None he bequeathed us.
 And love's joys, alas! love did he banish from me.
 Here couching alone neglected,
 With hair by unceasing dews drenched evermore, we curse
 Thy shores, O cruel Ilium.

Erewhile against terror by night,
 Javelin or sword, firm was our trust:
 He was our shield, valiant Aias.
 But now a malign demon of fate
 Claims him. Alas! When, when again
 Shall joy befall me?
 Oh once more to stand, where on the wooded headland
 The ocean is breaking, under
 The shadow of Sunium's height; thence could I greet from far
 The divine city of Athens.

[*Enter* Teucer, *followed by* Agamemnon.]

TEUCER

In haste I come; for the captain of the host,
Agamemnon, I have seen hurrying hither.
To a perverse tongue now will he give rein.

AGAMEMNON

Is it you, they tell me, have dared to stretch your lips
In savage raillery against us, unpunished?
'Tis you I mean, the captive woman's son.
Verily of well-born mother had you been bred,
Superb had been your boasts and high your strut,
Since you, being nought, have championed one who is nought,
Vowing that no authority is ours
By sea or land to rule the Greeks or you.
Are not these monstrous taunts to hear from slaves?
What was this man whose praise you vaunt so loudly?
Whither went he, or where stood he, where I was not?
Among the Greeks are there no men but he?
In evil hour, it seems, did we proclaim
The contest for Achilles' panoply,
If come what may Teucer is to call us knaves,
And if you never will consent, though worsted,
To accept the award that seemed just to most judges,
But either must keep pelting us with foul words,
Or stab us craftily in your rage at losing.
Where such discords are customary, never
Could any law be stablished and maintained,
If we should thrust the rightful winners by,
And bring the rearmost to the foremost place.
But such wrong must be checked. 'Tis not the big
Broad-shouldered men on whom we most rely;
No, 'tis the wise who are masters everywhere.
An ox, however large of rib, may yet
Be kept straight on the road by a little whip.
And this corrective, I perceive, will soon
Descend on you, unless you acquire some wisdom,
Who, though this man is dead, a mere shade now,
Can wag your insolent lips so freely and boldly.
Come to your senses: think what you are by birth.
Bring hither some one else, a man born free,
Who in your stead may plead your cause before us.
For when *you* speak, the sense escapes me quite:
I comprehend not your barbarian tongue.

CHORUS

Would that you both might learn wisdom and temperance.
There is no better counsel I can give you.

TEUCER

Alas! how soon gratitude to the dead
Proves treacherous and vanishes from men's minds,
If for thee, Aias, this man has no more

The least word of remembrance, he for whom oft
 Toiling in battle thou didst risk thy life.
 But all that is forgotten and flung aside.
 Thou who but now wast uttering so much folly,
 Hast thou no memory left, how in that hour
 When, pent within your lines, you were already
 No more than men of nought, routed in battle,
 He alone stood forth to save you, while the flames
 Were blazing round the stern-decks of the ships
 Already, and while Hector, leaping high
 Across the trench, charged down upon the hulls?
 Who checked this ruin? Was it not he, who nowhere
 So much as stood beside thee, so thou sayest?
 Would you deny he acted nobly there?
 Or when again chosen by lot, unbidden,
 Alone in single combat he met Hector?
 For no runaway's lot did he cast in,
 No lump of clammy earth, but such that first
 It should leap lightly from the crested helm?
 His were these exploits; and beside him stood
 I, the slave, the barbarian mother's son.
 Wretch, with what face can you fling forth such taunts?
 Know you not that of old your father's father
 Was Pelops, a barbarian, and a Phrygian?
 That your sire Atreus set before his brother
 A feast most impious of his own children's flesh?
 And from a Cretan mother you were born,
 Whom when her father found her with a paramour.
 He doomed her for dumb fishes to devour.
 Being such, do you reproach *me* with my lineage?
 Telamon is the father who begat me,
 Who, as the foremost champion of the Greeks,
 Won as his bride my mother, a princess
 By birth, Laomedon's daughter: a chosen spoil
 She had been given him by Alcmena's son.
 Thus of two noble parents nobly born,
 How should I shame one of my blood, whom now,
 Laid low by such calamity, you would thrust
 Unburied forth, and feel no shame to say it?
 But of this be sure: wheresoever you may cast him,
 Us three also with him will you cast forth.
 For it beseems me in his cause to die
 In sight of all, rather than for the sake
 Of your wife—or your brother's should I say?
 Look then not to my interest, but your own.
 For if you assail me, you shall soon wish rather
 To have been a coward than too bold against *me*.

[*Enter* Odysseus.]

CHORUS

In good time. King Odysseus, hast thou come,
If 'tis thy purpose not to embroil but reconcile.

ODYSSEUS

What is it, friends? Far off I heard high words
From the Atreidæ over this hero's corpse.

AGAMEMNON

Royal Odysseus, but now from this man
We have been listening to most shameful taunts.

ODYSSEUS

How shameful? I could find excuse for one
Who, when reviled, retorts with bitter words.

AGAMEMNON

Yes, I repaid his vile deeds with reviling.

ODYSSEUS

What has he done thee whereby thou art wronged?

AGAMEMNON

He says he will not leave yon corpse unhonoured
By sepulture, but will bury it in my spite.

ODYSSEUS

May now a friend speak out the truth, yet still
As ever ply his oar in stroke with thine?

AGAMEMNON

Speak: I should be witless else; for thee
Of all the Greeks I count the greatest friend.

ODYSSEUS.

Then listen. For the gods' sake venture not
Thus ruthlessly to cast forth this man unburied:
And in no wise let violence compel thee
To such deep hate that thou shouldst tread down justice.
Once for me too this man was my worst foe,
From that hour when I won Achilles' arms;
Yet, though he was such towards me, I would not so
Repay him with dishonour as to deny
That of all Greeks who came to Troy, no hero
So valiant save Achilles have I seen.
So it is not just thou shouldst dishonour him.
Not him wouldst thou be wronging, but the laws
Of heaven. It is not righteousness to outrage
A brave man dead, not even though thou hate him.

AGAMEMNON

Thou, Odysseus, champion *him* thus against *me*?

ODYSSEUS

Yes; but I hated him while hate was honourable.

AGAMEMNON

Shouldst thou not also trample on him when dead?

ODYSSEUS

Atreides, glory not in dishonouring triumphs.

AGAMEMNON

'Tis hard for a king to act with piety.

ODYSSEUS

Yet not hard to respect a friend's wise counsel.

AGAMEMNON

A good man should obey those who bear rule.

ODYSSEUS

Relent. 'Tis no defeat to yield to friends.

AGAMEMNON.

Reflect who it is to whom thou dost this grace.

ODYSSEUS

This man was once my foe, yet was he noble.

AGAMEMNON

Can it be thou wilt reverence a dead foe?

ODYSSEUS

His worth with me far outweighs enmity.

AGAMEMNON

Unstable of impulse are such men as thou.

ODYSSEUS

Many are friends now and hereafter foes.

AGAMEMNON

Do you then praise such friends as worth the winning?

ODYSSEUS

I am not wont to praise a stubborn soul.

AGAMEMNON

Cowards you would have us show ourselves this day.

ODYSSEUS

Not so, but just men before all the Greeks.

AGAMEMNON

You bid me then permit these funeral rites?

ODYSSEUS

Even so: for I myself shall come to this.

AGAMEMNON

Alike in all things each works for himself.

ODYSSEUS

And for whom should I work, if not myself?

AGAMEMNON

Let it be known then as your doing, not mine.

ODYSSEUS

So be it. At least you will have acted nobly.

AGAMEMNON Nay, but of this be certain, that to thee

Willingly would I grant a greater boon.

Yet he, in that world as in this, shall be

Most hateful to me. But act as you deem fit.

[*Exit Agamemnon.*]

CHORUS

After such proof, Odysseus, a fool only

Could say that inborn wisdom was not thine.

ODYSSEUS

Let Teucer know that I shall be henceforth

His friend, no less than I was once his foe.

And I will join in burying this dead man,

And share in all due rites, omitting none

Which mortal men to noblest heroes owe.

TEUCER

Noble Odysseus, for thy words I praise thee

Without stint. Wholly hast thou belied my fears.

Thou, his worst foe among the Greeks, hast yet

Alone stood by him staunchly, nor thought fit

To glory and exult over the dead,

Like that chief crazed with arrogance, who came,

He and his brother, hoping to cast forth

The dead man shamefully without burial.

May therefore the supreme Olympian Father,

The remembering Fury and fulfilling Justice

Destroy these vile men vilely, even as they

Sought to cast forth this hero unjustly outraged.

But pardon me, thou son of old Laertes,

That I must scruple to allow thine aid

In these rites, lest I so displease the dead.

In all else share our toil; and wouldst thou bring

Any man from the host, we grudge thee not.

What else remains, I will provide. And know

That thou towards us hast acted generously.

ODYSSEUS

It was my wish. But if my help herein

Pleases you not, so be it, I depart.

[*Exit Odysseus.*]

TEUCER

'Tis enough. Too long is the time we have wasted

In talk. Haste some with spades to the grave:

Speedily hollow it. Some set the cauldron

On high amid wreathing flames ready filled
 For pious ablution.
 Then a third band go, fetch forth from the tent
 All the armour he once wore under his shield.
 Thou too, child, lovingly lay thy hand
 On thy father's corpse, and with all thy strength
 Help me to lift him: for the dark blood-tide
 Still upward is streaming warm through the arteries.
 All then who openly now would appear
 Friends to the dead, come, hasten forwards.
 To our valiant lord this labour is due.
 We have served none nobler among men.

CHORUS

Unto him who has seen may manifold knowledge
 Come; but before he sees, no man
 May divine what destiny awaits him.

THE END

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