[1] Release from this weary task of mine has been my plea to the gods throughout this long year's watch, in which, lying upon the palace roof of the Atreidae, upon my bent arm, like a dog, I have learned to know well the gathering of the night's stars, those radiant potentates conspicuous in the firmament, [5] bringers of winter and summer to mankind [the constellations, when they rise and set].

So now I am still watching for the signal-flame, the gleaming fire that is to bring news from [Troy](http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/entityvote?doc=Perseus:text:1999.01.0004:card=1&auth=perseus,Troy&n=1&type=place) and [10] tidings of its capture. For thus commands my queen, woman in passionate heart and man in strength of purpose. And whenever I make here my bed, restless and dank with dew and unvisited by dreams—for instead of sleep fear stands ever by my side, [15] so that I cannot close my eyelids fast in sleep—and whenever I care to sing or hum （and thus apply an antidote of song to ward off drowsiness）, then my tears start forth, as I bewail the fortunes of this house of ours, not ordered for the best as in days gone by. [20] But tonight may there come a happy release from my weary task! May the fire with its glad tidings flash through the gloom!

*The signal fire suddenly flashes out* Oh welcome, you blaze in the night, a light as if of day, you harbinger of many a choral dance in [Argos](http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/entityvote?doc=Perseus:text:1999.01.0004:card=1&auth=tgn,7010720&n=1&type=place) in thanksgiving for this glad event!

[25] Hallo! Hallo! To Agamemnon's queen I thus cry aloud the signal to rise from her bed, and as quickly as she can to lift up in her palace halls a shout of joy in welcome of this fire, if the city of [Ilium](http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/entityvote?doc=Perseus:text:1999.01.0004:card=1&auth=tgn,7002329&n=1&type=place) [30] truly is taken, as this beacon unmistakably announces. And I will make an overture with a dance upon my own account; for my lord's lucky roll I shall count to my own score, now that this beacon has thrown me triple six.

Ah well, may the master of the house come home and may [35] I clasp his welcome hand in mine! For the rest I stay silent; a great ox stands upon my tongue[1](http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?doc=Perseus%3atext%3a1999.01.0004#note36)—yet the house itself, could it but speak, might tell a plain enough tale; since, for my part, by my own choice I have words for those who know, and to those who do not know, I've lost my memory.*He descends by an inner stairway; attendants kindle fires at the altars placed in front of the palace. Enter the chorus of Argive Elders*

The stroke of Zeus” they may call it; his hand can be traced there. As he determines, so he acts. Someone said [370] that the gods do not trouble themselves to remember mortals who trample underfoot the grace of things not to be touched. But that man was impious!

Now it stands revealed! [375] The penalty for reckless crime is ruin when men breathe a spirit of pride above just measure, because their mansions teem with more abundance than is good for them. But let there be such wealth as brings no distress, enough to satisfy [380] a sensible man. For riches do not protect the man who in wantonness has kicked the mighty altar of Justice into obscurity.

But, O daughter of Tyndareos, Queen Clytaemestra, [85] what has happened? What news do you have? On what intelligence and convinced by what report do you send about your messengers to command sacrifice? For all the gods our city worships, the gods supreme, the gods below, [90] the gods of the heavens and of the marketplace, have their altars ablaze with offerings. Now here, now there, the flames rise high as heaven, yielding [95] to the soft and guileless persuasion of holy ointment, the sacrificial oil itself brought from the inner chambers of the palace. Of all this declare whatever you can and dare reveal, and be a healer of my uneasy heart. [100] This now at one moment bodes ill, while then again hope, shining with kindly light from the sacrifices, wards off the biting care of the sorrow that gnaws my heart.

I have the power to proclaim the augury of triumph given on their way [105] to princely men—since my age[1](http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?doc=Perseus%3Atext%3A1999.01.0004%3Acard%3D104#note107)still breathes Persuasion upon me from the gods, the strength of song—how the twin-throned command of the Achaeans, [110] the single-minded captains of [Hellas](http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/entityvote?doc=Perseus:text:1999.01.0004:card=104&auth=tgn,1000074&n=1&type=place)' youth, with avenging spear and arm against the Teucrian land, was sent off by the inspiring omen appearing to the kings of the ships—kingly birds, [115] one black, one white of tail, near the palace, on the spear-hand[2](http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?doc=Perseus%3Atext%3A1999.01.0004%3Acard%3D104#note117), in a conspicuous place, devouring a hare with offspring unborn [120] caught in the last effort to escape.[3](http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?doc=Perseus%3Atext%3A1999.01.0004%3Acard%3D104#note119)

Sing the song of woe, the song of woe, but may the good prevail!

[140] “Although, O Lovely One, you are so gracious to the tender whelps of fierce lions, and take delight in the suckling young of every wild creature that roams the field, promise that the issue be brought to pass in accordance with these signs, portents [145] auspicious yet filled with ill. And I implore Paean[1](http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?doc=Perseus%3Atext%3A1999.01.0004%3Acard%3D140#note146), the healer, that she may not raise adverse gales with long delay to stay the Danaan fleet from putting forth, [150] by urging another sacrifice, one that knows no law, unsuited for feast, worker of family strife, dissolving wife's reverence for husband. For there abides wrath— [155] terrible, not to be suppressed, a treacherous guardian of the home, a wrath that never forgets and that exacts vengeance for a child.”

Such utterances of doom, derived from auguries on the march, together with many blessings, did Calchas proclaim to the royal house; and in harmony with this,

Sing the song of woe, the song of woe, but may the good prevail!

[160] Zeus, whoever he may be,—if by this name it pleases him to be invoked, by this name I call to him—as I weigh all things in the balance, I have nothing to compare [165] save “Zeus,” if in truth I must cast aside this vain burden from my heart.

He[1](http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?doc=Perseus%3Atext%3A1999.01.0004%3Acard%3D167#note168) who once was mighty, swelling with insolence for every fight, [170] he shall not even be named as having ever existed; and he[2](http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?doc=Perseus%3Atext%3A1999.01.0004%3Acard%3D167#note171)who arose later, he has met his overthrower and is past and gone. But whoever willingly sings a victory song for Zeus, [175] he shall gain wisdom altogether,—

Zeus, who sets mortals on the path to understanding, Zeus, who has established as a fixed law that “wisdom comes by suffering.” But even as trouble, bringing memory of pain, drips over the mind in sleep, [180] so wisdom comes to men, whether they want it or not. Harsh, it seems to me, is the grace of gods enthroned upon their awful seats.

So then the captain of the Achaean ships, the elder of the two— [185] holding no seer at fault, bending to the adverse blasts of fortune, when the Achaean folk, on the shore over against [Chalcis](http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/entityvote?doc=Perseus:text:1999.01.0004:card=184&auth=perseus,Chalcis&n=1&type=place) [190] in the region where [Aulis](http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/entityvote?doc=Perseus:text:1999.01.0004:card=184&auth=perseus,Aulis&n=1&type=place)' tides surge to and fro, were very distressed by opposing winds and failing stores.

The breezes that blew from the Strymon, bringing harmful leisure, hunger, and tribulation of spirit in a cruel port, idle wandering of men, and sparing neither ship [195] nor cable, began, by doubling the season of their stay, to rub away and wither the flower of [Argos](http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/entityvote?doc=Perseus:text:1999.01.0004:card=192&auth=perseus,Argos&n=1&type=place); and when the seer, pointing to Artemis as cause, proclaimed to the chieftains another remedy, [200] more oppressive even than the bitter storm, so that the sons of Atreus struck the ground with their canes and did not stifle their tears—

[205] Then the elder king spoke and said: “It is a hard fate to refuse obedience, and hard, if I must slay my child, the glory of my home, and at the altar-side stain [210] a father's hand with streams of virgin's blood. Which of these courses is not filled with evil? How can I become a deserter to my fleet and fail my allies in arms? [215] For that they should with all too impassioned passion crave a sacrifice to lull the winds—even a virgin's blood—stands within their right. May all be for the best.”

But when he had donned the yoke of Necessity, with veering of mind, [220] impious, unholy, unsanctified, from that moment he changed his intention and began to conceive that deed of uttermost audacity. For wretched delusion, counsellor of ill, primal source of woe, makes mortals bold. So then he hardened his heart to sacrifice his daughter [225] so that he might further a war waged to avenge a woman, and as an offering for the voyage of a fleet!

For her supplications, her cries of “Father,” and her virgin life, [230] the commanders in their eagerness for war cared nothing. Her father, after a prayer, bade his ministers lay hold of her as, enwrapped in her robes, she lay fallen forward, [235] and with stout heart to raise her, as if she were a young goat, high above the altar; and with a gag upon her lovely mouth to hold back the shouted curse against her house—

Then, as she shed to earth her saffron robe, she [240] struck each of her sacrificers with a glance from her eyes beseeching pity, looking as if in a picture, wishing she could speak; for she had often sung where men met at her father's hospitable table, [245] and with her virgin voice would lovingly honor her dear father's prayer for blessing at the third libation[1](http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?doc=Perseus%3Atext%3A1999.01.0004%3Acard%3D238#note246)—

What happened next I did not see and do not tell. The art of Calchas was not unfulfilled. [250] Justice inclines her scales so that wisdom comes at the price of suffering. But the future, that you shall know when it occurs; till then, leave it be—it is just as someone weeping ahead of time. Clear it will come, together with the light of dawn.*Enter Clytaemestra*

**Chorus**  
I have come, Clytaemestra, in obedience to your royal authority; for it is fitting to do homage to the consort of a sovereign prince [260] when her husband's throne is empty. Now whether the news you have heard is good or ill, and you do make sacrifice with hopes that herald gladness, I wish to hear; yet, if you would keep silence, I make no complaint.

**Clytaemestra**  
As herald of gladness, with the proverb, [265] may Dawn be born from her mother Night! You shall hear joyful news surpassing all your hopes—the Argives have taken Priam's town!

**Chorus**  
What have you said? The meaning of your words has escaped me, so incredible they seemed.

**Clytaemestra**  
I said that [Troy](http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/entityvote?doc=Perseus:text:1999.01.0004:card=258&auth=perseus,Troy&n=1&type=place) is in the hands of the Achaeans. Is my meaning clear?

**Chorus**  
[270] Joy steals over me, and it challenges my tears.

**Clytaemestra**  
Sure enough, for your eye betrays your loyal heart.

**Chorus**  
What then is the proof? Have you evidence of this?

**Clytaemestra**  
I have, indeed; unless some god has played me false.

**Chorus**  
Do you believe the persuasive visions of dreams?

**Clytaemestra**  
[275] I would not heed the fancies of a slumbering brain.

**Chorus**  
But can it be some pleasing rumor that has fed your hopes?

**Clytaemestra**  
Truly you scorn my understanding as if it were a child's.

**Chorus**  
But at what time was the city destroyed?

**Clytaemestra**  
In the night, I say, that has but now given birth to this day here.

**Chorus**  
[280] And what messenger could reach here with such speed?

**Clytaemestra**  
Hephaestus, from Ida speeding forth his brilliant blaze. Beacon passed beacon on to us by courier-flame: Ida, to the Hermaean crag in [Lemnos](http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/entityvote?doc=Perseus:text:1999.01.0004:card=281&auth=tgn,7011173&n=1&type=place); to the mighty blaze upon the island succeeded, third, [285] the summit of [Athos](http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/entityvote?doc=Perseus:text:1999.01.0004:card=281&auth=tgn,7002722&n=1&type=place) sacred to Zeus; and, soaring high aloft so as to leap across the sea, the flame, travelling joyously onward in its strength  
\* the pinewood torch, its golden-beamed light, as another sun, passing the message on to the watchtowers of Macistus. [290] He, delaying not nor carelessly overcome by sleep, did not neglect his part as messenger. Far over Euripus' stream came the beacon-light and signalled to the watchmen on Messapion. They, kindling a heap of [295] withered heather, lit up their answering blaze and sped the message on. The flame, now gathering strength and in no way dimmed, like a radiant moon overleaped the plain of Asopus to Cithaeron's ridges, and roused another relay of missive fire. [300] Nor did the warders there disdain the far-flung light, but made a blaze higher than their commands. Across Gorgopus' water shot the light, reached the mount of Aegiplanctus, and urged the ordinance of fire to make no delay. [305] Kindling high with unstinted force a mighty beard of flame, they sped it forward so that, as it blazed, it passed even the headland that looks upon the Saronic gulf; until it swooped down when it reached the lookout, near to our city, upon the peak of Arachnaeus; and [310] next upon this roof of the Atreidae it leapt, this very fire not undescended from the Idaean flame.

Such are the torch-bearers I have arranged, completing the course in succession one to the other; and the victor is he who ran both first and last.[1](http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?doc=Perseus%3Atext%3A1999.01.0004%3Acard%3D281#note314) [315] This is the kind of proof and token I give you, the message of my husband from [Troy](http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/entityvote?doc=Perseus:text:1999.01.0004:card=281&auth=perseus,Troy&n=1&type=place) to me.

**Chorus**  
Lady, my prayers of thanksgiving to the gods I will offer soon. But as I would like to hear and satisfy my wonder at your tale straight through to the end, so may you tell it yet again.

**Clytaemestra**  
[320] This day the Achaeans hold [Troy](http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/entityvote?doc=Perseus:text:1999.01.0004:card=320&auth=perseus,Troy&n=1&type=place). Within the town there sounds loud, I believe, a clamor of voices which will not blend. Pour vinegar and oil into the same vessel and you will say that, as foes, they keep apart; so the cries of vanquished and victors greet the ear, [325] distinct as their fortunes are diverse. Those, flung upon the corpses of their husbands and their brothers, children upon the bodies of their aged fathers who gave them life, bewail from lips no longer free the death of their dearest ones, while these— [330] a night of restless toil after battle sets them down famished to break their fast on such fare as the town affords; not faring according to rank, but as each man has drawn his lot by chance. [335] And even now they are quartered in the captured Trojan homes, delivered from the frosts and dew of the naked sky, and like happy men will sleep all the night without a guard.

Now if they keep clear of guilt towards the gods of the town—those of the conquered land—and towards their shrines, [340] the captors shall not be made captives in their turn. Only may no mad impulse first assail the army, overmastered by greed, to pillage what they should not! For to win safe passage home they need to travel back the other length of their double course. [345] But even if, without having offended the gods, our troops should reach home, the grievous suffering of the dead might still remain awake—if no fresh disaster transpires. These are my woman's words; but may the good prevail clearly for all to see! [350] For, choosing thus, I have chosen the enjoyment of many a blessing.

**Chorus**  
Lady, you speak as wisely as a prudent man. And, for my part, now that I have listened to your certain proofs, I prepare to address due prayers of thanksgiving to the gods; for a success has been achieved that well repays the toil.

[355] Hail, sovereign Zeus, and you kindly Night, you who have given us great glory, you who cast your meshed snare upon the towered walls of [Troy](http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/entityvote?doc=Perseus:text:1999.01.0004:card=355&auth=perseus,Troy&n=1&type=place), so that neither old nor young could overleap [360] the huge enslaving net of all-conquering Destruction. Great Zeus it is, lord of host and guest, whom I revere—he has brought this to pass. He long kept his bow bent against Alexander [365] until his bolt would neither fall short of the mark nor, flying beyond the stars, be launched in vain.

**Chorus**  
“The stroke of Zeus” they may call it; his hand can be traced there. As he determines, so he acts. Someone said [370] that the gods do not trouble themselves to remember mortals who trample underfoot the grace of things not to be touched. But that man was impious!

Now it stands revealed! [375] The penalty for reckless crime is ruin when men breathe a spirit of pride above just measure, because their mansions teem with more abundance than is good for them. But let there be such wealth as brings no distress, enough to satisfy [380] a sensible man. For riches do not protect the man who in wantonness has kicked the mighty altar of Justice into obscurity.

[385] Perverse Temptation, the overmastering child of designing Destruction, drives men on; and every remedy is futile. His evil is not hidden; it shines forth, a baleful gleam. [390] Like base metal beneath the touchstone's rub, when tested he shows the blackness of his grain （for he is like a child who chases a winged bird） [395] and upon his people he brings a taint against which there is no defence. No god listens to his prayers. The man associated with such deeds, him they destroy in his unrighteousness.

And such was Paris, who came [400] to the house of the sons of Atreus and dishonoured the hospitality of his host by stealing away a wedded wife.

[405] But she, bequeathing to her people the clang of shield and spear and army of fleets, and bringing to [Ilium](http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/entityvote?doc=Perseus:text:1999.01.0004:card=403&auth=tgn,7002329&n=1&type=place) destruction in place of dowry, with light step she passed through the gates—daring a deed undareable. Then loud wailed the seers of the house crying, [410] “Alas, alas, for the home, the home, and for the princes! Alas for the husband's bed and the impress of her form so dear! He sits apart in the anguish of his grief, silent, dishonored but making no reproach. In his yearning for her who sped beyond the sea, [415] a phantom will seem to be lord of the house. The grace of fair-formed statues is hateful to him; and in the hunger of his eyes all loveliness is departed.