

# Euripides: HELENE

Translated by Andrew Wilson

*The scene is Egypt, at the tomb of Proteus*

*Helen is discovered onstage. Behind her is the gateway of the palace.*

HELEN: Geography first: the river is the Nile  
Beautiful, and undefiled.  
The soil of Egypt depends on it;  
We get no water from the sky:  
Ours comes from pure white snow,  
Which melts and floods the Egyptian plain.  
History: king of this land was Proteus. Now dead.  
He ruled from his palace on the isle of Pharos.  
He married one of the "girls from the deep" -  
A sea-nymph, Psamathe - when Aeacus had finished with her.  
She gave him two children, born here in the palace:  
A boy, Theoclymenus (who did not live up to  
The theological promise of his name), and  
A girl, the princess Eido, named for her beauty,  
Her mother's darling - as long as she was a child.  
When she was grown up - sexually mature -  
They changed her name to Theonoe:  
Theonoe, "the mind of god", because she turned out  
The theological one. She knows all the gods' plans  
Past, present and yet to come.  
A useful talent inherited from her grandfather Nereus

But I'm no Egyptian. Sparta (you've heard of it?)  
Was my home, and my father was Tyndareus.  
There's a rather silly story that Zeus  
Came to Leda, my mother, in a flap - literally!  
Disguised as a bird - a swan - with an eagle in pursuit.  
An intriguing excuse to get into bed with her!  
I was given the name ... Helen.  
May I tell you my sad story?  
Three goddesses came to Mount Ida, near Troy  
To find Paris. Beauty is what it was all about.  
Hera, Aphrodite, and Athena, Zeus' virgin daughter  
Wanted a decision.  
"Whose figure was best?"  
It was *my* beauty - if such an affliction can be called  
Beauty, which Aphrodite told Paris  
He could have - a sweetener to make sure  
She won.  
So Paris, leaving his Trojan cowsheds behind  
Arrived in Sparta; with one purpose:  
To bed me!  
Hera, however, vexed she hadn't won,  
Turned my "union" with Paris

Into air.

What king Priam's son got was not me,  
But a working replica modelled out of air.  
He thinks he has me, but he hasn't.  
She is a phantom.

And that is by no means all the harm that Zeus contrived.  
He made the wretched Greeks and Trojans go to war;  
With two objectives.

First: "to ease the weight of population that the earth  
is called to bear";

Second: "to give the best Greek warrior  
a chance to shine"!

The prize on offer in the Trojan conflict  
Was not me, but just my name.

Hermes swept me off in a blanket made of air  
And hid me in a cloud -

Zeus really did go to a lot of trouble -  
And set me down here, in Egypt.

He'd picked out Proteus for me -  
"the most self-controlled man in the world" -

So I could keep my bed a sex-free zone  
for Menelaus.

So here am I, while my miserable husband, poor Menelaus  
Raised an army and sailed to Troy;

To hunt down "the fiends who snatched his wife".

It's due to me so many lives were lost

There on Scamander's banks, and I

The innocent victim, am cursed.

All think I betrayed my husband

And sparked off the Great War.

Is there any point to my existence, you may well ask?

Hermes told me this:

I should one day return to my beloved Sparta

With my husband, who will know

I never went to Troy,

And that no one ever shamed my bed.

Anyway. As long as Proteus still lived

My marriage was not at risk.

But now he is buried in the darkness of the earth,

The dead man's son is plaguing me

To marry him.

That's why I'm clinging here to Proteus' tomb

For sanctuary. I'm faithful to my husband:

My bed's reserved for him.

Even if my name is cursed in Greece,

In Egypt my body shall stay pure.

*Enter TEUCER, A Greek sailor*

TEUCER: Who's the owner of this desirable residence, then?

Some millionaire, to go by the looks of it.

Or a royal palace? It's got enough rococo trimmings

And fancy bits on the roof. [ *He sees Helen* ]

Blimey!

Ye gods! Am I seeing things or what?

It's her double - the bloody bitch

Who ruined me and every lad in Greece.

You're Helen's spitting image -

And may the gods spit on you for reminding me of her.

Think yourself lucky this is some foreign place,

Or you'd have tasted one of my trusty arrows

For looking so much like *her*. [*He turns to go*]

HELEN: Wait! Who are you? Why do you turn away from me?

Why hate me for what that woman did?

TEUCER: Sorry. That was rude. I let my feelings get the better of me.

All Greeks loathe the daughter of Zeus.

Pardon me for what I said, lady.

HELEN: Who *are* you? Where are you from? How did you get here?

TEUCER: I was one of the poor bloody Greeks, ma'am.

HELEN: No wonder you hate Helen. From where in Greece? What's your name?

TEUCER: Teucer is my name, Telamon was my father, and I was reared in Salamis.

HELEN: What are you doing in Egypt?

TEUCER: I was thrown out of my home.

HELEN: I'm so sorry. Who by?

TEUCER: The last person you'd expect - my own father!

HELEN: What happened? Your tale sounds tragic.

TEUCER: Ajax - my brother - died at Troy; and that was the end of me.

HELEN: How? I assume it wasn't you who killed him?

TEUCER: He killed himself. Fell on his sword.

HELEN: What made him do it? Surely he couldn't have been in his right mind.

TEUCER: Have you heard of a man called Achilles, Peleus' son?

HELEN: Of course! He came once to ask ... Helen to marry him - or so I've heard.

TEUCER: His death sparked off a quarrel among his friends, over who was to get his armour.

HELEN: And how did this cause Ajax harm?

TEUCER: When someone else took the armour, he took his life.

HELEN: It's from your brother's tragedy, then, that your pain comes?

TEUCER: Because I didn't die along with him.

HELEN: So you were at Troy too?

TEUCER: Helped wreck the place, and became a wreck myself.

HELEN: It has been burned to the ground?

TEUCER: Utterly. Not a trace of where the walls once were.

HELEN: Wretched Helen. The Trojans met their doom through you.

TEUCER: So did the Greeks. It was a disaster for all involved.

HELEN: How long since the sack?

TEUCER: Seven years, or thereabouts.

HELEN: And how long had you been at Troy before that?

TEUCER: Ten years; although it seemed much longer.

HELEN: And the woman from Sparta, did you capture her?

TEUCER: Menelaus dragged her off by the hair.

HELEN: You saw this? Or just something you heard?

TEUCER: Clear as I see you now. Saw it with my own eyes.

HELEN: Your eyes can be deceived - fooled by the gods.

TEUCER: Don't give me that. Anyway, enough of her. Let's change the subject.

HELEN: [*persisting*] The evidence of the senses can be unreliable.

TEUCER: Look. I saw her with my eyes, then registered it with my brain. All right?

HELEN: So is she home now with her husband Menelaus?

TEUCER: No, not in Argos, nor in Sparta, neither.

HELEN: This is bad news. [*Quickly*] For those who care.  
TEUCER: He and his wife are posted missing.  
HELEN: Did the Greek fleet not sail in convoy, then?  
TEUCER: It did, but a storm split us all up.  
HELEN: Where did this happen?  
TEUCER: Halfway across the Aegean, in the open sea.  
HELEN: And no one saw Menelaus reach land?  
TEUCER: Right. He's dead; that's what they say in Greece.  
HELEN: [*aside*] Then all is lost. [*To Teucer*] Is Leda still alive?  
TEUCER: Leda, her mother? No, she's dead as well.  
HELEN: Helen's disgrace destroyed her, one presumes.  
TEUCER: That's what they say. Her ladyship hanged herself, at any rate.  
HELEN: Are the twins - Tyndareus' sons - alive or not?  
TEUCER: They are dead - and not dead. There are two versions.  
HELEN: Which is the favoured one? [*Aside*] O my god!  
TEUCER: They say they're gods, - turned into stars, the pair of them.  
HELEN: That's fine. But what's the other story?  
TEUCER: Suicide because of their sister. [*Briskly, after a pause*] Enough of the past.  
I've no wish to weep twice over.  
Now; the reason I've come here to the palace is this.  
I need to see the priestess Theonoe; maybe you could introduce me?  
Put in a word? [*Helen looks reluctant*]  
It's so as I can get directions to the island of Cyprus.  
That's where Apollo prophesied I'd find a home, and call it Salamis  
After the place where I was born.  
HELEN: The route is easy: you can't miss it.  
But you must leave here and be on your way  
Before the king, Proteus' son gets wind of you.  
He's off at the moment with his dogs on one of his beastly hunts.  
Any Greek he gets his hands on, he kills.  
Don't ask me to explain.  
I will not, and it would do no good if I did.  
TEUCER: Say no more, lady. Thanks for the tip-off!  
You're like Helen to look at, but underneath  
You're quite different. Damn her!  
I hope she never gets back to Sparta.  
But you, ma'am, may you be happy always. [*Exit*]

*Music.*

HELEN: Can I find the words  
Of pain to match  
The pain I feel?  
Sighs  
Groans  
Screams  
Inarticulate noise works best!

[*She screams*]

I need the mythic Sirens  
To orchestrate my grief,  
Set it to flute accompaniment,  
Or lyre, or pipes,  
Weeping in time with me.

Persephone - dark queen of death -  
Perhaps she has some harmonies  
To fit my mood,  
In rhythm with my throbs of agony,  
Matching pain with pain,  
Dirge with dirge.  
Music to scream to.  
So in the halls of night  
She could echo me,  
Sounding the funeral chant  
The only song enjoyed  
By lifeless corpses.

*Enter the CHORUS of Greek slavegirls*

CHORUS : By the blue Nile water  
I'd spread the purple clothes  
On the green papyrus fronds  
To dry in the golden sunlight,  
When I heard my mistress cry out  
Shriek piteously  
As at the news of death;  
Or as a mountain nymph  
Might have shrilled  
Cornered by Pan  
In some barren grotto  
Which echoes to her screams of rape.

HELEN: My friends; you were hunted from your homes in Greece  
Like animals.  
A Greek, a sailor came  
Came to bring tears  
To add to my tears.  
Troy's walls are rubble,  
Fire-reddened dust.  
The blame is mine -  
"mass-killer";  
The name is mine -  
"grave-filler."  
Leda (with a noose)  
In her agony  
At my shame  
Welcomed death.  
My husband, lost at sea  
Will not return.  
Castor and his twin  
Finest of their generation  
Are gone.  
The drumming of hooves as their horses went racing out over the plain,  
No more.  
No more  
The wrestling contests by the river's muddy edge.

CHORUS: Your fate brings tears to us as well, my lady.  
Your life has been  
No life at all.  
Unfair!  
Unfair since Zeus  
Came flashing through the sky  
Swan-winged  
"Snow-white"  
And found your mother's womb  
And fathered you.  
Your suffering is complete.  
You've suffered all life's pains.  
Your mother is dead.  
Your beloved brothers  
Twin sons of Zeus  
Are gone.  
You've lost your home  
And lost your reputation -  
Gossip in Greece has you, madam,  
Lounging in some foreign bed.  
Your husband's lost his life at sea.  
Once you brought such joy  
To your father's house,  
Helping in the ceremonies  
When the bronze door of Athena's temple was open.

HELEN: Who felled that pine  
Which brought the tears to Troy?  
The timber Priam's son  
Trimmed to build the fateful boat  
Which came with Trojans at the oar  
To my home  
In quest of my most cursed  
Beauty,  
To make it his  
Possession.  
And Aphrodite, scheming,  
Mass-killer,  
Are you satisfied  
With the catastrophe you caused?  
And Hera, Zeus' spoilt darling,  
Despatched their speedy  
Messenger boy.  
Hermes found me  
Picking fresh rose petals,  
Putting them in the folds of my dress  
To take to the temple with the bronze doors.  
He snatched me up,  
Sped through the air,  
Dumped me here  
In this parched unpleasant land.  
The purpose? For me to be the cause of war  
Disastrous war  
For Troy and Greece.  
Meanwhile on the banks of Simois my name

Becomes a word  
In dirty mouths  
For shame.

CHORUS: You have much to bear, I know.  
But what's happened cannot be helped.  
Best not to dwell on it.

HELEN: Bad luck is like something I'm married to:  
I can't get away from it.  
I've been handicapped - to judge by the way people stare -  
Since birth; and all my life I've lived under the shadow  
Of my deformity.  
Hera made it worse, but most of all I blame  
My "beauty".  
If only it could have been wiped off,  
Like a painting that's still wet,  
And I could have chosen an ugly face  
In place of of this "lovely" one,  
And the Greeks could forget the bad things which have happened,  
And remember good things instead!

When someone is victimised by the gods in one thing,  
It's hard, but it can be endured.  
I am beset with problems on all sides.  
First, I am not wicked, but people think I am.  
There's nothing worse than being innocent,  
But treated as guilty.  
Second, the gods transplanted me from my home  
To an uncouth country with peculiar ways,  
And severed from my friends I am a slave, my status gone.  
It's democratic in a way: we're all slaves except the king.  
One thing kept me sane:  
The hope my husband would appear and take me home.  
And now I must accept that he is dead.

My mother is dead, and "Helen killed her" -  
That is not right, but then I have no rights.  
My family's joy and mine, my daughter,  
Shrivels up, too old to find a husband now.  
The "sons of Zeus", so-called, the twins,  
Exist no more.  
And I am dead myself, although in fact I live!  
The final insult would be that, if I did get home,  
I'd find the door slammed in my face, since  
"Helen drowned with Menelaus on the way from Troy."

If he were alive, and we were to meet  
We would recognise each other by signs known only to ourselves.  
But, as he's dead there'll be no "recognition scene".  
Why go on living, you may ask? What future remains?  
Choose marriage to escape my problems,  
Move in with an Egyptian and be a pampered wife?  
But if a woman lives with an unsavoury man,  
Not even sex is any consolation.

Suicide is best.  
Can it be done with dignity?  
There's something distasteful about dangling from a noose -  
It's thought common even by slaves.  
The knife has a little more class - and it's quick and easy.  
How desperate I have become.  
Beauty brings happiness to other women - to me  
Just death.

CHORUS : Are you sure the man who was here was speaking the truth?

HELEN: Yes. He convinced me that my husband was dead.

CHORUS : Lies often have the ring of truth.

HELEN: Yes, and truth can sound like lies.

CHORUS : Why be pessimistic? Hope for the best!

HELEN: Fear envelopes me and drives me to expect the worst.

CHORUS : How much support do you have in the palace?

HELEN: They are all my friends, except the one who's pestering me to be his wife.

CHORUS : It's obvious what you have to do: leave the tomb.

HELEN: What sort of advice is this? Abandon my refuge?

CHORUS : Go to the house of the virgin granddaughter of Nereus,  
Theonoe, who knows all things.

Ask her about Menelaus, whether he's alive or not.

Then when you know for certain you can celebrate - or mourn.

What's the point of grieving before you know the truth?

Trust me. Leave the tomb, and go to Theonoe.

You've got someone in the palace who can tell you everything -

Why look elsewhere? I'd be happy to go with you,

And help you ask the questions.

Women *should* stick together, and help each other out.

### *Music*

HELEN: Sisters: I welcome your advice.

Come on! Come in

To the palace.

Let's know the worst.

CHORUS : I'm ready to follow.

HELEN: O bitter day!

How will she phrase it?

What words precisely will move me to tears?

CHORUS : Wait till you're certain, don't jump to conclusions.

HELEN: What is my wretched husband's fate?

Does he still see the light?

The sun's four-horsed chariot?

The stars in their courses?

Or is he now among the dead below the earth

Where he will stay

Forever?

CHORUS : Make the best of the future,

Whatever it holds.

HELEN: Listen to me!

Eurotas, my river in Sparta,

Your banks so green with sedge!

I swear by you



If the news that said  
"your husband's dead"  
Is true ...  
I feel none of this is making sense...  
I shall twist  
A bloody noose  
Around my neck  
Or else  
I'll slit my throat  
And let the blood  
Run free, as sacrifice  
To the three goddesses  
And Priam's son,  
Paris, the "innocent shepherd boy".  
CHORUS : No need for this, your news could yet be good.  
HELEN: Unhappy Troy!  
As you fell  
You suffered agonies,  
Unspeakable atrocities.  
Aphrodite brought me to you  
As a present, gift-wrapped:  
I gave you blood and more blood,  
I gave you tears and more tears.  
Mothers lost sons,  
Sisters cut their lovely hair for brothers  
Killed by Scamander's flood.

Greece, too, screamed for her dead,  
Pounded her head with her fists  
Ripped her soft cheeks with her nails  
Till the blood streamed down her face.

That time in Arcadia, Callisto,  
How happy you were!  
When *you* were lured to Zeus' bed  
Your beauty was transformed,  
You became a bear, soft-coated, gentle-eyed  
And were released from pain!  
How different from my mother's fate!

You, too, were lucky, daughter of Merops.  
Because of your overpowering loveliness  
Artemis changed you to a deer  
With golden antlers.

Only my beauty is lethal.  
Lethal to Troy. Lethal to Greece.

*Enter MENELAUS. He is wearing an extremely scanty costume: the rags which are all that are left of his once splendid royal robes. His attire seems to be causing him some embarrassment.*

MENELAUS : [*with a groan*] Pelops, who outsmarted Oenomaus all those years ago  
At Pisa in that four-horse chariot race!  
I wish when your father persuaded you to be cooked up as a meal for the gods,  
They'd just eaten you, before you could father Atreus.

Atreus then would not have mated with Aerope,  
And would not have sired that celebrated double-act:  
Agamemnon and myself, Menelaus.

Actually, my opinion is that *I* did most of the work in getting our fleet to Troy;  
This is a fact, not boasting, because I was no dictator conscripting troops,  
But *my* men were a band of gallant volunteers.  
There were casualties, of course - I have a list -  
But others made it back across the sea  
With useful data on their missing comrades.

Since I sacked the towers of Ilium, I have been a wild rover  
O'er the glassy waters of the billowing main,  
And I'm beginning to wonder whether the gods  
Actually want me to reach home.  
I've sailed every inch of the Libyan coast -  
Not that there's anything to see except sand  
And unfriendly natives.  
Whenever I do get in sight of home, the ruddy wind changes  
And blows me right back again.  
I never seem to get the breeze to fill  
My sail and take me home to Greece.

And now I've been shipwrecked, lost my friends,  
And landed in this place.  
My ship is matchwood, splintered on the rocks.  
The steering oar was intact - rather a fine piece of workmanship actually -  
And on this, painfully and - to be frank - unexpectedly,  
I got safe to shore,  
With Helen whom I dragged away from Troy.

What the name of this place is and who lives here  
I haven't the faintest idea.  
I've felt embarrassed to actually go and ask anyone,  
In view of the somewhat indecent nature of my clothing.  
When a top person has bad luck,  
It's far worse for him than for ordinary folk  
Who are probably used to it.

But now there's not much choice. I've got no food  
And no clothes.  
This scrap of cloth I'm wearing as I'm sure you'll guess  
Is something saved from the shipwreck.  
The sea took my normal wardrobe which contained  
Some pretty smart items, I don't mind saying.

As for the woman who's the root of all my troubles,  
I've hidden her in a cave, with my colleagues - what's left of 'em -  
On guard; instructed to keep a strict eye on her.  
I'm here alone; hoping to sniff out some necessities for the others.

When I spotted this grandiose piece of architecture with its imposing gateway -  
Obviously belongs to a man of substance - I approached.  
A mansion like this will hopefully be able to spare something  
For my sailors.

One can't expect much help from poor people,  
However well-intentioned they might be.

Hullo! Is there a porter on duty?

Someone to announce me and tell them of my pitiful plight?

OLD WOMAN: [*within*] Who's at the door? Go away! Stop cluttering up the porch  
And disturbing your betters! You sound like a Greek:

We don't have no truck with Greeks.

We kill all Greeks on sight.

MENELAUS : Of course, madam, of course. I quite understand.

But can't I persuade you just to take a message?

OLD WOMAN: [*opening the door*] Go away! My orders, "sir", is to let no Greek  
Near this door. [*She pushes him off*]

MENELAUS : I say! No need to poke your finger and shove me about.

OLD WOMAN: Your own fault. Should've done what I said.

MENELAUS : Kindly take a message to your superiors...

OLD WOMAN: Fine reception I'd get from them!

MENELAUS : I've been shipwrecked. I'm claiming asylum.

OLD WOMAN: Go and bother some other house!

MENELAUS : No! I'm coming in! Do as I tell you!

OLD WOMAN: Now, don't be a nuisance, or I'll have you removed by force.

MENELAUS : Where is my army when I need it?

OLD WOMAN: You may be a big man at home, here you're nobody.

MENELAUS : Gods! See how they treat me. [*he weeps*]

OLD WOMAN: What are you crying for? You'll get no sympathy from me!

MENELAUS : Just thinking how I've come down in the world.

OLD WOMAN: Why don't you go and do your weeping for someone who might appreciate it?

MENELAUS : What is this country? Whose palace is it?

OLD WOMAN: Proteus'. Egypt.

MENELAUS : Egypt? My god! What a place to end up!

OLD WOMAN: What have you got against Egypt?

MENELAUS : Nothing. Just feeling sorry for myself.

OLD WOMAN: You're not the only one with problems.

MENELAUS : Is the king, what's 'is name, at home?

OLD WOMAN: This is his grave - his son's in charge now.

MENELAUS : And would he by any chance be in?

OLD WOMAN: No. He hates Greeks, anyway.

MENELAUS : Why?

OLD WOMAN: Because Helen, daughter of Zeus lives here.

MENELAUS : Sorry? What did you say? Repeat what you said.

OLD WOMAN: Helen of Sparta. Daughter of Tyndareus.

MENELAUS : [*to himself*] It doesn't make sense. Where did she come from?

OLD WOMAN: From Sparta!

MENELAUS : When? [*aside*] Surely she couldn't have escaped from the cave  
Without our noticing?

OLD WOMAN: Before the Greeks sailed to Troy!  
Move away from the house.

We've got a panic on in the palace; you couldn't have come at a worse time.

If the master catches you, the only hospitality you'll get

Is your throat cut.

I've nothing against Greeks myself.

I gave you a mouthful because I'm doing my job -

And because I'm scared of the master. [*Exit*]

MENELAUS : Well! I'm baffled - don't know what to say.  
Listening to her, I've got a whole new set of problems.  
I rescued my wife from Troy, I left her in a cave, and I came here.  
Can it be there's a person living in the palace  
With the same name as my wife?  
But she said "daughter of Zeus".  
Perhaps there's a chap called Zeus living on the banks of the Nile.  
No. There's only one Zeus, the one in heaven.  
Is there another Sparta, apart from the one where  
[wistfully] sweet Eurotas runs softly through the reeds?  
And surely there's only one man called Tyndareus?  
Could there be another place called Sparta, another Troy?  
I'm totally confused.  
I suppose when you come down to it lots of men in different countries  
Must have the same name - women, too, and towns.  
Not surprising, really.  
And there's nothing to be afraid of in a bit of servant's bluster.  
No man could be so uncivilised as to refuse me food,  
Once he hears my name. [*He is oblivious of the irony*]  
The fire of Troy is famous,  
And I am the man who lit it!  
A man who's name is known around the world:  
Menelaus!

I shall await the master of the house.  
There are two schemes I have in mind:  
Plan A: if he does turn out to be some monster,  
I'll hide and slip back to the wreck.  
If he seems at all sympathetic, then Plan B:  
Ask him for the supplies I need.

The worst part of this whole business for me is  
Being a king myself, to have to grovel  
To a fellow royal.  
But - "beggars can't be choosers". Hardly an original proverb,  
But wise words indeed.

CHORUS : The prophetess told Helen  
Just what she wanted to hear!  
Menelaus has not yet gone  
To the land of dark  
Below the earth.  
Nor yet  
Is he safe in harbour  
In his native land,  
But wanders still  
Friendless  
Poor man  
Tossed by the salt sea waves.

HELEN: I'm on my way back to the tomb.  
I've had amazing news from Theonoë.  
She really does know everything! She says...  
My husband is alive. He is not dead.  
(She has this tendency to say everything twice.)

He's sailed a thousand voyages, and wanders still  
 To this place, to that place, and is quite experienced in travelling, and  
 He will be coming here when it's all over!  
 She didn't say whether he'd get away again -  
 That would have been nice to know:  
 But I didn't like to cross-question her  
 As I was so happy just to know he's safe!  
 She said he was quite close.  
 He's been shipwrecked with just a few of his men. [*pause*]  
 O god! When will you be here?  
 I can't say how I'm longing to see you.  
 [*She sees him*]  
 Oh! Who is that? There's a man hiding!  
 It's that disgusting son of Proteus - one of his little tricks!  
 I'll have to dash for the tomb. Can I make it?  
 I'd need to be a racehorse, or have supernatural speed.  
 He's a savage, look at him!  
 The hunt is on, and I'm the prey.  
 [*She sprints for the tomb.*]  
 MENELAUS : [*intercepting her*] Whoah!  
 What's the strange attraction of this tomb -  
 Minor architectural masterpiece though it may be?  
 Keep still, I won't hurt you. [*He releases her*]  
 Now I can see you properly!  
 I don't believe my eyes! I don't know what to say!  
 HELEN: Help, women! There's a man stopping me getting to the tomb!  
 Because I won't marry him, the king has sent this fellow  
 To grab me and take me to him by force!  
 MENELAUS : I'm not a criminal. I'm a thoroughly respectable man.  
 HELEN: You're not exactly dressed like one! [*she dodges past him to the tomb*]  
 MENELAUS : No need to be afraid. Don't run away.  
 HELEN: I'll stay here, thank you; now I'm at the tomb I'm safe.  
 MENELAUS : Who are you? Your face is so familiar.  
 HELEN: I could equally ask the same question. Who are you?  
 MENELAUS : I've never seen anyone look so much like someone else.  
 HELEN: My god! I think I recognise someone I know!  
 MENELAUS : Are you a Hellene or a local girl?  
 HELEN: Hellene! And you?  
 MENELAUS : Helen - you are so very much like her, my dear.  
 HELEN: And you are just like - Menelaus! The words won't come.  
 MENELAUS : You have identified me correctly, despite my sorry state.  
 HELEN: I've waited so long for this moment. Come to my arms, your wife's loving arms.  
 MENELAUS : What do you mean, *wife*? Keep your hands off my clothes!  
 HELEN: I am your wife, the one Tyndareus my father gave to you!  
 MENELAUS : Hecate bringer of light! This is a nightmare!  
 HELEN: I'm no dream sent by Hecate!  
 MENELAUS : I am certainly not the husband of two wives.  
 HELEN: Who else's bed are you the master of?  
 MENELAUS : I have a wife I brought from Troy. She's hidden in a cave.  
 HELEN: You have no other wife but me.  
 MENELAUS : I don't think I'm mad - maybe my eyes are playing tricks.  
 HELEN: When you look at me, don't you recognise your wife?  
 MENELAUS : You look the same, but my brain refuses to accept the message from my eyes!  
 HELEN: Look at me! What is your problem? Who could be a more expert judge than you?  
 MENELAUS : You do resemble her. That I can't deny!

HELEN: What else can you go on, except the evidence of your senses?

MENELAUS : Trouble is, I've got a wife, already.

HELEN: I did not go to Troy! It was a phantom!

MENELAUS : A pretty solid phantom! Who makes such things?

HELEN: The air! A god made your wife - out of air!

MENELAUS : Which god? Stuff and nonsense!

HELEN: Hera, as a decoy; so Paris couldn't have the real me.

MENELAUS : How could you have been here and in Troy at the same time?

HELEN: Just the name travelled, not the person. [*She holds his hand to her breast*]

MENELAUS : Let me go! I've got enough problems!

HELEN: You'll leave me, and take the phantom wife?

MENELAUS : Yes! Goodbye. You are too much like Helen.

HELEN: I am finished. I held my husband in my arms, but I still can't have him!

MENELAUS : My mountain of troubles back there in Troy - that was real. You aren't.

HELEN: O god! Who was ever more wretched than I? My darling is going,

And I shall never see my beloved Greece again.

*Enter a MESSENGER, panting uncontrollably*

MESSENGER: Menelaus! At last I've caught up with you!

I've been all over this bloody country on a wild goose chase.

Our friends you left at the cave sent me.

MENELAUS : What's the matter? Don't tell me those thieving foreign bastards ...

MESSENGER : It was magic - it really was, not just a trick. [*He can hardly speak: he pauses for breath*]

MENELAUS : Go on! Must be something important, from the state you're in.

MESSENGER [*after a deep breath; portentously*] The countless pains you bore were all in vain!

MENELAUS : Yes, I know, thank you. What is your message?

MESSENGER : Your wife has gone. Disappeared into thin air. Vanished.

As she left the mighty cave where we was guarding her,

A voice from the sky - we couldn't see nobody - said this:

"You fools! Greeks and Trojans alike!

Hera's plan it was for you to die

On the banks of Scamander: I was the means.

You thought Paris possessed Helen. He did not.

Now I have stayed the allotted time.

Destiny is fulfilled.

I depart to my father in heaven.

The wretched daughter of Tyndareus has been cursed,

And called such evil names:

But she is innocent!"

[*He suddenly notices Helen*]

O, hello, Helen! There you were all the time!

I'd been telling them you'd been wafted up

To join the stars; I didn't realise

You'd simply grown wings!

I'm not letting you make a monkey out of me a second time -

You gave us and your husband enough of a runaround in Troy!

[*He moves towards the tomb to grab her*]

MENELAUS : It's true! This confirms her story! This is the day I've been longing for,

When I should hold you in my arms again!

HELEN: Menelaus, my darling! The wait was long

But the joy is all the greater!

*Music*

*[Helen is by now passionately embracing Menelaus. At first he is embarrassed, but he gradually succumbs to her physical assault.]*

With joy I hug my darling.

I slide my arms around his neck.

I run my fingers through his hair.

I am on fire!

MENELAUS : I feel rather the same.

We've so much catching up to do,

I don't quite know where to start.

HELEN: Ecstasy! My hair's undone,

Blowing freely in the breeze.

I'm crying with happiness. *[She sinks to her knees]*

I press my arms around your thighs.

I want your sweetness.

MENELAUS : My darling, I'm very pleased to see you too.

I'm holding the lovechild of Leda and Zeus!

I remember the first time, the torchlight,

Your brothers on their white stallions,

The twins, both of them, shouting their blessing:

Then Hera snatched you from my house

And sent you to another fate

Which you could not resist.

HELEN: Now good comes from bad,

We're together once more.

I waited so long.

I'm so thankful it's over.

CHORUS : Give thanks then to fortune;

I echo your prayers.

A couple is when two are one,

Sharing joy and sharing pain.

HELEN: My friends, friends! I don't regret

The past or brood on it.

I'm holding my husband

The man I longed for

For so many years

To come back from Troy.

MENELAUS : You have me, and I have you.

Ten thousand days I struggled through,

To learn of Hera's spite at last.

But no regrets - my tears

Are tears of joy,

A joy that cancels all the pain.

HELEN: What can I say?

Who dared hope for this?

I never thought to have you back

Caressing my breasts.

MENELAUS : Nor I - I thought you'd gone

To Troy's lonely towers for ever.

*[suddenly]* For god's sake tell me:

Why did you leave my house?

HELEN: *[with a cry]* Bitter memories!

You ask me to relive sour memories.

*[She cries again]* Your probing

brings back the acrid taste.

MENELAUS : Tell me. We have to accept what the gods hand out.

HELEN: I start to retch

Bringing up that story that nauseates me.

MENELAUS : But it would do me good to hear: please tell.

HELEN: [*calmly*] There were no madly dipping oars

Ferrying me with passionate lust

And adulterous longings

To some strange boy's bed ...

MENELAUS : So which god, what fate thieved you from home?

HELEN: It was Zeus' son, Zeus' son, my darling,

Hermes - he brought me to Egypt.

MENELAUS : A miracle! Who sent him?

This tale is weird!

HELEN: I could not control my tears.

My sight was blurred with weeping -

But it was Zeus' wife who ruined me.

MENELAUS : Hera? Why us? Why did she want to do us harm?

HELEN: I can picture it all -

The spring they all bathed in,

The source of my pain;

The goddesses primping,

The on to "the judgment".

MENELAUS : The judgment led to Hera's grudge?

HELEN: She wanted to rob Paris ...

MENELAUS : Go on, don't stop ...

HELEN: Because Aphrodite'd

Promised me to him.

MENELAUS : You! The tragic victim.

HELEN: Victim, yes, victim. She sent me to Egypt.

MENELAUS : And put a phantom in your place:

It all makes sense.

HELEN: And left at home my poor unhappy mother ...

MENELAUS : What of her?

HELEN: I have no mother. She made a noose

Because of my shame,

My wedding disaster.

MENELAUS : O god!

Our daughter Hermione, what's left for her?

HELEN: She'll never marry

Never have children

A lifetime doomed to

Regret our marriage

That never was.

MENELAUS : Paris, you stormed my house, and sacked and looted it.

Your crime destroyed you

And the Greek warriors armed with bronze

In their tens of thousands.

HELEN: It was Hera who tore me

From my homeland

From my city

Cursed and weeping,

And from you;

When I left our house,

Our bedroom,

I did not sneak off



For guilty sex!

CHORUS : May you have only good luck from now on,  
To wipe out all the misery you've known.

MESSENGER : Menelaus, share some of your pleasure with me:  
I realise you're happy, but I don't quite understand why.

MENELAUS : Of course, old chap, you must share the news.

MESSENGER : Isn't she the one who put us through it all,  
The whip that lashed our bloody backs?

MENELAUS : Not her; we were tricked by the gods -  
We chased a replica made from a cloud.

MESSENGER : You mean ...? We went through all that effort -  
For a cloud?

MENELAUS : It was Hera's doing - the quarrel of the three goddesses.

MESSENGER : But this one is your real wife, you're sure?

MENELAUS : She is! Take my word for it.

MESSENGER : My daughter! The ways of god are queer and no mistake.  
But taking the rough with the smooth  
All's well that ends well.

One man has trouble all the while,  
Another's fine to start with, but still comes a cropper.  
You never know what's round the next corner.  
You and your husband both had your fill of grief.  
Yours was verbal, mainly, ma'am,  
But he faced angry spears.

He tried his darndest and got nowhere -  
Now he's got all he ever wanted without lifting a finger!  
And you never disgraced your old father, nor the twins,  
And you done nothing what they said you'd done.

*[he is beginning to ramble, but they haven't the heart to interrupt him]*

Your wedding night - how it all comes back to me!  
The torch I carried, running along in front of the horses -  
And you, the blushing bride, up there in the chariot  
With Menelaus as you left your lovely home behind.

I've no time for slaves that don't take no interest  
In their masters' things. Share the laughs  
And share the tears, that's my motto.  
I'm only a humble servant, but there is some slaves with class:  
Count me among them. "Slave" is what I'm called -  
But I don't have to live down to the name.

That's the best way, else you get a double dose of pain:  
You hear them call you slave and feel like one as well!  
MENELAUS : There there, old boy - you've been a good slave to me in wartime;  
Now you can share my change of luck and go and tell  
The rest what's happened.

Describe the circumstances you found us in, and the current situation;  
Tell them: "stay on the beach, and sit out the fun and games I've got to face,  
As I expect, and if I can somehow smuggle Helen out of the country,  
Make sure that now we're reunited, we , if possible, save our lives."

MESSENGER: It's as good as done, sir. But, before I go,  
Can I pass on something I've observed?

*[Menelaus and Helen exchange knowing glances]*

What prophets say's a pack o' lies, and daft, at that.

Them and their "spurts of flame" and "twitterings of birds" -  
It's unhealthy if you asks me.  
Birds giving men advice - the notion's barmy!  
Calchas never said nothing, did he sir,  
Nor gave no sign, when he saw his mates dying  
Because of a cloud?  
Nor did his Trojan rival, Helenus, but his city was sacked  
For nothing.  
And don't give me "Twas the will of god  
They should'st not utter" -  
What's the point of going to a prophet?  
We should worship the gods, and ask for what we need.  
Stuff the oracles, cut out the middle man.  
They was invented as a trap for those  
Looking for success the easy way -  
It's hard hard work gets you what you want  
Not flaming sacrifices.  
Common sense and looking after number one:  
That's the best oracle.

[*The Messenger goes about his business, at last.*]

CHORUS : I totally agree with old man about oracles.  
Having the gods as friends is more use to people  
Than the finest prophecies.  
HELEN: H'm, yes! So far then, so good.  
How did you get away from Troy, poor sweet?  
You don't have to tell me, but as I love you  
I love listening to you talking about the past - however sad.  
MENELAUS : Well. There was just one journey, one story -  
But still there's much to tell.  
Nauplius and the Euboean beacon business,  
Cities I ended up in in Crete and Africa,  
Perseus' watchtower - I couldn't begin to tell you everything,  
And if I did, you'd get upset, and I'd upset myself  
In going through it twice.  
HELEN: I shouldn't have asked you - I'm sorry.  
Leave out the rest, just tell me how long it took you,  
Your sad passage here across the sea?  
MENELAUS : Another seven years afloat to add to the ten I spent at Troy.  
HELEN: [*she sighs heavily*]  
A very long time indeed! And now you're safe at last  
From all that, and here you are  
In danger of your life!  
MENELAUS : [*springs from her embrace*]  
What do you mean? You've shaken me, my dear.  
HELEN: Fly! Flee for your life away from here!  
The man who owns this house will kill you!  
MENELAUS : Why? What have I done?  
HELEN: You've arrived out of the blue, and ruined his wedding plans.  
MENELAUS : Someone planned to marry my wife?  
HELEN: He forced me, he made me, I had no choice.  
MENELAUS : Is this some local bigwig, or do you mean the king?  
HELEN: The king of Egypt, Proteus' son.  
MENELAUS : That solves one puzzle. What that doorkeeper said.

HELEN: Have you been making a habit of knocking on Egyptian doors?  
MENELAUS : Only this one - and I was thrown out like a beggar.  
HELEN: You didn't go begging for food? Oh Hell!  
MENELAUS : I was, in fact, begging, though I didn't use the word.  
HELEN: Then you'll know all about our "wedding"?  
MENELAUS : What I don't know is if you managed to avoid the, er, consummation.  
HELEN: We've not had sex, if that's what you mean - I've saved it all for you.  
MENELAUS : How could you have stopped him? I'd like to believe you.  
HELEN: See how I've been camping at this tomb?  
MENELAUS : The mattress? What does that prove?  
HELEN: It's been my refuge - from a forced marriage.  
MENELAUS : Couldn't you find an altar? Or is this some local custom?  
HELEN: This tomb's as secure as any temple of the gods.  
MENELAUS : No chance you can pilot me into the palace, then?  
HELEN: You'll find a sword waiting for you, not my bed!  
MENELAUS : And that would make me most upset.  
HELEN: Flee this country now, no need for heroics.  
MENELAUS : And leave you? You are what I sacked Troy for.  
HELEN: Your love will be your death unless you do.  
MENELAUS : You want me to be a coward? The conqueror of Troy?  
HELEN: There's no chance of killing the king, if that's what you're thinking.  
MENELAUS : Why not? Has he got a sword-proof skin?  
HELEN: You'll find out. An intelligent man won't attempt the impossible.  
MENELAUS : Shall I just stand here then and wait to be arrested?  
HELEN: Don't give up; there must be a cunning plan.  
MENELAUS : If I were doing something, I wouldn't feel so bad about dying.  
HELEN: There is one hope; one way we could be saved ...  
MENELAUS : Whatever you need, I'll help: money? courage? persuasive powers?  
HELEN: If the king doesn't find out you're here ...  
MENELAUS : Who will tell him? I hardly think he knows me by sight!  
HELEN: He's got a friend in high places.  
MENELAUS : Some personal intelligence service?  
HELEN: No, his sister. They call her Theonoe.  
MENELAUS : An ominous name. What can she do?  
HELEN: She knows everything. She'll tell her brother you are here.  
MENELAUS : I'm as good as dead. There's nowhere to hide.  
HELEN: Perhaps we could go down on our knees and try to persuade her ...  
MENELAUS : To do what? There *is* hope still?  
HELEN: ... Not to inform her brother of your presence.  
MENELAUS : Which would give us time to get across the border?  
HELEN: If she helps, yes, easily - but not otherwise.  
MENELAUS : You go to her - women get on best with other women.  
HELEN: Yes, she'll let me kneel to her at least.  
MENELAUS : What happens if she won't say yes?  
HELEN: You die. And I am forced into marriage.  
MENELAUS : You mean you would make love to him? Sounds as if you can't wait to be forced!  
HELEN: But I swear by your sacred life ...  
MENELAUS : What? To die? To sleep with no one else?  
HELEN: With one sword through us both - I shall sleep with you.  
MENELAUS : If that's agreed - take my hand.  
HELEN: I clasp it. If you die, I die as well.  
MENELAUS : And I shall kill myself if I lose you.  
HELEN: But how will people know the glorious reason for our deaths?  
MENELAUS : I shall kill you on the pinnacle of this tomb then kill myself.  
But first I'll fight and fight on your behalf.

Let 'em all come! I'll not disgrace the name I won at Troy.  
I'll not creep back to Greece to have tongues wag:  
"He took Achilles from his mother, saw poor Ajax kill himself,  
Saw old Nestor lose his only son, and didn't have the guts  
To die to save his wife!" No sir!  
If the gods are wise, they let the earth lie gently on a hero slain by foes,  
But on cowards' graves pile rocks to crush their bones!  
CHORUS : O gods! Please change the family's luck - from bad to good!  
HELEN: Oh no! Our luck's run out! Menelaus, we're done for!  
The priestess Theonoë is coming out of the palace.  
That noise is the bolts being loosened. Run!  
Yet what's the use? Whether you go or stay,  
She knows you've come.  
Menelaus; there is no escape.  
Saved from the savagery of Troy  
More savage swords await you here.

*Enter the young priestess THEONOË, preceded by a slave with a sacred torch.*

THEONOË : [*To the slave*] Lead me forth! Hold aloft the sacred flame,  
To sanctify the holy air, so I may draw  
Pure breath from heaven!  
And you, if anyone hath profaned the pathway  
With his polluted foot, give it a waft of cleansing flame.  
Brandish the firebrand, so I may proceed!  
And when you've finished your sacred duty,  
Take everything back inside and throw it on the fire.

[*She sees Helen*] Helen. Now. I had a divine message for you. What was it?  
Oh yes. Your husband Menelaus has come - [*She sees Menelaus*] that's him!  
He's lost his ships, and the replica of you.

Poor tragic Menelaus. What perils you have survived,  
But you will not reach home if you stay here!  
The gods will be having a debate about you:  
A conference this very day in Zeus' halls.  
Hera, who was once your enemy is now your friend,  
And wants to see you safely home with Helen.  
This is because she wants Greece to find out  
That her marriage to Paris - which was Aphrodite's little reward to him -  
Was a complete sham.  
Aphrodite, however, now wants to stop you coming home,  
So she won't be found out!  
She does not want people to know she sold beauty -  
Helen's - for an adulterous match.

In short, it's up to me, whether I do what Aphrodite wants,  
And destroy you by telling my brother you're here,  
Or go with Hera and save your life, deceiving my brother,  
Who ordered me to tell him the moment you arrived ... [*pause*]

Which of you slaves is going to tell my brother  
That Menelaus has come?  
My rule of life is simple. I put safety first. My own.  
HELEN: Theonoë, I fall as suppliant, and clasp your knees.

I kneel, in this rather uncomfortable position,  
For myself and for my husband, whom  
I've only just got back, and whose  
Death it seems I'm on the point of witnessing.  
Don't tell your brother that my darling has returned  
To his wife's loving arms: save him, I beseech you.  
Do not buy the favour of that wicked, lawless man  
Your brother, at the cost of your own saintliness.  
God hates violence: "thou shalt not steal";  
"Acquire your goods by honest means."  
The sky belongs to everyone, so does the earth  
On which we furnish our homes, but not  
By taking others' things or using force.  
Appropriately - though inconveniently for me -  
Hermes gave me to your father to keep safe:  
For my husband; this man who stands here eager  
To claim what's rightfully his.  
How can he have it if he's dead?  
How would your father view my being redelivered  
To a corpse?  
Now's the time to think about your duty to the god,  
And your duty to your father.  
Would either the god or your late parent have refused  
To return a neighbour's borrowed property? I think not!  
You ought then to pay more heed to your honoured father than  
To your useless, unjust brother.  
If you, as prophet and theological consultant undermine  
The justice of your father's position, and foster  
The rights of your evil brother, I'd say it was disgraceful!  
I'd say "You know your religion, see the past  
Foretell the future and all that,  
But you can't tell right from wrong!"

Release me, sad creature that I am, from my despair,  
And think how happy you could make me!  
There's no one in the world who doesn't hate  
Helen. In Greece they say: "she betrayed her husband-  
Went off to live in a gold-encrusted palace, in Troy."  
If I reach Greece, and return to Sparta,  
When the gossips discover they were fooled by the gods,  
And I was not untrue to my love,  
They will rehabilitate my reputation.  
I'll see my daughter married - no one would take her now -  
Quit this ghastly nomadic existence, and be home  
With my own things, content at last.

If I heard he'd been murdered somewhere else,  
I'd have cried over his ashes and made the best of it.  
But now he's here, he's safe; is he to be  
Wrenched away from me?  
Please not, Theonoë - I beg you this;  
Show me your favour, be like your saintly father.  
For children the greatest thrill's to have it said:  
"Their father lived life righteously:  
They're turning out as good as he."

CHORUS : Your debating skill wrings pity from my heart,  
And so do you. Now I can't wait to hear  
The arguments Menelaus will choose, to save his life.  
MENELAUS : You'll not find me on my knees, grovelling.  
No tearful scenes from me!  
The coward's way would shame my feats at Troy!  
Although they do say many a hero's  
Wiped away a tear in times of stress.  
But I do not choose this precedent - fine though it be:  
Stiff upper lip's my way. Here goes. [*takes a deep breath*]  
If you believe it's right to spare a guest in your country  
Who seeks merely to leave quietly for home  
With his lawfully wedded wife, then [*abruptly*] -  
Give her to me and save my life!  
If you decide not to, I should be most upset -  
Not for the first time , I might add -  
And you would be shown up as  
A thoroughly unpleasant woman!

Now - something I deem worthy of myself and fitting;  
And something that will especially touch your heart:  
I shall address these words unto your father's tomb. [*moves to the tomb*]

Old Man, who art in this marble mausoleum,  
Give back, I entreat thee, my wife  
Whom Zeus didst hither send for thee to keep for me.  
I know thou art dead and find'st it hard to answer my request,  
But now thy daughter hath thy power,  
And she will not be pleased if thou, her sire,  
When called on in thy grave, lovest  
Thy good name for justice, and [*threateningly*]  
Art cursed instead!

[*No answer. He moves to address the god of the underworld*]

O Hades, which art in Hell, I call on thee  
To be my friend!  
Many are the corpses I have given thee,  
Slain for Helen's sake by my trusty weapon!  
My account is in the black, I think!  
[*hectoring*] Either give them back now and make them live again,  
Or force the priestess here to do what her glorious father could not -  
Give me my wife!

[*Silence. After a pause, to Theonoë*]

If you rob me of my wife ... well!  
[*nastily*] Let me fill in the blanks in Helen's speech.  
We swore an oath, my dear, as you shall learn:  
First I'm going to fight your brother -  
Until one of us lies dead. Couldn't be simpler.  
If he won't face me, man to man,  
And tries to starve me out,  
I have sworn to kill Helen and myself, upon the tomb,  
Thrusting my two-edged sword here into our guts,

Whence rivers of blood shall foul the tomb.  
And our two corpses shall lie locked in embrace  
Upon your precious tomb -  
[*the word 'tomb' is stressed more heavily each time to ram home the sacrilege*]  
A desecration of your father's tomb  
To cause you everlasting grief!  
Neither your brother nor anyone else shall marry Helen.  
If I can't take her home, I'll take her with me -  
To the dead!

[*His voice cracks; the rest of the speech is choked with sobs*]  
What's happening? Tears? Am I turning into  
A woman? Has action man become a wimp?  
Kill me if you like, and kill  
Your name for justice.  
You've been a righteous woman all your life -  
So hear my plea and let me have my wife!  
CHORUS : Now for the summing up; [*to Theonoë*] that's you my love.  
Try to please everyone, just like a judge.  
THEONOË: I've always been religious. I enjoy my job.  
I also love myself.  
I should not wish to stain my father's memory  
Nor ruin my own good name  
By seeming over-partial to my brother's camp.  
I am a great temple of righteousness.  
I was made that way, a gift passed down to me by Nereus.  
And so I shall do my best, Menelaus, to save you.  
I'll cast my vote with Hera, who's the one  
Who wants to do you good.  
I have never really had much to do with Aphrodite - touch wood,  
And, as I intend to stay a virgin all my life,  
I shall not have much need of her!

The criticisms you had of my father, by the tomb -  
I quite agree; we should be wicker not to give her back!  
If Proteus still were with us, he'd  
Give her to you, and you to her.  
All men's accounts are settled after death, if not before.  
There is no life beyond the grave as such:  
Our consciousness merges within the cosmic soul, and so  
Attains an immortality of sorts.  
But I digress.  
I shall be silent on the matter that you raised.  
I shall not be encouraging my brother's foolishness.  
In fact I'll be doing him a favour unawares,  
If I avert the harm and make him do a decent act.

How you escape is up to you:  
My role is to keep out of the way and say nothing.  
Perhaps you could start with a prayer?  
Ask Aphrodite to permit you to return,  
And Hera to keep up the good intentions that she's shown  
To you and Menelaus.  
[*To the tomb*]  
And thou my late father  
With me at thy side,

May thy name for purity  
For ever abide. [*Exit*]

CHORUS : [*naively*] The unjust person never has good luck,  
Only the just may hope to find to find success!

HELEN: Menelaus - the Virgin has played her part in saving us.  
From here on you must employ *your* brain,  
To find a cunning plan to save us both.

MENELAUS : Of course! [*A pause; he thinks*]  
Listen. You've been in the palace a good long time,  
You're close to the king's servants ...

HELEN: What are you getting at?

MENELAUS : Could you persuade the stable boys  
Who look after the chariots to lend us one?

HELEN: I *could* - but how would we get away by land in a foreign country?  
We'd have no idea which way to go.

MENELAUS : You're right, it's not possible. Erm. [*he is thinking once more*]  
[*suddenly*] What if I hide in the palace and kill  
The king with my trusty sword?

HELEN: His sister would stop you; she'd hardly stand by  
While you calmly got on with killing her brother.

MENELAUS : We haven't even got a ship we could get away in.  
[*wretchedly*] Mine's at the bottom of the sea.

HELEN: [*this gives her an idea*] Listen - If you're prepared to admit a woman  
Can come up with something sensible:  
How about pretending to be dead?

MENELAUS : Can't say I like it. [*unenthusiastically*] But if it's any use  
I'm most happy to pretend I'm dead.

HELEN: Suppose I go to the king. I'm mourning for you -  
Full traditional female mourning - shaven head  
Beating my breast - the full business.

MENELAUS : [*pompously*] How does this effect a cure for our complaint?  
Sounds a bit corny if you ask me.

HELEN: I shall say you've drowned at sea, and ask  
The king's permission to set up a memorial!

MENELAUS : Suppose he agrees. I don't see how  
Some tombstone is going to do me any good:  
What we need is a ship!

HELEN: I shall tell him to supply a ship,  
So I can perform the funeral rites  
Out at sea!

MENELAUS : Absolutely brilliant - apart from one detail:  
If he tells you to put the memorial on land,  
Bang goes the excuse - we're sunk!

HELEN: Aha! I shall tell him it is not the custom in Greece  
To put a memorial on land for those who've died at sea.

MENELAUS : That should do the trick! Then I could sail with you  
In the same boat, and "assist with the arrangements"!

HELEN: It's essential you and your surviving crew are there.

MENELAUS : Once I take over the ship, we'll have our swords  
And mark them, man for man.

HELEN: That will be your responsibility - all we need's  
An off-shore breeze, and it will be - plain sailing!

MENELAUS : No problem. The gods will be sending no more trouble my way.  
Who will you say told you of my "death"?



HELEN: You! Say you were the only officer to escape death;  
You were on Menelaus' ship, and you saw him drown.

MENELAUS : These tattered shreds of rag I'm wearing  
Will confirm the story of the wreck!

HELEN: They were embarrassing earlier, but now they're perfect!

MENELAUS : Bad luck can sometimes come in useful!

Should I come into the palace with you,  
Or keep a low profile here by the tomb?

HELEN: Stay here: then if he does try anything nasty,  
The tomb will offer some defence -

Though I'd keep your sword handy as well.

I'll go inside and cut my hair off, slip into something black ...

[after a pause] scratch my cheeks and make them bleed;

The prize is worth the pain.

The pendulum could now swing either way:

One way - my plan goes wrong, I'm caught and killed;

The other way I live to save your life and see my home again.

[*She prays*]

O mother Hera - thou hast thy husband Zeus beside thee

In bed each night: release two sad humans from their pain.

We lift our arms in supplication to heaven, where you have

Your lovely home among the stars!

[*It is gradually becoming less of a prayer and more of a rant*]

And thou, Aphrodite, daughter of Dione, remember

It was my marriage paid for you to win the prize for beauty:

Please punish me no more. I've suffered grief enough,

Prostituting my name (though not my person) in the land of Troy.

If thou still dost wish to take my life, please -

Wait till I get home! Why are you so greedy?

Are you never satisfied with the harm you've done?

You peddle sex, lies, double-crossing, and

A chemist's shop full of drugs and remedies that never work.

If only you did things in moderation, you would be

Mankind's favourite goddess!

Amen. That's all I have to say.

CHORUS : As I sing of Helen's torment

And the torment

And the tears

Of all the women trapped in Troy

When the Argive spears

Smashed home,

Come and help me sing my song

Come join me, tearful

Nightingale,

From the leafy thicket where you hide,

Pump the thrilling notes from your tawny throat,

Most musical,

Melodious of birds.

The bow wave came hissing

Across the glassy bay

From the ship rowed by its panting

Trojan crew,  
Warning "he's here, he's here!"  
As Paris the marriage-crusher sent by  
Aphrodite  
Came to rip you, Helen, from your bed,  
Snatch you from Sparta  
And take you to Troy.

A generation of Greeks -  
Metal through tissue  
Stone against bone -  
Breathed out their life:  
They captured Death, that's all,  
Leaving widows,  
Their lovely hair  
Now hacked and ugly,  
Their homes  
Unmanned.

There was a second cull of Greeks:  
Nauplius, alone, with one small boat  
And a fiery beacon  
On the treacherous Euboean coast,  
Like a star in the darkness,  
Seducing the fleet to the cliffs of Capheria  
Lighting the way  
To death on the rocks.

No harbours along this cliff-lined shore  
When, blown by storms,  
Menelaus passed this way,  
Still far from his home  
Bringing her, once the Trojans' prize  
(Can a war be a prize?)  
The phantom,  
Now with a squadron of Greek ships as escort,  
The replica,  
Hera's notion.

Can any man  
After profound research  
Say he has the answers to these questions:  
What is a god?  
What is not a god?  
Can there be something in between?  
Is knowledge of the gods possible  
When you see how gods behave - their actions  
Unstable  
Undisciplined  
Unpredictable  
Randomly jumping now this way  
Now that?

You, Helen, are Zeus' daughter.  
He fathered you

After intimacy  
With your mother  
In the form of a bird.  
Then you were slandered all over Greece  
As a faithless, worthless, godless bitch.  
What can mere mortals hope to understand?  
All I can say about gods,  
From bitter experience, is  
They keep their promises.

You are mad,  
You men  
Who think that war's  
The proof of manhood,  
Squabbling with spears and lances -  
A futile way  
To solve man's problems.  
If we settle things  
By seeing who can bleed the most,  
War will always  
Haunt our cities.  
This time the Trojans won  
The boxes, underground -  
They could have talked,  
Settled their quarrel over you, Helen,  
With words.  
Now they march in the ranks of Death,  
While searing flames destroy their walls -  
Downed by a force like  
Zeus' lightning -  
And you, Menelaus, bear pain on pain,  
As one torment  
Merges into the next.

*THEOCLYMENUS, the king, enters, returning from his hunting expedition, accompanied by slaves, dogs and much paraphernalia. He pauses at his father's tomb.*

THEOCLYMENUS: Greetings, father! The reason you were buried here -  
On my precise instructions - near this gate  
Was so that I, your son, Theoclymenus,  
Could pay my respects to you, father, each time  
I pass your tomb; on my way out  
And now, as I return. You slaves there!  
Take the dogs and hunting nets into the palace!  
I've just been cursing myself rather severely.  
You know I punish all scum with death -  
But I've just found out that some Greek's been here  
In broad daylight, slipped past the sentries;  
A spy, maybe - or trying to sneak off with Helen.  
Once I catch him he's as good as dead.  
*[He sees Helen is missing from the tomb]*  
What!!  
It seems I'm too late - it's all over!  
The tomb's deserted - she's left her camp  
And been smuggled out of the country!

Hoy! Open up the gates! Slaves, get the horses out of the stable!  
 Wheel out the chariots! I'm not going to stand  
 Idly by while my wife-to-be is spirited away!  
*[Helen enters demurely from the palace - in full mourning]*  
 Hold on! I see what I'm looking for.  
 She hasn't escaped. She's in the palace.  
 You! What are you doing in those black clothes?  
 Where are your nice white ones? And why have you  
 Taken the knife to your lovely hairstyle  
 And cut it off? And what's the meaning of those tears  
 Staining your cheek? Was it a nightmare  
 Or has some news from Greece robbed you entirely of your wits?  
 HELEN: *[she speaks with deep pathos and total sincerity]*  
 My master - now this must be my name for you.  
 I am finished. Everything is lost and I am nothing.  
 THEOCLYMENUS : Why? What has happened?  
 HELEN: My Menelaus - I can hardly find the words - is dead.  
 THEOCLYMENUS : I am indeed sorry to hear these words -  
 But this is good news , too! How did you find out?  
 I suppose Theonoë told you, did she?  
 HELEN: Yes she did - and a man who was here confirmed it.  
 THEOCLYMENUS : Someone came with this information - there's no mistake?  
 HELEN: No. I hope he gets what he deserves!  
 THEOCLYMENUS : Who is he? Where is he? I want complete proof!  
 HELEN: That's him, cowering over there on the tomb.  
 THEOCLYMENUS : Lord Apollo! Look at the state of him!  
 HELEN: I fear my husband may look much like him.  
 THEOCLYMENUS : Where's he from, this man? What nationality?  
 HELEN: A Hellene. One of the Greeks who was on my husband's ship.  
 THEOCLYMENUS : How does he say Menelaus died?  
 HELEN: Horribly: He was swept overboard and drowned.  
 THEOCLYMENUS : In which benighted corner of the sea was this?  
 HELEN: Near the Libyan coast: a rocky and inhospitable shore.  
 THEOCLYMENUS : How come he didn't share his shipmate's fate?  
 HELEN: The humble are sometimes luckier than the great.  
 THEOCLYMENUS : Where has he left the wreckage of the ship?  
 HELEN: My curse on it, wherever it is - but if only Menelaus ...  
 THEOCLYMENUS : *[smugly]* Menelaus is dead. So how did this man get here?  
 HELEN: Some sailors found him and picked him up, he says.  
 THEOCLYMENUS : And where's the cursed thing they sent to Troy instead of you?  
 HELEN: My phantom double? Gone with the wind!  
 THEOCLYMENUS : Ha! Priam and your land of Troy: you went to Hell - for nothing!  
 HELEN: So did I! I shared the misery in Troy - for nothing!  
 THEOCLYMENUS : Your husband's body - has it been buried, or is it still lying around?  
 HELEN: It's not been buried. There's so much pain I've still to bear.  
 THEOCLYMENUS : So it's for him you've trimmed your long blond hair?  
 HELEN: He's very dear to me.  
*[rather lamely]* That is he's dear to me because he was when he was alive.  
 THEOCLYMENUS : This is the true reason you're upset?  
 HELEN: Ask your sister. I could hardly deceive her.  
 THEOCLYMENUS : Of course not. Well then!  
 Are you still going to be spending your life at the tomb?  
 HELEN: Don't taunt me. Let me get used to his death.  
 THEOCLYMENUS : You cower away from me. You're still in love - with a dead man!  
 HELEN: No; no more. *[she looks at him sweetly and innocently]*

It's time to start thinking about ... my husband.

THEOCLYMENUS : You've taken your time - but I'm glad.

HELEN: Let's get on with it. Let bygones be bygones.

THEOCLYMENUS : What would you like me to do? It's my turn to be nice to you!

HELEN: Make peace - be friends!

THEOCLYMENUS : Our quarrel's over - all better now.

HELEN: Now you are my friend, may I have just one favour?

THEOCLYMENUS : [*mistaking her interest*] What favour's this excites you so?

HELEN: I want to bury my late husband.

THEOCLYMENUS : How? Funeral service *in absentia*? A burial without a body?

HELEN: We've a custom in Greece: if anyone dies at sea ...

THEOCLYMENUS : What happens? Trust the Greeks to do something different!

HELEN: We take an empty set of clothes and ...

THEOCLYMENUS : Bury it. Go ahead - put up a tombstone anywhere you like!

HELEN: No, that's not what we do, when sailors drown at sea.

THEOCLYMENUS : What, then? These Greek rigmaroles baffle me!

HELEN: We take the things for the funeral out to sea ...

THEOCLYMENUS : Where exactly do I come in? [*he is getting impatient*]

HELEN: [*turning to MENELAUS*] This man's the expert.

Nothing like this has happened to me before.

THEOCLYMENUS : Sailor; you've brought me news which pleases me.

MENELAUS : Not good for me: nor very cheerful for the dead man either.

THEOCLYMENUS : How do you bury a man who's died at sea?

MENELAUS : Depends who he was. How rich, and so on.

THEOCLYMENUS : I'll meet the expense, whatever it is, for Helen's sake.

MENELAUS : First; a sacrifice to the gods below.

THEOCLYMENUS : Of what? Name the beast - it's yours.

MENELAUS : You choose - we'll be happy with whatever you provide.

THEOCLYMENUS : In Egypt it's usually a horse or a bull.

MENELAUS : Whatever - as long as it's a first-class animal.

THEOCLYMENUS : I'm a wealthy man - no shortage in my herds of such!

MENELAUS : We take a bed, with fresh, clean bedclothes - no one in it of course!

THEOCLYMENUS : It's yours. Anything else your custom requires?

MENELAUS : Weapons and armour - bronze. Because he was a soldier.

THEOCLYMENUS : I'll give him just the kind he'd choose himself!

MENELAUS : And fresh food; the finest produce of your land!

THEOCLYMENUS : Then what? How do you, er, get it all into the sea?

MENELAUS : You must provide a ship, and a crew to row it.

THEOCLYMENUS : How far out to sea does it have to go?

MENELAUS : Until her wake can only just be seen from land.

THEOCLYMENUS : Why? What exactly does this ritual achieve?

MENELAUS : Otherwise the sea might wash the offerings back to shore.

THEOCLYMENUS : You'll have a Phoenician longboat - fastest ship afloat!

MENELAUS : Menelaus would be delighted with your generosity.

THEOCLYMENUS : Would it be sufficient if you performed these rites alone, without Helen?

MENELAUS : "It is the duty of the dead man's mother, wife or son ..."

THEOCLYMENUS : It's laid down, you're saying, that Helen must shoulder the burden of her husband's funeral?

MENELAUS : Yes - a good wife would not try to cheat the gods by omitting any part of the ritual.

THEOCLYMENUS : Then let her go! [*joyful and hearty*]

I wish to encourage her to be a good wife!

Go into the palace and pick out the stuff you need;

And I shan't let you go empty-handed from my land,

After all you've done for Helen.  
The news you brought me is excellent!  
Strip off those rags and help yourself to clothes  
And food - enough to see you home.  
I have observed your tailoring leaves something to be desired!  
And, Helen, don't make yourself ill with all this weeping for the dead.  
Menelaus has met his fate: you can't bring a dead man back to life!  
MENELAUS : Do as he says, my girl. Love the husband that you have -  
Forget the one who's yours no more.  
Best for you to embrace what fate has brought you.  
If I get back safe and sound to Greece, I'll clear your name.  
You make sure you are a proper wife to the one who shares your bed!  
*[Exeunt into the palace]*

CHORUS : A young girl  
Lost  
Passionately missed  
By her mother,  
The mother of the gods:  
Demeter raced over  
Mountains, through  
Forests, crossed raging  
Rivers, and the deep-voiced crashing  
Sea.

A young girl  
Snatched  
As she danced with her friends  
Snatched from the circling dance.  
Artemis with bow  
Athena with shield and spear  
Helped the search, as Demeter  
Set out in her chariot pulled by  
Creatures from the wild with wild music  
From castanet and drum.

Zeus looked down, saw:  
It was all part of his master plan.

The mother  
Crazed by her loss  
Gave up the search.  
Insane with grief she lashes out:  
Floods strip the soil,  
Sun parches the earth -  
No crops in the plough-scratched land.  
Children and parents starve  
Cattle die without  
The fresh green shoot to feed on.  
Cities of men were like  
Cities of the dead.  
No sacrifices were acceptable to the gods.  
No dew. No springs. No water.

\* \* \* \*

*Enter HELEN from the palace*

HELEN: Sisters. Luck's been on our side so far within the palace.  
Theonoë is happily making herself an accessory,  
And hasn't said a word to her brother about Menelaus' being here.  
In fact she spontaneously told him my husband was dead!  
Menelaus has got just what he wanted.  
The weapons for throwing in the sea - well he's already got his hands -  
Those strong hands - firmly on a shield and spear.  
Such a comfort to the unfortunate corpse.  
He's already armed for the fight, warmed up, equipped  
To slaughter Egyptians in their thousands - once we're all aboard.  
I've removed his things he had on from the shipwreck:  
I've helped him bathe and wash off the filth of years  
In the clear Nile water, and I've kitted him out in real clothes!  
That's all I can say for now.  
The one who thinks he's soon to have rights of ownership over my body  
Is coming out of the palace. Sh!  
You, too, stay on my side - careful what you say.  
There's a good chance that if we can get away safely,  
We can help you escape one day.

*Reenter MENELAUS and THEOCLYMENUS with a number of slaves carrying equipment. Menelaus is now magnificently dressed.*

THEOCLYMENUS : That's right, slaves, form a chain!  
Let the Greek organise it: you pass down the naval tackle along the line.  
Helen - please - and I don't want to annoy you by saying this -  
Take my advice. Don't go.  
It will make no difference to your husband if you're there or not,  
And I'm frightened that you be overcome with emotion  
And throw yourself into the sea, carried away  
By all the fuss being made for Menelaus.  
Your grief for that ex-husband is out of all proportion.  
HELEN: As my new husband, you must accept that I  
Still remember my first husband, and all  
The little things our marriage meant to me.  
Because I am still in love with him,  
I should have liked to share his death.  
But what pleasure could my death bring to one who's dead himself?  
All I want to do is go and pay my last respects  
In person. As for you  
May the gods fulfil the hopes I have for you  
And for this man, who's been your partner in all this.  
In return for all you've done for Menelaus and myself,  
You shall find me just the kind of wife that you deserve!  
Everything's turning out exactly as it ought to!  
Now, if you'll tell someone to find a ship to put all this in,  
You'll make my happiness complete!  
THEOCLYMENUS : [*to a slave*] You! Move! Get them a ship -  
A fifty-oared Phoenician galley, and a crew.  
HELEN: Wouldn't it be a good idea if the man  
In charge of the funeral were captain of the ship?  
THEOCLYMENUS : Of course. My sailors must do whatever he tells them.  
HELEN: Repeat the order, to make sure they understand you.

THEOCLYMENUS : Gladly - and I'll say it a third time if it makes you happy!  
 HELEN: Bless you! And bless my plans!  
 THEOCLYMENUS : Try not to stain your cheeks with too many tears.  
 HELEN: Today will show how much I owe to you.  
 THEOCLYMENUS : Don't waste too much on the dead - they won't appreciate it!  
 HELEN: I'm looking to the future as well as the past!  
 THEOCLYMENUS : As a husband you'll find me no worse than Menelaus!  
 HELEN: I'm not complaining! I'll find true happiness, I'm sure!  
 THEOCLYMENUS : Of course you will, as long as you are true to me.  
 HELEN: Lovers will not need teaching how to love!  
 THEOCLYMENUS : Shall I come too? I want to do all I can to help.  
 HELEN: No, no! No point in having dogs and bark yourself, my king!  
 THEOCLYMENUS : Off you go, then! These customs are all Greek to me.  
 My palace needs no purification ceremony -  
 It was not here that Menelaus breathed his last:  
 Someone! Go and tell my underlings to bring  
 All the wedding paraphernalia into the palace.  
 The whole of Egypt must shout for joy  
 And sing the wedding-chant for Helen and myself.  
 I am a lucky, lucky man.  
 You, Greek: go put the gifts in honour of  
 My Helen's ex-husband into the sea's loving arms,  
 Then hurry home and deliver me my wife.  
 Then, after you've been guest of honour at our wedding feast,  
 You may leave for home.  
 Or stay here - I'll make you rich!  
 [*Exit THEOCLYMENUS* ]  
 MENELAUS : O Zeus, thou art called our father, and thou art wise.  
 Look upon us, and deliver us from evil.  
 Reach out to us with thy caring arms,  
 As we follow our fortune to the limit.  
 Just a touch of thy little finger  
 Will bring us the destiny we hope for.  
 Let the troubles we've survived already be enough:  
 I have called you many names, o gods,  
 Some good, some not so flattering.  
 But I don't deserve ill-luck for ever -  
 I've earned a clear road home.  
 And if you grant me this favour -  
 Let me then live happily ever after.  
 [*Exeunt MENELAUS and HELEN*]

CHORUS : The ship's from Syria  
 From Sidon.  
 She's swift.  
 Watch her oars catch the breakers.  
 Queen of the sea, the rowers her princes.  
 The dolphins like a chorus line  
 Leap in formation, and she leads their dance,  
 When out at sea  
 The breezes are gentle,  
 The surface is smooth,  
 And the Ocean's daughter  
 Galeneia - Calm -  
 Misty blue like the sea is,



Whispers these words:  
"Unfurl your sails  
For the sea-breeze to fill;  
You've left land behind.  
Pull firm on the oars,  
The oars made of pine,  
You rowers  
You oarsmen,  
Carrying Helen  
Home to the welcoming  
Shores, and the house built  
by Perseus.

I wonder if she'll see  
The Eurotas in flood,  
And Leucippus' daughters  
Bathing beside it;  
Or if she'll be in time to catch  
The dancing in front of the temple of Pallas.  
Or perhaps it will be dark,  
For the torchlit festival  
Of sad Hyacinthus,  
Whom Apollo killed  
At the games - it was  
An accident: he was driving his chariot  
And was struck as he raced to the finish  
By a discus  
Thrown by the god.  
It became a feast-day for Sparta  
When oxen are roasted:  
Apollo ordained it  
To show he was sorry.  
Who is that lonely  
Ungainly  
Young girl, on her own?  
That's Hermione, Helen, your daughter,  
Still wistfully dreaming  
That one day the torches  
Will blaze for her wedding.

I wish we could grow wings and fly  
Like those migrating flocks of birds  
Who leave the wintry rains behind,  
With noisy flight-path  
Set for summer plains  
Where no rain falls  
And the grain is ripe.  
In skeins or lines they follow their leader,  
Trusting the expert:  
He's like a shepherd whose piping  
Brings the sheep home.

You with your beating wings  
And necks outstretched,  
On course up there

Above the clouds -  
The Pleiads are in mid-course;  
Orion is clear in the night-sky: it's autumn.  
It's time for your journey.  
Take this message  
To the wetlands of Sparta:  
"Menelaus has taken Troy -  
He's coming home!"

And you, Helen's brothers,  
Race your horses  
On their heavenly course -  
Bright stars in the dark sky,  
Now you are gods,  
Helen's rescuers.  
Shine on the sea where its waveless swell  
Reflects the sky,  
And the white-frothing wave-crests.  
Send firm steady breezes  
From Zeus  
To our sailors.  
Remove the blot  
On your sister's name,  
The rape, the abduction,  
The stain that she got  
From the goddess' quarrel,  
The Judgment on Ida.  
She never came to the land of Troy,  
To the towers built  
By Apollo.

[Enter a MESSENGER]

MESSENGER : Disaster! Catastrophe!  
I have terrible news to tell!

THEOCLYMENUS : [*impatiently*] What is it?

MESSENGER : Start looking for another wife!

Helen has left this land; she's gone!

THEOCLYMENUS : [*sarcastically*] Did she spread wings and fly,  
Or just walk on her own two legs?

MESSENGER : Menelaus has sailed off with her: he was  
The one who came with news of his own death.

THEOCLYMENUS : Incredible! Impossible! Where could he have found a ship  
To take him out of Egypt? I don't believe it.

MESSENGER : You gave it to the Greek yourself! He's gone,  
Taking your men as you will presently hear.

THEOCLYMENUS : How? I should very much like to know.  
It's past all belief that one man could have overpowered  
So large a crew - and you were part of it!

MESSENGER : After she left the palace, Helen walked  
Down to the sea, taking great care  
Where she put those pretty feet, crying out  
For her husband - though he was beside her;  
Not dead, in fact, at all.  
When we reached the dockyard area, we launched

A Sidonian ship - brand new she was -  
With fifty rowing -benches and a trim set of oars.  
All was bustle and activity: one was  
Checking the mast, another making sure  
The oars were all aligned properly;  
One looked over the white sails, another  
Was adjusting the cross-piece on the steering oar.  
In all this hubbub, picking their moment,  
Some Greeks, Menelaus' sailors, came up to the quayside.  
Their clothes told the story of their shipwreck -  
They were big strong lads, but a bit of a sight!  
Noticing them, the son of Atreus, with a phony show  
Of feeling sorry for 'em, called out:  
"You poor beggars, how did you get here?  
Shipwrecked, were you? Where was it? What was she called?  
This is a funeral ceremony for poor old Menelaus -  
Helen here is performing our special rites  
For a body lost at sea - please join us!"  
They were all weeping crocodile tears  
As they got in the boat, bringing offerings for Menelaus.  
We were suspicious and started muttering amongst ourselves,  
About how many extra men were getting on board.  
But we shut up when we remembered what you'd said.  
When you made that Greek the captain that was when  
You set us on course for disaster!  
We got most of the tackle on board easily enough;  
But the damned bull refused to walk up the gangplank -  
Bellowing and rolling its eyes, arching its back,  
Lowering his horns - we were afraid to go near him!  
The Helen's husband shouted out:  
"Sackers of Troy! Come on! Grab the beast -  
Hoist him on your shoulders Greek style,  
And chuck him in the bows. Let's have  
A sacrifice in honour of the man who died!"  
His sword was ready in his hand;  
They did what he said - seized the bull,  
Carried it up and dumped on the deck.

Finally, when everything was stowed,  
Helen, showing a glimpse of shapely ankle,  
Climbed aboard and took her seat amidships,  
With Menelaus, the supposed corpse, beside her.  
The other Greeks sat along the gunwales,  
Man marking man, their daggers hidden in their clothes.  
We rowed out through the breakers on his word of command.  
When we were out to sea, still near land  
But not near enough, the helmsman called out:  
"Any further, captain, or will this do?  
It's up to you - whatever you say" he said.  
"This is fine."  
With his sword in his hand he leapt into the bows,  
And stood poised to sacrifice the bull.  
Making no mention of any dead man,  
He shouted as he slit its throat:  
"Poseidon, master of the sea; glorious daughters of Nereus:

Bring me safe to the shores of Nauplia,  
And my wife - safe from the land of Egypt!"  
A jet of blood curved into the sea.  
The Greek was pleased. And someone said:  
"It's a trap! Turn the ship round!  
Paddle on right-hand oars - give the order! Use the rudder!"  
The son of Atreus stood back from the slaughtered bull  
And shouted to his friends "What's keeping you?  
Death to the Egyptians! Kill them!  
Throw them off the boat! Into the sea with them!"  
The boatswain shouted back telling your men:  
"Come on! Grab anything for a weapon!  
Break up the rowing-seats, some of you;  
Rip that oar out of its rigger!  
Anything to smash their skulls and make them bleed,  
The foreign scum!"  
Everyone sprang to his feet - our side  
Had poles and spars, but they had swords.  
The ship was awash with blood.  
There was a voice from the stern egging them on:  
It was Helen: "Where's the old panache?  
Give the Egyptians a taste of the medicine you gave Troy!"  
With the Greeks fired up at her words, our side  
Started to fall back. Some were left on their feet,  
But you'd have seen corpses aplenty lying still.  
Menelaus, in full armour, watched to see  
Where his friends were under pressure; there  
He put his strength to use, flashing his sword  
Until all your men were overboard.  
He cleared your loyal sailors from the decks,  
Then standing on the helm he told the coxwain  
To steer straight for Greece. They hoisted sail  
Which billowed out as the wind caught it.

They've gone. Left Egypt. I escaped  
Only by jumping into the sea by the anchor.  
A fisherman picked me up -  
I was quite exhausted - and brought me here  
To tell you this news.

Seems you were a bit naive, sir:  
There's nothing more useful in life  
Than a good suspicious nature.

CHORUS : [*simperingly*] My goodness! I never would have thought  
Menelaus could have pulled the wool  
Over your eyes like that - and ours too!  
Fancy, that was really him all the time!

THEOCLYMENUS : Snared! The woman's guile has trapped me! What a stupid fool am I!  
Gone! My lovely bride has vanished, it's too late to catch you now.  
Blasted Greeks I cannot punish, but my sister is here still:  
She deceived me, seeing clearly who he was, our palace guest -  
Menelaus! That's the last time she'll have secrets from the king.  
I'll make sure that no one else is cheated with her quackery!

*He turns to enter the palace, but finds the Messenger barring his way. The dialogue that follows is slightly farcical in tone: the beat of the verse (exactly as in the original) should be emphasised sufficiently to bring this out*

MESSENGER : You there! Sir! Where are you going? Who do you propose to kill?  
THEOCLYMENUS : I go to do what's right and proper. Stand aside, out of my way!  
MESSENGER : No! I won't let go your garments! Evil things you plan to do!  
THEOCLYMENUS : You're a slave; can't rule your master!  
MESSENGER : ...Yes, if I've more sense than you!  
THEOCLYMENUS : I don't think so! Now please let me ...  
MESSENGER : ... No! Permit you I shall not!  
THEOCLYMENUS : Kill that evil bitch, my sister...  
MESSENGER : ... No! She's good, she is a saint!  
THEOCLYMENUS : Who betrayed me! ...  
MESSENGER : ... No! It was a fine betrayal! It was right!  
THEOCLYMENUS : Right to give my bride away?  
MESSENGER : ... To someone who deserved her more!  
THEOCLYMENUS : Who deserved her more than me?  
MESSENGER : ... The one her father gave her to!  
THEOCLYMENUS : Fate presented her to me!  
MESSENGER : ... But then fate took her back again!  
THEOCLYMENUS : You've no right to judge my actions  
MESSENGER : ... Yes, if I'm the better judge!  
THEOCLYMENUS : So I'm the subject, not the ruler?  
MESSENGER : ... Tyrants have no right to rule.  
THEOCLYMENUS : You're in love with death, my friend ...  
MESSENGER : ... Go on! Kill me! I'm not scared!  
Kill me! Spare your sister's life, and give me death instead of her.  
Slaves can be their masters' equals, dying for their masters' sake.

*The HEAVENLY TWINS appear suddenly and spectacularly. As with the previous scene, there should be an element of farce (difficult to avoid anyway with two actors dressed as Stars speaking in tandem!)*

THE TWINS : Restrain thy rage! Control thy angry mood,  
Theoclymenus, proud Egypt's king! We are the Twins;  
They call us Sons of Zeus, whom Leda bore;  
Brothers of Helen who hath fled thy realm.  
The marriage you're so cross you've lost  
Was never meant to be! Your sister, she  
(whose mother was a goddess don't forget)  
Is not at fault: she only did what's right,  
Obedient to her father's just commands.  
Helen was a guest within your house; allowed  
To stay till fate said she must leave: today.  
For now the walls of Troy have fallen down,  
The gods no longer need to use her name.  
Sorry! It's time for her to join once more  
Her real husband and go home to be his wife.  
Put back your threatening sword into its sheath -  
Your sister was correct in what she did.  
We would have rescued Helen long before,  
But Zeus had made us gods: you see  
We have to bow to fate *and* to the gods,  
Since they'd decided how it all should end.

So much for you; and to my sister this I say:  
Sail with your husband, fair winds shall be yours.  
We two, your brothers twain, your rescuers,  
Riding the waves beside you, guide you home.  
When you are old and end your life on earth,  
You shall be made a god, and with the Twins  
Shall share the offerings mortals make to us;  
It's all included in the plans of mighty Zeus!  
The isle where Hermes dropped you off that time,  
When he had snatched you up from Sparta, so  
Paris should not secure you as his bride  
(The isle that guards the Aktaean shore, I mean)  
Shall be called "Helen" by the natives there  
For giving you welcome when you lost your home.  
For Menelaus, too, the wanderer  
The gods reserve a special fate: you'll dwell  
For ever in the Islands of the Blest!  
The gods don't hate the upper class, they just  
Get twice the share of trouble as the common herd!  
THEOCLYMENUS : O sons of Zeus and Leda, please forgive  
The fuss about your sister that I made.  
*My* sister I've decided not to kill;  
Let Helen go to Greece, if that's god's will.  
She is the finest sister anyone could have,  
A true sister to the pair of you. She is  
Untouched - her virtue is secure. And so  
Farewell! Your Helen is a person truly fair -  
Women like her, alas, are somewhat rare!

*They vanish as alarmingly as they appeared*

[CHORUS : It's a funny old game ...]

*The final clichés of the Chorus should be inaudible - perhaps drowned out by suitably triumphal music!*