

# HELEN by Euripides

1.22.17

Translated by Diane Svarlien

## SOUND CUES

### CAST OF CHARACTERS

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HELEN of Sparta

TEUCER, brother of Ajax

CHORUS of Greek women and Egyptian women

MENELAUS, husband of Helen

POLYDAMNA (Gatekeeper)

ELPIS (“Hope”), retainer of Helen and Menelaus

THEONOË, daughter of Proteus, prophet/priestess

THEOCLYMENUS, son of Proteus, king of Egypt

ELAPHOS (“Deer”), sailor of Theoclymenus

PHYLAX (“Guardian”), retainer of Theoclymenus

CASTOR & POLYDEUCES (aka the DIOSCURI)

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## PROLOGUE

[HELEN]

#1: Nile  
Groove

**MUSIC:** *intro music fades into the Groove of the Singers.*

**NOTE:** *All stage directions are provisional—the directions are there to help out; if they are not working for you, feel free to try something else!*

**HELEN enters running**, surreptitiously, carrying “stolen” papyri rolls from the palace. She rushes to her “bedroom” at the Tomb of Proteus. She may be writing at her “desk” as she talks at times. There’s something irresistibly playful and “sparkly” about her.

**HELEN:**

**These are the lovely virgin streams of the Nile  
which waters Egypt's plain: they don't need rainfall  
from Zeus—just white snow, melting into torrents.  
This land was ruled by Proteus when he lived;  
he married one of the sea-nymphs, Psamathe.**

**He sired two children in this house: a boy  
named Theoclymenus, and a noble maiden,  
her mother's jewel, called Eido as a child,  
but when she reached the fullness of her youth,  
the age when she might marry, then her name  
was changed to Theonoë, for she knew  
all that is, and all that's yet to come;  
her "mind" was "like a god's." This honor came  
from her grandfather Nereus.**

**As for me, my city is far from unknown:  
Sparta. And perhaps you know my father's name: Tyndareos.**

**There is a story, though, that Zeus took on  
the shape of a swan, pretending he was fleeing  
from an eagle, and he flew into the arms  
of my mother, Leda, and made love to her—  
if such a story is even credible.**

**#2: fade  
& end  
Nile  
Groove  
at signal  
from  
Helen**

**My name is Helen. I've suffered many evils.**

**#3: begin  
Air/  
Phantom  
Groove at  
signal  
from  
Helen**

**Three goddesses came to Alexandros  
deep in the recesses of Mt. Ida  
to have a beauty contest: Hera, Cyprian Aphrodite,  
and Zeus's virgin daughter Athena. Their intent  
was to settle this question: which one looked the best.**

**My beauty (if misfortune can be called  
beautiful) was the offer Aphrodite made  
to Alexandros: he could marry me.  
She won.**

**He left the cowsheds of Mt. Ida  
and came to Sparta, to lay claim on my bed.**

**But Hera was upset she didn't win,  
so Alexandros never slept with me  
but only with thin air. The goddess took  
armfuls of the sky, and made a shape  
that looked just like me: a living, breathing figment.  
She gave this phantom to King Priam's son.  
He thought he had me, but he really didn't;  
it was only an illusion.**

**Hand in hand  
with these misfortunes went the plan of Zeus**

to bring a war to Greece and to the doomed  
Trojans. The goals were to lighten

#4:  
Air/Phantom  
Groove  
climax  
through  
next  
section

the crowded mass that pressed on Mother Earth  
and to glorify the strongest man in Greece.

The reason for the battle was—not me,  
but just my name, a spear-prize for the Greeks.

Hermes wrapped me in a cloud and took me  
up into the folds of aether—Zeus had not  
abandoned me—and settled me right here  
in the house of Proteus (whom he had judged to be  
the man whose wise restraint surpassed all others')  
so I could keep the bed of Menelaus  
untouched and pure.

While I'm here, my poor husband  
has gathered an army and taken it to Troy  
to hunt for me.

#### Beside Scamander's streams

#5:  
transition  
back from  
Air/Phantom  
groove to  
Nile  
groove  
slowly

many souls have perished for my sake.  
And I, who have been through so much, am cursed,  
detested by the Greeks; they believe  
that I betrayed my husband and brought war.

Why, then, do I still live?

#6: Nile  
Groove

Well, I have heard  
a god's pronouncement: Hermes has declared  
that once again on Sparta's glorious plain  
I will dwell with my husband, who will realize  
I never went to Troy—this will happen  
only if I never share my bed  
with another man.

While Proteus still lived

I was safe from threats of marriage, but when the earth  
had covered him in darkness, then his son  
began to seek my hand—to hunt me down.  
I honor my husband still, and so I've  
thrown myself upon the tomb of Proteus

as a suppliant, to keep my marriage safe.

#7: Bell  
shimmer;  
pickup Nile  
Groove much  
softer; bird  
cries & soft  
water sounds

My name has been reviled throughout all Greece;

I want to keep my body free from shame.

*(Enter TEUCER from the direction of the sea, armed with bow and arrows. He carries a leather pouch at his side, with a large hunk of bread, apples, cheese, etc.; pocket-knife)*

**TEUCER:**

Look at this stronghold—who's the ruler here?

It's like the house of Plutus\*: regal walls;

\*god of Wealth

beautifully corniced. Nice.

*(TEUCER is about to knock at the palace gate, but suddenly sees HELEN)*

**Ah! O gods, what's this?**

**This murderous image—she's a replica  
of the one I hate beyond all other women:  
she destroyed me, destroyed all the Greeks.**

**You look so much like Helen—**

*(pulls arrow out, strings bow)*

**May the gods**

**spit on you! If I were not a stranger,  
a foreigner in this land, then you would die:  
my arrow would deliver your reward  
for just how much you look like Zeus's daughter.**

*(HELEN freezes. Slowly, TEUCER moves away, with difficulty looks  
away from her. Pause; HELEN recognizes the stranger as a Greek; because of his  
words and anger, she knows she can't appear to be HELEN as she speaks]*

**#8: crescendo  
then sudden  
stop to Nile  
groove once  
Teucer has his  
bow strung  
and aimed at  
Helen; back to  
Nile sounds  
after the  
“freeze frame”**

**HELEN:**

**Unhappy stranger, why do you turn away,  
and why hate me for all the harm she's done?**

**TEUCER:**

**I'm sorry; anger got the best of me.  
Everyone in Greece hates the daughter  
of Zeus. Forgive my words; I went too far.**

**HELEN: Who are you, and what brings you to this land?**

**TEUCER:** I'm one of the unfortunate Achaeans—a Greek.

**HELEN:** It's no surprise that you hate Helen, then.

**TEUCER:** I'm a fugitive, driven from my homeland.

**HELEN:** You poor man. Who sent you into exile?

**TEUCER:** My nearest and dearest. My father, Telamon.

*(Revelation—HELEN knows Telamon, and now knows he's Teucer.)*

**HELEN:** What for? Some harm was done—that much is clear.

**TEUCER:** Because my brother Ajax died in Troy.

**HELEN:** But—surely you didn't take his life with your own dagger!

**TEUCER:** No! -- He fell on his own sword. He killed himself.

**HELEN:** He went mad? What sane man would do that?

**TEUCER:** You know Achilles, Peleus's son?

**HELEN:** Oh, yes... I've heard that he once courted Helen.

**TEUCER:** He died; there was a contest for his armor.

**HELEN:** I see. And how did that make Ajax suffer?

**TEUCER:** He didn't win the armor, so he ended his life.

#9: bell  
shimmer  
indicates  
new info;  
continue  
Nile groove  
but bell  
shimmers  
grow ever  
louder

**HELEN:** And why were you afflicted by his pain?

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

**HELEN:** So you, too, went to glorious Troy?

**TEUCER:** We sacked the town; now I'm destroyed as well.

#10: bell  
shimmer

**HELEN:** *(shocked)*

The city has been taken? Burned to the ground?

**TEUCER:** You can barely see the outline of its walls.

**HELEN:** O miserable Helen, destroyer of the Trojans.

#11: bell  
shimmer

**TEUCER:** The Greeks are ruined, too. Such heavy damage.

**HELEN:** Troy was ravaged—when? How long?

**TEUCER:** It's been almost seven growing seasons now.

**HELEN:** And how long did you stay in Troy before that?



**TEUCER:** The months went on and on. Ten years, in all.

**HELEN:** *(as if casually)*

**And did you capture her—the Spartan woman?**

#12: bell  
shimmer

**TEUCER:**

**Menelaus did. He dragged her by the hair.**

**HELEN:** Did you see the poor woman? Or just hear about it?

**TEUCER:** I saw it, just as I'm seeing you right now.

**HELEN:** Were you so sure of what you thought you saw?

**TEUCER:** I saw it with my eyes and with my mind.

**HELEN:** Watch out—perhaps the gods sent an illusion.

**TEUCER:** Let's speak of something else. No more about her.

#13: Nile  
Groove  
continuing -  
very audible

*(Pause)*

**HELEN:** Is Menelaus home now, with his wife?

#14: bell  
shimmer

**TEUCER:** "Not in Argos, nor by Eurotas' streams."

**HELEN:** *(too quickly)*

Oh, no! That's bad—for those who are affected.

#15: bell  
shimmer

**TEUCER:**

They've vanished, so they say—he and his wife.

**HELEN:** *(confused; starting to panic)*

The Greeks didn't all sail home together?

**TEUCER:** They did, but then a storm drove them apart.

**HELEN:** Where were they on the salty waves' broad back?

**TEUCER:** Their course was straight across the Aegean Sea.

**HELEN:** And no one knows if Menelaus made it?

#16: bell  
shimmer  
on "dead"

**TEUCER:**

No one. Throughout Greece they say he's dead.

*(big break; HELEN walks away from Teucer, downstage; to herself and audience)*

#17:  
shakers  
begin to  
take  
over the  
Nile  
groove

**HELEN: I am destroyed.**

*(new thought—to Teucer; Leda, Thestias' daughter, is Helen's mother)*

**Does... Thestias' daughter live?**

**TEUCER:**

Leda, you mean? No, she has passed away.

*(pause)*

**HELEN:**

**Was she destroyed by... Helen's infamy?**

#18:  
shaker  
shimmer

**TEUCER:**

**That's what they say. The lady hanged herself.**

**HELEN: And Tyndareos's sons? Are *they* alive?**

#19:  
shaker  
shimmer

**TEUCER: They're dead, and not dead. There are two reports.**

**HELEN: Which story is more plausible?**

*(to herself & audience only)* **Oh, no!**

**TEUCER: They have the form of stars now; they are gods.**

**HELEN: *(relieved momentarily)* Well said; I like that story.**

**What's the other?**

#20:  
shaker  
shimmer

**TEUCER:**

**Self-slaughter. They took their lives because of their sister.**

*HELEN reacts visibly; TEUCER continues, decisively.*

#21: move  
back to Nile  
groove,  
with bird  
sounds  
prominent

**Enough talk, now. Why grieve for something twice?**

**I came here to this royal house to see  
the prophet Theonoë, and to hear  
an oracle from her—I'd like for you**

to be my representative to her  
so I can learn the most favorable course  
to sea-girt Cyprus on my wingèd ship.  
Apollo prophesied I'd settle there  
and name the place in honor of my homeland  
far away, the island Salamis.

**HELEN:**

Your journey will find its own course. You must leave  
this land at once.

Flee now, before he sees you—  
the son of Proteus, who rules this land.  
He's gone now, with his trusty hunting dogs,  
to kill wild beasts. And he kills any Greek  
he can lay his hands on.

*TEUCER begins to protest.*

You must not ask why,  
nor will I tell you. What good would it do?

**TEUCER:**

Well said, and thank you. May the gods repay you.  
Your body is like Helen's, but your mind  
is not at all like hers; it's very different.

*(calling on the gods; incantation; furious)*

**May she die painfully; may she never reach**

**#22: bell  
and  
shaker  
shimmer**

**Eurotas' streams.**

*(to Helen, mildly)*

**But to you, I wish good fortune.**

*Exit TEUCER, toward the sea.*

**#23:  
Song 1  
Intro**

**HELEN:** *(falls to ground—out of breath—despairing slowly until she begins wailing, rambling to herself...)*

**How shall I start my lament? Its anguish must equal the anguish here in my heart. What muse knows the ways of the language of pain?**

**Ah, me.**

**#24:  
SONG 1**

*Helen begins low, then wails gradually louder, losing control—out of this, begins her song. Her cries draw the attention of the CHORUS of Greek and Egyptian Women, who enter from the inland direction while Helen sings the first strophe. The CHORUS brings their laundry in baskets onstage with them, as they are coming from the river.*

**SONG 1: *Virgin Daughters of the Earth/There Beside the Indigo Waters;*  
*CHORUS enters carrying laundry baskets; dance and singing with Helen***

*HELEN falls to the ground, weeping..*

## **SCENE 1: WHY DO I STILL LIVE?**

[HELEN, GREEK and EGYPTIAN WOMEN, POLYDAMNA)

**CHORUS MEMBERS** *(come forward, speak):*

**ELISSA:** Women should stick together,

**BLAIR:** help each other.

**ELISSA:** I know your life is painful, but it's best

**RAJULA:** to accept the things we must,

**ELISSA:** and bear them lightly.

*CHORUS members are comforting HELEN throughout her speech.*

**HELEN:**

Dear women, what is this strange destiny  
entwining me? For certainly no woman—  
whether Greek or foreign—bears her young  
within an eggshell—a delicate white vessel—  
the way they say Leda bore me to Zeus.

Did my mother bear me as a freak of nature?  
For, yes, my life and all the things I've suffered  
have been quite freakish: Hera was the cause  
of some of it; my beauty caused the rest.  
If only I could have been wiped clean—just like  
a sculpture—and taken on a new appearance:  
an ugly one, no longer beautiful.

And if only the Greeks had put my evil fortunes  
out of their minds, and held on to the good  
the way they now keep clinging to the bad.  
When someone is treated badly by the gods  
--in that one thing he cares the most about—  
it's difficult, yet still it must be borne.  
But I've been handed multiple disasters.

First of all, I've never been unjust,  
and yet I have an evil reputation.  
Being blamed when you've done nothing wrong  
is even worse than really being guilty.

And secondly, the gods have settled me  
among non-Greeks, far away from loved ones.

And then, the only anchor  
that held me steady, the only hope I had—  
that my husband would release me from these troubles—  
that's gone now, since he's dead.

And furthermore,  
I murdered my own mother; yes, the charge  
is unjust, but that injustice is all mine.

**My daughter, too, the jewel of our home,  
a virgin still, grows old without a husband.**

**The Dioscuri, the twin-born sons of Zeus,  
my dear brothers, exist no longer.**

**All that I possess  
is misery; I might as well be dead.**

**And here's the worst of it: I can't go home;  
my fatherland would shut me out. They'd think  
that I was the Helen who had gone to Troy,  
that I was coming back without my husband.**

**If Menelaus were alive, we'd have  
secret ways to recognize each other.  
But that won't happen. He is gone for good.**

**Well, then. Why do I still live? What fortune now  
is left for me? Should I exchange my troubles  
for marriage to a rich Egyptian, the new king,  
and take my place at his abundant table?**

**But a woman who feels bitter toward her husband  
becomes embittered even to her own body.**



**It's best to die. How could that not be right?  
My troubles are so great, and run so deep.**

**For other women, beauty brings good fortune;  
my beauty brought me nothing but destruction.**

**AMINA:**

**Helen, whoever that stranger was—you shouldn't  
believe that every word he said was true.**

**HELEN:**

**He stated clearly that my husband's dead.**

**ELISSA:**

**Many clear statements happen to be lies.**

*(approval from other women)*

**HELEN:**

**Yes, and the reverse: some are the truth.**

**#25:  
INTRO  
SONG #2**

**RAJULA:**

**You're always ready to believe the worst.**

**HELEN:**

**Fear engulfs me and impels me, yes.**

**AMINA:**

Do people in this household wish you well?

**HELEN:**

Yes—all except the one who's hunting me.

**AMINA:**

So, here's what you must do. First, leave this tomb—

**HELEN:**

What are you telling me? What's your advice?

**AMINA:**

--and go inside the house,

**ELISSA:** to ask the one who knows all things, ...

**CHORUS MEMBERS:** ... the ocean Nereid's daughter, Theonoë:

*Ask Theonoë! Ask the prophet!*

#25: SONG  
2 - "Ask  
Theonoë" -  
Call and  
response  
song with  
audience  
participation

## **SONG #2: ASK THEONOË**

*Exit the CHORUS and HELEN into the palace, singing; they take baskets of clothing with them.*

## **SCENE 2: MENELAUS AT THE GATES**

**[MENELAUS, POLYDAMNA)**

## 2a: MENELAUS' ENTRANCE MONOLOGUE

*Enter Menelaus from the direction of the sea. He carries a ragged satchel or backpack possibly. He is dressed in rags.*

**MENELAUS:**

**O Pelops\*, you who long ago in Pisa  
contended in your four-horse chariot—  
a mighty tournament with Oenomaus—  
if only you had lost your life that day  
before you ever fathered Atreus  
who, in the bed of Aerope, engendered  
a glorious brace of brothers: Agamemnon  
and myself: I am Menelaus.**

\*Pelops = grandfather  
of Menelaus; beloved  
of Poseidon; founder  
of the house of Atreus

**You see, the force that sailed with me to Troy  
was, to my knowledge—I don't mean to boast—  
the largest army ever. The youth of Greece  
followed me willingly; they were not coerced  
by any threat of violence. I'm no tyrant.**

**Those men are all accounted for: some dead,  
and some (who made it through the waves alive)  
with their dead comrades' names upon their lips.**

But as for me, I wander without cease  
upon the pale sea's salty wave, alas,  
ever since the day that I took down  
the towers of Troy.

My one desire is to go  
home to my fatherland—and yet the gods say no.  
I've sailed to every bleak, forbidding landfall  
along the coast of Libya. Every time  
I approach my fatherland, I'm blown right back;  
no fair wind ever came to send me home.

And now, marooned and miserable, I'm here  
in this land, reft of all my friends; my ship  
was shattered into fragments on the rocks,  
her workmanship—a marvel to behold—  
in smithereens. By some fantastic stroke  
of fortune, the ship's keel remained intact;  
I clung to it and kept myself alive  
along with Helen, whom I've dragged from Troy.

The name of this place, who its people are—  
I just don't know. You see, I was ashamed  
to mingle with the crowd, to ask them questions,  
and simply too embarrassed to display  
the clothes that my hard luck had wrapped around me.  
A man of high position, when he falls

into a joyless state, is much worse off  
than one who is accustomed to misfortune.

I am beset by need. I have no food,  
no clothes upon my back. Just take a look  
at what I'm wearing: scraps the ship cast off.  
The sea has robbed me of my finery,  
my brilliant robes and garments. I have left  
my wife, the cause of all my trouble, hidden  
inside a cave.

My few surviving friends  
are keeping watch; I've ordered them to stay there  
and be the guardians of my marriage bed.  
I've come here by myself, in hopes of finding  
the things my friends need.

When I saw this house  
with its impressive gates and corniced walls,  
I approached: a rich man lives here, clearly.  
A wealthy household is a better bet  
for sailors in need. People who have nothing  
couldn't help out even if they wanted.

## 2b: Menelaus & Polydamna

*(knocking on door or gate or pavement, shouting, etc.)*

**Hey there! Doorman! Somebody, come out!  
Report my troubles to the ones who live here!**

*POLYDAMNA comes out (from behind "counter" of tomb)*

**POLYDAMNA:**

**Who is that at the gates? Why don't you leave?**

**You're making a commotion, and my master  
will be displeased. Ah, I see you're Greek.**

**You're a dead man. Greeks are not allowed here.**

**MENELAUS:**

**Old woman, there's no need to speak so harshly.**

**I'll listen to you—please, just change your tone.**

**POLYDAMNA:** *(she gestures with her broom, shoo-ing him away)*

**Go away. My job is to make sure  
no Greek comes near this house. So get lost, stranger.**

*(On "get lost," she raises the broomstick above her head preparing to strike him,  
or maybe actually comes at him with the broom end)*

they  
speak  
almost  
simulta-  
neously  
– on  
top of  
each  
other

**MENELAUS:**

**Put down your hand! There's no need to use force!**

**POLYDAMNA:**

**It's your own fault; you're not listening to me.**

**MENELAUS:**

Go inside, and let your master know...

**POLYDAMNA:**

Oh, no. That wouldn't work out well for you. Definitely not, definitely not.

**MENELAUS:**

... that I've been shipwrecked and I am a guest here in your country; I should be safe from threats!

**POLYDAMNA:**

Get out of here, and try some other house.

**MENELAUS:**

No, I'm going in. *YOU*, listen to *me*!

**POLYDAMNA:**

Don't think I won't use force. You are a nuisance.

**MENELAUS:**

Alas, where is the glory of my armies?

**POLYDAMNA:**

Oh, I'm supposed to be impressed. I'm not.

**MENELAUS:**

**O evil fate, O undeserved dishonor!**

**POLYDAMNA:**

**Why do you weep? Whose pity have you earned?**

**MENELAUS:**

**The pity is, I once was blessed with fortune.**

**POLYDAMNA:**

**So go back to your friends and cry to them.**

**MENELAUS:**

**What place is this? Whose kingly residence?**

**POLYDAMNA:**

**These are the halls of Proteus; this is Egypt.**

**MENELAUS:**

**Egypt! Woe is me—where have I sailed?!**

**POLYDAMNA:** *(pissed off)*

**Why disdain the Nile's sparkling waters?**

**MENELAUS:** **I don't. It's my own fortune I deplore.**



**POLYDAMNA:** You're not the only man on earth who's suffered.

**MENELAUS:**

The lord you just now mentioned—King Proteus – is he home?

**POLYDAMNA:**

That is his tomb.      His son now rules the land.

**MENELAUS:** Well, then, where's *he*? Is he at home, or out?

**POLYDAMNA:** He's out. And he abominates the Greeks.

**MENELAUS:** Oh, lucky me. What causes his ill will?

**POLYDAMNA:** Helen, Zeus's daughter. She lives here.

**MENELAUS:**                    (*strong double take*)

What are you saying? Say that one more time!

**POLYDAMNA:** The Spartan daughter of Tyndareos.

**MENELAUS:**

Where did she come from? How can that make sense?

**POLYDAMNA:** She came from Lacedaemon; now she's here.

**MENELAUS:**

**But—When? Has my wife been stolen from the cave?**

**POLYDAMNA:**

**She came before the Greeks set out for Troy.**

**Now move on, stranger. There's been a twist of fortune;  
the royal residence is agitated.**

**You've come at a bad moment. If my master  
catches you, he'll give you a guest-gift:  
your death.**

*(confidentially)*

**I'm trying to help you.**

*(POLYDAMNA exits, leaving Menelaus standing)*

**MENELAUS:**      *(bewildered)*

**What can I say? I have no words. It appears  
that one disaster follows on another.**

**I caught my wife and brought her back from Troy  
and put her in a cave to keep her safe,  
and now I learn another woman lives here  
who has the very same name as my wife!**

**And she's the child of Zeus, that woman said.**

**Is there some man named Zeus who lives beside**

the banks of the Nile? There's just one Zeus in heaven!  
And where on earth is there a place called Sparta  
other than beside the lovely reed-beds  
along Eurotas' streams? Are there two men  
named Tyndareos? Are there two different lands  
called Lacedaemon? Is there another Troy?

I simply don't know what to say. It seems  
that many men, across the wide world, share  
a name—and so do cities, so do women!

I guess that's not so strange.

Well, as for me,  
I won't be scared off by a servant's threats.  
No man in earth is so uncivilized  
that he could hear my name and still refrain  
from giving me some food. The fires of Troy  
are famous—glorious!—and so am I,  
Menelaus, the man who kindled them,  
well-known throughout the earth.

*(hides)*

I'll wait right here  
for the lord of the house. This gives me two ways out:  
if he seems truly savage, I'll stay hidden

and head back to the shipwreck. If he shows even a flicker of humanity, I'll ask him for the things we need right now. Yes, that's the worst of all this: it's pathetic that I, a king myself, should have to beg for sustenance from other royal households.

I'm in necessity's grip. There is a saying— not mine, but it's a wise one, truly—nothing is more powerful than terrible Necessity.

#27:  
CHORUS  
RE-  
ENTRAN  
CE -  
SONG 3:  
I've  
Heard  
the  
Word I  
Sought

*Menelaus further conceals himself. Enter CHORUS from the palace, singing, followed by HELEN.*

**SONG 3: I've Heard the Word I Sought:** GREEK & EGYPTIAN

WOMEN, and HELEN (happy procession back to the tomb, interrupted by MENELAUS--)

## SCENE 3: He Lives! First Meeting

HELEN:

I'll go back to the safety of the tomb;

I've heard the welcome words of Theonoë.

She knows the whole truth, and she says my husband

lives, and sees the light! His ship has strayed

to a thousand places; he'll arrive, exhausted,

his sufferings will reach their end-point here.

URGENT  
GROOVE  
drumbeat  
continues from  
end of song

There's one thing that she didn't say; what happens  
when he gets here? Will his safety be assured?

I didn't want to press her: I was thrilled  
to hear that he was living. He's nearby,  
marooned, not far from this land—so she says—  
shipwrecked, with a few surviving friends.  
Oh, when will you come? I long to see you!

*(MENE LAUS stands up)*

**But—**

who's this? Oh, my! Is this some kind of ambush  
planned by Proteus' ungodly son?

I've got to get to the tomb; I'd better run  
as swiftly as I can, like a bacchante  
or racing filly. I am being hunted  
by this man, and his appearance is wild.

*(HELEN runs, tries to make her way to the tomb; MENE LAUS blocks her)*

**MENE LAUS:**

You! Hello! You, making a mad dash  
for the tomb where many offerings are burned—  
wait! Why run away? The sight of you—  
the way your body looks—I'm stunned. I'm speechless.

**HELEN:**

O women, this is most unjust. This man

(Drumbeats  
continue &  
intensify)

is blocking me, to keep me from the tomb.

He's trying to capture me and hand me over  
to the one who wants to marry me, the tyrant.

**MENELAUS:**

No, really: I'm no thief. I'm no one's henchman.

**HELEN:**

And yet the way you're dressed is ---!

**MENELAUS:**

Stop—slow down—there's no need to be afraid.

**HELEN:**

All right, I've stopped—now that I've reached the tomb.

Drums  
slow  
down,  
become  
softer

*(They finally look at each other.)*

**MENELAUS:**

Who are you? What's this sight my eyes are seeing?

**HELEN:** I'm wondering the same thing. Who are you?

**MENELAUS:** I've never seen two bodies more alike.

**HELEN:** O gods, it's magical, this... recognition.

**MENELAUS:** Are you a Greek, or are you from here?

**HELEN:** A Greek. And I'd like to know where you're from.

**MENELAUS:** Helen—when I look at you, I see Helen.

**HELEN:** And I see Menelaus. I am speechless.

**MENELAUS:** Yes: Menelaus the unfortunate.

*(HELEN tries to embrace MENELAUS)*

**HELEN:** You're back in your wife's arms! It's been so long!

*(pushes her away)*

**MENELAUS:** Wife? What wife? Get off—don't touch my robes!

**HELEN:** Your bride! My father Tyndareos gave me to you!

**MENELAUS:**

**Hecate\*, light-bringer, keep me safe from phantoms!**

\*goddess of the crossroads, night wanderings; sometimes identified with Rhea/Demeter

**HELEN:** I'm not one of Hecate's night-spirits!

**MENELAUS:** And I am not the husband of two wives!

**HELEN:** Two wives? What other woman calls you husband?

#29:  
Phantom  
Groove

**MENELAUS:** She's in the cave! The one I brought from Troy!

**HELEN:** You have no other wife; there's only me.

**MENELAUS:** I think I'm sane—is the problem with my eyes?

**HELEN:** When you see me, do you not see your wife?

**MENELAUS:** Your body is like hers. But I'm uncertain.

**HELEN:** Just look! Could there be any clearer proof?

**MENELAUS:** You're very similar; I won't deny it.

**HELEN:** Who can instruct you better than your eyes?

**MENELAUS:** This is the problem: I have another wife.

**HELEN:** I never went to Troy! That was a figment!

**MENELAUS:** But who could craft a living, conscious body?

**HELEN:**

She was a phantom, made of aether—the god's own  
handiwork!

**MENELAUS:** Which god? What you are saying is bizarre.



**HELEN:**

Hera swapped us, so Alexandros wouldn't get me.

**MENELAUS:**

What, now? You were here, and in Troy, too?

**HELEN:**

A name can be everywhere; a body can't.

**MENELAUS:**

Please, let me go. I've had my fill of sorrow.

**HELEN:**

You'll leave me here, and trade me for an illusion?

**MENELAUS:** (sadly; moving away)

I wish you all the best. You look like Helen.

**HELEN:**

I am destroyed. My husband, I have lost you.

**MENELAUS:**

I believe in what I suffered. Not in you.

**HELEN:**

Ah, me. Who is more wretched now than I?

My dearest love has left me; I will never  
return to Greece, to my fatherland.

#### **SCENE 4: THE PHANTOM VANISHES; REUNION**

[HELEN, MENELAUS, GREEK & EGYPTIAN WOMEN, ELPIS, servant of Menelaus]

#30:  
PHAN  
TOM  
GROO  
VE  
contin  
ues

*Enter ELPIS, excited and out of breath*

**ELPIS:**

Menelaus, there you are! It wasn't easy  
to find you. I have wandered the whole length  
of this non-Greek land. Your comrades sent me.

**MENELAUS:**

Have you been plundered by the Egyptians?

**ELPIS:**

No—something unbelievable has happened.  
“Amazing” is too weak a word for it.

**MENELAUS:**

It must be something strange; you're so excited!

**ELPIS:** Your endless suffering was all in vain.

**MENELAUS:** That's old news. Tell me something I don't know.

Phantom  
groove -  
shakers  
prominent

**ELPIS:** Your wife has flown away and disappeared  
into the folds of aether. She left behind  
the sacred cave where we had kept her safe;  
she's hidden in the sky. As she departed  
she spoke these words:

“Unhappy Trojans,  
unhappy Greeks, beside Scamander's banks—  
all for me!—by Hera's strategies  
you perished one by one, since you believed  
that Alexandros had Helen—but he really didn't.  
I've stayed as long as I was meant to stay;  
I did what I was sent to do. I'm going  
back to the sky that fathered me. Poor Helen  
has been reviled, but she is not to blame.”

*(SHE notices HELEN)*

Oh! Helen, there you are. Hello. I see  
you were here all along. I just came to report  
that you'd flown up to the stars; I didn't know  
that you had wings.

Now listen: it's all over.

I will not let you mock us any more.  
You've done enough harm—all the suffering  
you caused your husband and his men in Troy.

#31:  
Phantom  
Groove  
STOPS

**MENELAUS:** OK, that's it; I see now. This woman  
has told the truth! This is the day I've longed for,  
the day that I can hold you in my arms!

#32:  
SONG  
4 -  
SOMET  
HING  
MUCH  
BETTE  
R

<p><b><u>SONG #4: SOMETHING MUCH BETTER (Duet Menelaus &amp; Helen, with Chorus/Aud and Elpis)</u></b> <i>[HELEN &amp; MENELAUS, and then GREEK &amp; EGYPTIAN WOMEN (call-and-response)]</i></p>
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## **SCENE 5: THE GODS' WORKMANSHIP**

**[HELEN, MENELAUS, GREEK & EGYPTIAN WOMEN, ELPIS]**

**ELISSA:**

If future days can bless you with good fortune,  
it might make up for what occurred back then.

**ELPIS:** Menelaus, let me in on this good news:

I think I understand, but it's not clear.

**MENELAUS:**

Of course, my dear woman. Come join in the discussion.

**ELPIS:** She's not the one we fought for back in Troy?

**MENELAUS:**

**She's not the one! The gods deceived our minds;  
we held a baneful image made of cloud.**

**ELPIS:               What?**

**Our struggles were in vain? All for a cloud?**

**MENELAUS: Blame Hera. Blame the beauty contest.**

**ELPIS:               Really?**

**And this woman here is actually your wife?**

**MENELAUS: She is, believe me. Take my word for it.**

**ELPIS:**

**O daughter, the gods' workmanship is brilliant  
and intricate, but hard to comprehend.  
In their hands, everything gets turned around,  
twisted this way and that. One man may struggle;  
another may go through life without a care  
and then die horribly. At any moment  
anything could happen; nothing's certain.**

**You and your husband both have shared in struggles:  
you've been harmed by words, and *he* went out  
with spear in hand, intent upon his purpose.**

He fought hard, and got nothing. Now, just look:  
from out of nowhere—happiness! Good fortune!  
It turns out that you never did the things  
they said you did; you never brought down shame  
on your old father, or the Dioscuri.  
Now, once again, I sing your wedding hymn,  
remembering the torches that I carried  
as I ran along beside your chariot.  
You sat beside this man, a radiant bride  
leaving a prosperous home.

#33: SONG  
4 reprise:  
“Something  
Much  
Better” -  
only  
instrument  
al;  
song/dance

*Music crescendoes – CHORUS MEMBERS join HELEN and MENELAUS in a joyful recreation of their wedding day; ELPIS participates, runs alongside “chariot”, etc.*

**MENELAUS:** Elpis, you’ve toiled beside me many times  
and now you share my happiness, my joy.

#34: soft  
wedding  
reprise  
behind  
rest of  
scene;

Go and announce these new discoveries  
to our surviving friends, and let them know  
the state of our fortune. Tell them to keep watch  
there on the shore. More challenges, I know,  
await me, if I somehow find a way

to steal this woman from this land.

Fade to  
drums at “go  
tell them to  
be on the  
alert”

Go tell them to be on the alert. We must combine

our forces and our fortunes, if we hope  
to save ourselves from the non-Greeks!

**ELPIS:**

So be it. I have come to see, my lord,  
that prophecy is full of lies; it's worthless.  
The cries of birds, the fumes of offerings—  
they're noxious, nothing more.

Calchas the prophet saw his friends die one by one  
but never told the army that the war  
was all for a cloud—and neither did Helenus, Troy's seer.  
The city was destroyed in vain. You might say,  
"The god preferred to hide the truth." Then why—  
why bother with prophets at all? Make sacrifice  
and ask the gods for favors; never mind  
the empty words of augurs: they're alluring,  
but offerings won't help a lazy man.  
Good planning is the surest kind of prophet.

*Exit ELPIS.*

**ELISSA:**

Our view of prophecy is just the same as hers.

**RAJULA:**

No prophet can be greater than the friendship of the gods,

ELISSA: for any household.

#35:  
Urgent  
drum  
beat  
picks  
up

## **SCENE 6: THE CRISIS – “FLEE THIS LAND OR DIE”**

[HELEN, MENELAUS, GREEK & EGYPTIAN WOMEN]

**HELEN:** All right; so far, so good. I realize that it won't get us anywhere, poor man, for you to tell me how you came here safely from Troy. But all the same, I long to hear it.

**MENELAUS:**

You're asking for a lot—where to begin? Why should I tell of the Aegean shipwreck, the signal-fires of Nauplius on Euboea, the cities I traversed in Crete and Libya, the lookout-point of Perseus? You would never be sated by my tales, yet I would suffer my woes a second time in telling them; once more I'd re-experience my pain.

**HELEN:**

You've said more than I asked. Just tell me this: how long a time upon the sea's broad back were you distressed amid the salty waves?



**MENELAUS:**

I spent ten years in Troy; then, after that,  
I wandered in my ship for seven years.

**HELEN:**

Ah, poor man, you traveled for so long  
and came here safely only to be slaughtered.

**MENELAUS:**

What's that? You're killing me! What do you mean?

**HELEN:**

Flee this land as quickly as you can.  
The man whose house this is will take your life.

**MENELAUS:**

What did I do to bring on this disaster?

**HELEN:** You came out of the blue to block my marriage.

**MENELAUS:** Your marriage?! Someone plans to steal my wife?

**HELEN:** That is the outrage he has threatened, yes.

**MENELAUS:** Is he the king? Or a private man with power?

**HELEN:** He rules this land—the son of Proteus.

**MENELAUS:** That's it—I see now what the servant meant.

**HELEN:** The servant? Did you stand at someone's gates?

**MENELAUS:** These very ones. I was driven like a beggar.

**HELEN:** You had to ask for sustenance? Oh, dear.

**MENELAUS:** Not in so many words, but—yes, I begged.

**HELEN:** Well. Now you know about this marriage threat.

**MENELAUS:** Yes, except one thing: Has he... been with you?

**HELEN:** No! I've saved my bed for you, untouched.

**MENELAUS:** Good news, if this is true. Do you have proof?

**HELEN:** You see where I am camped beside this tomb?

**MENELAUS:** A woeful bed of straw. You mean, that's yours?

**HELEN:** Yes. This is where I seek escape from marriage.

**MENELAUS:** Is that a foreign custom? There's no altar?

**HELEN:** This tomb protects me, just like a god's temple.

**MENELAUS:** Well. It looks like I can't take you home by ship?

**HELEN:** Just try: a sword awaits you, not my bed.

**MENELAUS:** Then I would be the most miserable of men.

**HELEN:** There's no shame in escaping—flee this land!

**MENELAUS:** And leave you here? I sacked Troy for your sake!

**HELEN:** Better that than dying for my marriage.

**MENELAUS:** I am a man—a hero! I sacked Troy!

**HELEN:** Perhaps you want to kill the king. You can't.

**MENELAUS:** Why not? His body can't be pierced by steel?

**HELEN:** You'll see. But pointless daring is not wise.

**MENELAUS:** Should I just hold my hands out to be chained?

**HELEN:** There's no way out—we need some strategy.

**MENELAUS:** Yes—if we must die, let's go down fighting.

**HELEN:** There's just one thing that possibly might save us.

**MENELAUS:** What is it: money, daring, or fast talking?

**HELEN:** Secrecy. The king can't know you're here.

**MENELAUS:** How could he? I'm a stranger. Who would tell him?

**HELEN:** Inside the house, he has a god-like ally.

**MENELAUS:** (*marveling*) Some kind of sacred voice that dwells within?

**HELEN:** No, it's his sister. She's called Theonoë.

**MENELAUS:** Her name's oracular—"Mind of God". What does she do?

**HELEN:** She'll tell her brother. She knows everything.

**MENELAUS:** I'm dead, then. There's no way he won't find out.

**HELEN:** But maybe, if the two of us persuade her...

**MENELAUS:** To do what? Tell me what you're getting at!

**HELEN:** Not to tell her brother that you're here.

**MENELAUS:** If we persuade her, then we could escape?

**HELEN:** With her help, easily. Without her, no.

**MENELAUS:** It's up to you, then, since you both are women.

**HELEN:** I'll plead with her, my arms around her knees.

**MENELAUS:** But what if she refuses our entreaty?

**HELEN:** You will be killed, and I'll be forced to marry.

**MENELAUS:** How dare you! You'll be "forced"? That's your excuse?

**HELEN:** All right. I hereby swear, upon your head...

**MENELAUS:** That you would rather die than wed another?

**HELEN:** I'll die by the same sword, and lie beside you!

**MENELAUS:** Then give me your right hand, to seal the vow.

**HELEN:** Here is my hand. If you die, so shall I.

**MENELAUS:** And if I can't have you, I'll end my life.

**HELEN:** How can we die with glory and acclaim?

**MENELAUS:**

Upon the tomb's broad back I'll kill you first  
and then myself. Before that, I'm prepared  
to fight a stalwart fight with anyone  
encroaching on your bed! Just let them try!  
I will not bring disgrace upon the fame  
I won in Troy; I won't return to Greece  
to face the blame they'd pile upon my head  
if I, who parted Thetis from Achilles,  
who saw the death of Ajax, Telamon's son,  
and saw the son of Neleus lose his child,  
should hesitate to die for my own wife.  
Oh, yes, I'll fight! The gods, in their great wisdom,  
will take a fearless man who's killed by foes  
and wrap him lightly in a tomb of earth;  
but cowards they cast out upon the rocks.

**ELISSA and BLAIR:**

O gods, please grant the race of Tantalus  
a change of fortune now, from bad to good.

## **SCENE 7: THE PROPHETESS'S JUDGMENT**

**[HELEN, MENELAUS, GREEK & EGYPTIAN WOMEN, THEONOË]**

*Sounds of opening gate comes from palace*

**HELEN:**

Ah, me. This is the way my fortune stands.  
Menelaus, we are done for. Theonoë  
the prophetess emerges from the house;  
I heard her approach. Flee now! No, wait—  
What good is flight? She knows that you've arrived  
whether she's here or not. I am destroyed.  
And you've escaped from one non-Greek land  
into another: survived the war at Troy  
only to walk into a dagger here.

**#36:**  
**Entrance**  
**flourish**  
**and**  
**Priestess**  
**theme**

*Enter Theonoë from the palace, preceded by attendants carrying a torch  
and a sulfur-burner.*

**THEONOË:**

Lead on, with torchlight's radiance held high,  
and, in accordance with the sacred precept,  
purify the aether that surrounds us

so that I might breathe clean air.

And you: if any impure foot has stepped  
upon this ground, then strike the path with pine-torch  
and cleansing fire, to clear the way for me.

*GRAND PROCESSION and fire-purification ritual. Censers, magic!*

So, Helen: my pronouncements—were they right?  
Your husband Menelaus—here he stands!—  
without his ships, without your look-alike.

Poor man—the struggles you've been through, and still  
you don't know whether you will go back home  
or have to stay here. On this very day  
beside the throne of Zeus there will be conflict  
among the gods; they'll be discussing you.

Hera was your enemy before,  
but she's your friend now; she wants you to return  
to your fatherland with Helen by your side  
so Greece will learn that Alexandros' marriage,  
the gift of Aphrodite, was a sham.  
But Aphrodite doesn't want you back in Greece;  
she doesn't want it known that she's a fraud  
who bought her victory in the beauty contest  
with an empty promise and an unreal marriage.



**It's my decision, in the end: Should I  
destroy you, tell my brother that you're here?  
That's what Aphrodite wants. Or should I save you:  
side with Hera, hide this from my sibling,  
who gave me clear instructions to speak up  
if fortune ever brought you to this land.**

*Helen drops to the ground and wraps her arms around Theonoë's knees.*

**HELEN:**

**My lady, hear me: I'm your suppliant.  
My fortune's at a low point; here I sit  
at your knees and beg you, on my own behalf  
and for the sake of this man—finally  
I have him back now, after all these years,  
only to see him on the brink of death!  
Don't tell your brother that my husband's here—  
my dearest husband, back in my arms again.  
Save him, I beg you. You are pious. Don't  
betray your principles; don't sell your soul  
to your brother as a monstrous, unjust favor.  
The gods hate violence; they command mankind  
to gain possessions rightly, not to snatch them.  
The sky and earth belong to everyone;  
when people fill their houses up with goods**

they must do so without thievery or violence.

When Hermes put me in your father's keeping,  
yes, it was opportune, but all the same  
I suffered terribly. Your father kept me safe  
for this man here: my husband. He has come  
to take me back, since I belong to him.  
That won't happen if he's dead; your father  
can't give a living person to a dead man.  
Consider the gods' wishes, and your father's.  
Would they or wouldn't they want you to give back  
what belongs to someone else? I think they would.  
Don't listen to your brother's foolishness;  
respect instead your father's decency.

If you—a prophet, one who puts her faith  
in what the gods say—if you overturn  
your father's justice just to gratify  
your unjust brother, I find that disgraceful:  
to know what is, and what is yet to come,  
with no conception of what justice means.

Please, save me from the troubles I've been handed;  
serve justice first of all, but incidentally  
relieve my suffering. There's no man alive  
who doesn't hate me: Helen is the one—

as every Greek believes—who left her husband  
and ran away to live in a golden palace.  
If I go back to Greece, back to Sparta,  
people will hear, and see with their own eyes,  
that I never really did betray my loved ones:  
it was the gods' ruses all along  
that did them in. I'll win back their respect;  
they'll recognize my wise restraint. At last  
I'll betroth my unwed daughter to a husband,  
I'll leave behind my bitter vagabondage,  
and profit from the goods I have at home.

If my husband had been killed, his body burned  
on a distant pyre, I'd tend his memory  
with my tears. But he is here, alive and well!  
Will I be robbed of him? My lady, no!  
I beg you: do this favor for me, follow  
the path of justice, walk in your father's footsteps.  
This is the greatest glory for a child:  
to emulate a father's decency.

**THEONOË:**

I pity you, for everything you've said.  
But now I long to hear what Menelaus  
will say for himself, to argue for his life.

**MENELAUS:**

I won't fall at your knee, or shed a tear:  
such cowardice would bring disgrace on Troy.  
They say that noble men who face disaster  
will let their tears fall freely. That may be,  
but if weeping is a virtue, I prefer  
stout-heartedness.

If you see fit to save me—  
stranger that I am, a foreign guest  
who makes a rightful claim on his own wife—  
then give her to me, please, and let me live.

If not, then all is lost. It wouldn't be  
the first time—I have often suffered torment.  
The world would see how cruel you really are.

The words I say now will be those most likely  
to touch your heart, here at your father's grave.

O thou that dwellest in this tomb of stone,  
give back to me—O patriarch—my wife,  
whom Zeus sent here so you could keep her safe  
for me. I know that you can't give her back  
yourself, since you are dead, but I believe  
that this young woman will not think it right  
to let her father—whom I summon up

from beneath the earth, whose name was so renowned—  
to let him be reproached. The choice is hers.

I call on you, O Hades: be my ally,  
you who have received so many bodies—  
men my dagger slew, men I sent down  
to you for *her* sake. You've been paid in full.  
Refund that payment now: send back those men  
alive and breathing, or else make this woman  
return my wife, and outdo her pious father!

But you—if you plunder my wife away, I'll tell you  
what *she* has left unsaid, so you will know:  
my lady, I am bound by oath to fight  
your brother to the death. It's just that simple:  
one of us will die. If he refuses  
to face me man to man, but tries instead  
to starve us out—two suppliants at a tomb!—  
then I'm determined, first, to kill this woman,  
and then to plunge this two-edged sword right through  
my liver, there upon the tomb's broad back,  
and drench the grave with streams of blood.

We two will lie there side by side upon the tomb,  
eternal grief for you, and for your father  
eternal blame. Your brother will not marry

**this woman—no one will. She's mine. I'll take her home with me, or down among the dead.**

*(overcome by emotion. Aside)*

**What's this? If you start crying like a woman you'll just seem pitiful. Be forceful, now.**

**If you see fit, then go ahead and kill me. You'll kill a man who's not without distinction. But listen: you'd be so much better off acting with justice, letting me take my wife.**

**ELISSA:**

**Young lady, you're the arbiter; I hope your judgment will be pleasing to us all.**

**THEONOË:**

**By nature I am pious, and I want to do the right thing, out of self-respect. I won't defile my father's reputation or harm my own to gratify my brother. Descended as I am from Nereus, justice is enshrined within my nature, and yes, I'll try to help you, Menelaus. Since Hera's on your side, I'll cast my vote**

along with her. May Aphrodite show me mercy.  
I've never come around to the goddess of Love;  
I want to stay a virgin all my life.

As for your harsh words at my father's tomb—  
well, I agree with you. It would be unjust  
for me to keep her from you. If my father  
were still alive, he'd bring you two together.  
Among the living and the dead alike  
an unjust deed will meet with retribution.  
The dead do not have consciousness, and yet  
their minds live on, in the immortal aether.

I'll make my answer brief: just as you ask,  
I'll keep my silence; I won't say a word  
to my brother, or assist him in his folly.  
He may not think so, but I'm on his side:  
I'm saving him from his impiety.

Plan your escape; go, find your own way out.  
I'll step aside, and I will keep my silence.  
Begin with supplication of the gods.  
Ask Aphrodite to allow this homecoming,  
and pray to Hera not to change her mind:  
ask her to stay focused on your safety.

**O my departed father, may you never  
be charged with impiety—not if I can help it.**

*Exit Theonoë into the palace, reversing her entrance ritual.*

**AMINA and ELISSA:**

**Good fortune never comes to the unjust;  
The only hope of safety lies in justice.**

#37:  
PLANN  
ING  
Music  
theme:  
quicke  
r,  
drum  
ming

## **SCENE 8: STRATEGY SESSION**

**[HELEN, MENELAUS, GREEK & EGYPTIAN WOMEN]**

**HELEN:**

**Menelaus, we are safe, where she's concerned.  
But now you need to tell me, what's your plan  
to keep us safe? We need a strategy.**

**MENELAUS: Just listen, now. You've lived here a long time;  
you've gotten to know the servants of the king.**

**HELEN: Well, yes—what are you getting at? It seems  
you have a plan to benefit us both.**

**MENELAUS: Could you persuade somebody who has access  
to let us have a four-horse chariot?**



**HELEN:** I think I could. But how would we escape?  
This is non-Greek soil, unknown to us.

**MENELAUS:** You're right; impossible. What if I hide,  
and kill the master with this two-edged sword?

**HELEN:** His sister would not allow that. She would never  
stand by in silence and let you kill her brother.

**MENELAUS:** To get away in safety, what we need  
is a ship. But ours has sunk into the sea.

**HELEN:** Perhaps a woman can be wise. Just listen:  
you're alive, but what if we say you're dead?

**MENELAUS:**  
That's an unlucky omen. Still, go on—  
if it will help us, you can say I'm dead.

**HELEN:** For that villain, I'll put on a show of grief:  
womanish wailing, tears, my hair cut short...

**MENELAUS:**  
All right, but how does *that* ensure our safety?

**HELEN:**

I'll tell the king you're dead, and you require symbolic burial upon the waters.

**MENELAUS:**

All right, so he says yes. Without a ship how would this "burial" help us get away?

**HELEN:** I'll ask him for a ship. Grave-ornaments must be delivered to the sea's embrace.

**MENELAUS:** But what if he insists this cenotaph should be on dry land? There goes our excuse.

**HELEN:** I'll say that's not our custom. Every Greek who dies at sea has a funeral on the waters.

**MENELAUS:** Yes, perfect! I will sail along with you to help you cast the ornaments on the waves.

**HELEN:** Exactly; that's important. You'll be there with all your men—those who survived the shipwreck.

**MENELAUS:** Just give me a ship at anchor, and my men will be there in full force, swords at the ready.

**HELEN:** Yes, you must be in charge. May we have winds to fill our sails, and may our ship run swiftly!

**MENELAUS:** It will be so; the gods will end my struggles. But—how will you say you learned about my death?

**HELEN:** From you! You need to say that you alone escaped, when Atreus' son met his demise.

**MENELAUS:** Good thinking. And these rags that I have on will help to prove that I was in a shipwreck!

**HELEN:** Yes, that works out well. Though at the time, of course, it seemed unfortunate. Now it's lucky!

**MENELAUS:** Should I come with you now, inside the house? Or is it best to stay here by the tomb?

**HELEN:** Stay here. If he tries anything out of line, the tomb can help you—and, you have your dagger. I'll go inside to cut my curls, and change these white robes for black ones. With my fingernails I'll scratch my cheeks until they bleed. We have so much at stake; we're hanging by a thread. Either I will die, if they discover my ruse, or else I'll bring you safely home.

*praying:*

O Hera, Holy One, you who share the bed  
of Zeus: we lift our arms up heavenward,  
to where you dwell, amid the brilliant stars,  
and beg you—pitiful creatures that we are—  
please, grant our spirits some relief from struggles.

And you, who used my marriage to procure  
the prize of beauty for yourself,  
O Aphrodite, Goddess of Love,  
Dione's daughter, please, don't tear me down.  
The insult that you visited upon me  
was quite enough. You cast me out—my name,  
if not my body—among the non-Greeks.  
If you desire my death, then let me die  
at home in Greece. Why are you ravenous  
for every kind of evil—fierce desires,  
deceptions, deadly potions? You would be  
the deity that brings most pleasure to mankind,  
I must admit—if only you were temperate.

*Exit Helen into the palace. Menelaus stays close to the tomb.*

#38:  
SONG  
#5

**SONG 5: "AMID THE TREES' DEEP TRESSES (NIGHTINGALE)"**

**[CHORUS of GREEK & EGYPTIAN WOMEN; MENELAUS]**

#39:  
THE  
KING'S  
GROO  
VE

## **SCENE 9: THE SET-UP**

**[HELEN, MENELAUS, THEOCLYMENU, GREEK & EGYPTIAN WOMEN]**

*Enter Theoclymenus from hunting, accompanied by Attendant, leading dogs.*

*Theoclymenus addresses the tomb.*

**THEOCLYMENU:**

**I greet you, Proteus, my departed father.**

**Indeed, I placed your tomb beside the gate**

**for just this reason: Theoclymenus—**

**I, your son—can speak to you each time**

**I pass this way.**

*To dog Attendant*

**You, go take the dogs  
and hunting nets inside the royal palace.**

*Exit Attendant and dogs.*

**I have to say, I really blame myself:**

**we should be putting wrongdoers to death.**

**I've just found out a Greek was here, arriving  
in broad daylight, but he got past my watchmen.**

**He's here to spy on me, or to hunt down**

**and steal Helen from me. He will die,**

**if only we can catch him.**

*THEOCLYMENUS, without noticing MENELAUS, realizes that HELEN is no longer at the tomb.*

**Ah, what's this?**

**The deed's been done already! She's not there—  
Tyndareos' daughter has been shipped away.**

*THEOCLYMENUS calls to servants inside the palace.*

**Hey! Servants, go, undo the bolts, unbar  
the stables, bring the chariots and horses!  
The wife I want is being smuggled out  
of this land, and I'll do anything to stop her.**

*HELEN emerges from the palace. She has cut her hair and put on black clothing. Her cheeks may have bloody red marks on them as though she's used her nails on them.*

**Wait—never mind. I see the one we seek.  
She's here; she hasn't fled.**

**What have you done?**

**Why are you clothed in black instead of white?  
Why have you shorn your hair with an iron blade?  
Why are fresh tears running down your cheeks?  
Are you crying from a nighttime dream so real  
that you believed in it? Or did you hear  
a devastating story from back home?**

**HELEN: My master—that's the name I give you now—  
I am destroyed; I'm nothing. All is lost.**

**THEOCLYMENUS:** What happened? What disaster has upset you?

**HELEN:** It's hard to speak the words—Menelaus is dead.

**THEOCLYMENUS:**

I take no joy in that—though it's my good fortune.

How do you know? Did Theonoë tell you?

**HELEN:** Yes—and someone else, who saw him die.

**THEOCLYMENUS:** There's someone here, who gave a clear account?

**HELEN:** Yes, he's here...

**THEOCLYMENUS:** Who is it, and where is he? I want details.

**HELEN:** That man, who's crouching there beside the tomb.

**THEOCLYMENUS:** Apollo! Would you look at what he's wearing!

**HELEN:** Oh, my poor husband must be dressed like that.

**THEOCLYMENUS:** Where is he from, and how did he get here?

HELEN: He's Greek; he sailed together with my husband.

THEOCLYMENUS: What kind of death did Menelaus die?

HELEN: The saddest kind, in the salty ocean waves.

THEOCLYMENUS: Where was he sailing, in these foreign seas?

HELEN: He was marooned on the harborless Libyan crags.

THEOCLYMENUS: Then how did *he* not perish with his shipmates?

HELEN: Sometimes a worse man enjoys better fortune than his superiors.

THEOCLYMENUS: Where did he leave the wreckage of his ship?

HELEN: Where it can go to hell, for all I care!—But not Menelaus!

THEOCLYMENUS: Well, he's already dead. Who brought *him* here?

HELEN: By chance, some sailors found him—so he says.

THEOCLYMENUS: And what about that *thing* that went to Troy?



**HELEN:** The image made of cloud? It flew away.

**THEOCLYMENUS:** O Troy, O Priam, you were ruined in vain.

**HELEN:** I too shared in the Trojans' suffering.

**THEOCLYMENUS:** Your husband—did he have a funeral?

**HELEN:** No, he was left unburied! Ah, poor me!

**THEOCLYMENUS:** And that is why you've cut your beautiful hair?

**HELEN:** Yes, for I love him, as if he were still here!

**THEOCLYMENUS:** Is it truly right that you should weep for this disaster—there's no doubt it occurred?

**HELEN:** I suppose your sister is easy to deceive?

**THEOCLYMENUS:**

No, not at all. Are you going back to the tomb?

**HELEN:** Yes. By fleeing you, I'm faithful to my husband.

**THEOCLYMENUS:**

Why do you mock me? Forget the dead—he's gone!

**HELEN:** All right. We'll marry—you can make arrangements.

**THEOCLYMENUS:** At last! It took a long time. I approve!

**HELEN:** So, here's what you must do. The past is past.

**THEOCLYMENUS:** What favor do I owe you in return?

**HELEN:** Let's make a treaty and be reconciled.

**THEOCLYMENUS:** Whatever grudge I held has flown away!

**HELEN:** Now, by your knees I beg you, if you love me...

**THEOCLYMENUS:** Why supplicate me? What is it you're hunting?

**HELEN:** A funeral for my departed husband.

**THEOCLYMENUS:**

What—for his shadow? A tomb with no one in it?

**HELEN:** Greek custom is, when someone dies at sea...

**THEOCLYMENUS:** What does the clever race of Pelops do?

**HELEN:** ... we hold a funeral, with an empty shroud.

**THEOCLYMENUS:** Certainly. Build his tomb wherever you like.

**HELEN:** No, that's not it; there's no tomb for lost sailors.

**THEOCLYMENUS:**

Well, what, then? I don't know all these Greek customs.

**HELEN:** We sail out, bringing what the dead require.

**THEOCLYMENUS:** What do you need from me, to bring to this dead man?

**HELEN:** *(indicating MENELAUS)* **He can tell us. All this is new to me.**

*THEOCLYMENUS approaches MENELAUS.*

**THEOCLYMENUS:**

O stranger, you've brought news that's very welcome.

**MENELAUS:** Not to me—nor to the one who died.

**THEOCLYMENUS:** How do you have a funeral at sea?

**MENELAUS:** Well, it depends on the family's resources.

**THEOCLYMENUS:** I don't care what it costs, if it's for her sake.

**MENELAUS:** First, we offer a blood-sacrifice.

**THEOCLYMENUS:** What animal? Just tell me what you need.

**MENELAUS:** Your choice; I'm sure it will be adequate.

**THEOCLYMENUS:** We Egyptians use a horse, or bull.

**MENELAUS:** All right—but choose a perfect specimen.

**THEOCLYMENUS:**

Of course. We're prosperous; we have no shortage.

**MENELAUS:** Then, we bring sheets—as if there were a body.

**THEOCLYMENUS:** You'll have them. And what else is customary?

**MENELAUS:** Bronze weapons. Menelaus loved the spear...

**THEOCLYMENUS:** Yes. They'll be worthy of the race of Pelops.

**MENELAUS:** ... & fruits, & vegetables—all the bounty of the earth.

**THEOCLYMENUS:** So, how will you consign these to the waves?

**MENELAUS:** We'll need to have a ship, and oarsmen, too.

**THEOCLYMENUS:** How far out from the shore will you be going?

**MENELAUS:** A long way—almost out of sight of land.

**THEOCLYMENUS:** Why so far? Another Grecian custom?

**MENELAUS:** So the waves don't carry pollution back to shore.

**THEOCLYMENUS:** A swift Phoenician ship will be provided.

**MENELAUS:** That's perfect. Menelaus would be pleased.

**THEOCLYMENUS:** *(indicating Helen)*

Would it be... adequate—to do this without *her*?

**MENELAUS:** It must be done by mother, wife, or child.

**THEOCLYMENUS:**

She must perform the rite, is what you're saying?

**MENELAUS:** It's never pious to defraud the dead.

**THEOCLYMENUS:** Well—all right. I want a wife who's pious.  
Go into the house, and choose the ornaments  
to honor the dead.

Nor will I send *you* away  
empty-handed—not when you have done  
such a favor for her. To me you've brought  
good news, and in exchange you shall have clothing—  
instead of what you're wearing now!—and food  
for your journey home. I see that you are needy.

*(to Helen)*

And you, poor thing, don't wear your spirit out  
with useless grief.

Menelaus has met his fate;  
your tears can't bring a dead man back to life.

**MENELAUS:**

It's up to you, young lady. You must cherish  
your current husband, and forget about  
the one who's gone. That is the best approach.  
If I can make it safely back to Greece,  
I'll put an end to all the blame they heap  
upon your head, if you can be a good wife.

**HELEN:**

So be it. I will never give my husband  
any cause for disappointment—wait and see.  
And as for you, poor thing, go on inside,  
have a bath, and change your clothes. Don't worry:  
I'm on your side; I'll help you without delay.  
If I do right by you, then you're more likely  
to do right by my dearest Menelaus.

*(Exit MENELAUS, HELEN, and THEOCLYMENUS into the palace.)*

#40:  
SONG 6

## **SONG 6 – MOUNTAIN MOTHER**

### **SCENE 10: THE SEND-OFF**

[HELEN, MENELAUS, THEOCLYMENUS, GREEK & EGYPTIAN WOMEN, SAILORS  
(silent; they may be the same as the DIOSCURI)]

*Enter HELEN from the palace.*

**HELEN:**

My friends, it's going well; we're fortunate.  
My partner in crime, the daughter of Proteus,  
for my sake, told her brother when he asked  
that my husband was dead. For his part, he was able  
to take advantage of a lucky break:  
he has the armor he's supposed to throw

into the sea: his noble arm is thrust  
through the shield-strap; his right hand grips the spear.  
It looks like he's prepared to do the work  
Of gratifying the dead, but he's decked out  
In battle armor, ready to subdue  
Egyptian warriors by the thousand, just as soon  
as we're on board that ship. I've changed his clothes;  
he has fine robes, now—no more shipwreck remnants.  
I bathed him—finally, fresh clean river water!  
But wait; I must be quiet. Here *he* comes,  
the one who thinks he has me—that I'm ready  
to marry him. I must ask for your help:  
be kind, and keep your silence. If we can  
we'll save you, too, when we have saved ourselves.

*Enter THEOCLYMENUS from the palace, followed by SAILORS carrying offerings, and MENELAUS in armor.*

**THEOCLYMENUS:**

Stay in order, Sailors, just the way  
the stranger showed you, as you carry forth  
these funeral-offerings destined for the sea.  
And Helen, if it's not too much to ask:  
stay here; let me persuade you. You can serve  
your husband just the same if you're not there.  
I fear that you'll be overcome by longing—



lashed by the memories of your late husband—  
and try to fling your body on the waves.  
He's gone; you mourn for him excessively.

**HELEN:**

My glorious husband, I'm obliged to honor  
the marriage I once had as a young bride.  
It's true, the love I bear him is so great  
I'd even die with him. But that would be  
an empty favor, meaningless for him.  
Please, let me go perform his funeral  
in person. May the gods grant what I wish  
for you, and for this stranger here—our helper.  
Since you are benefiting Menelaus  
and me, I'll be the wife that you deserve.  
All things are pointing in the right direction.  
Now, complete your favor: tell someone  
to get our ship, so we can take these things.

**THEOCLYMENUS:** *To a SAILOR.*

You, go and get the ship, and oarsmen, too.  
Get them a fifty-oared Phoenician vessel.

**HELEN:** *Indicating MENELAUS.*

Well, shouldn't the funeral-leader lead the ship?

**THEOCLYMENUS:** Of course. My sailors will obey this man.

**HELEN:** Can you repeat that order? Just to be clear.

**THEOCLYMENUS:** *To the SAILORS.*

**Yes—Obey this man! that's an order!**

**Twice and three times over.**

**HELEN:** May you—and I!—have everything we plan for.

**THEOCLYMENUS:** My dear, don't harm your cheeks with streams of tears.

**HELEN:** This very day you'll know my gratitude.

**THEOCLYMENUS:** The dead are nothing; toil for them is wasted.

**HELEN:** No, they are something—here and in the next world.

**THEOCLYMENUS:** I'll be as good a husband as Menelaus.

**HELEN:** You're above reproach! I only need good fortune.

**THEOCLYMENUS:** You'll have it, if you'll just be kind to me.

**HELEN:** I take care of my friends—no need to teach me.

**THEOCLYMENUS:** I'll come along and help you, if you like.

**HELEN:** Oh, no! My lord, you mustn't serve your servants.

**THEOCLYMENUS:**

All right. So much for the customs of Pelops' race.

My home is not polluted; Menelaus  
did not give up his life here.

*Gestures to one of the SAILORS.*

Someone go, now,  
and tell my regents to bring wedding presents.  
I want the land to resonate with song,  
and every voice to join the wedding-hymn;  
my marriage to Helen must be something special.

*Exit a SAILOR. THEOCLYMENUS addresses MENELAUS.*

Go, stranger, take these gifts; deliver them  
to the sea's embrace, for the sake of her late husband,  
then hurry home, and bring my wife with you,  
so you can join me at the wedding feast  
and then be on your way. Or, if you like,  
you could stay here, enjoying fortune's blessings.

*Exit THEOCLYMENUS into the palace. MENELAUS prays:*

**MENELAUS:**

**O Zeus, we call you wise; we call you father.  
Look now upon us; take away our troubles.  
Disaster dogs us as we struggle upward  
on a jagged slope; relieve us of our burden.  
If your fingertip should graze us even slightly,  
we'd come to the good fortune we desire.  
The toils that we have toiled before this day  
were quite enough. O gods, I've called on you  
repeatedly; you've heard my vain complaints.  
I shouldn't have to suffer endlessly;  
I'd like to walk tall. Do me this one favor,  
and my good fortune will be guaranteed.**

*Through next song, exit MENELAUS, HELEN, and SAILORS in the direction of the sea.*

**#41:  
SONG 7**

**SONG 7 – O SAILORS, SAILORS, SEND HELEN HOME!**

**[MENELAUS, HELEN, GREEK & EGYPTIAN WOMEN]**

**SCENE 11: ESCAPE**

**[ELAPHOS, THEOCLYMENUS, PHYLAX (silent), GREEK & EGYPTIAN WOMEN]**

*Enter a messenger, ELAPHOS, from the direction of the sea and, from the palace, THEOCLYMENUS with an attendant, PHYLAX.*

**ELAPHOS:** *(out of breath)* ... **I'll tell you now of new calamities!**

**THEOCLYMENUS:** **What is it?**

**ELAPHOS:**

**You must find another wife  
to marry. Helen's gone; she's left this land.**

**THEOCLYMENUS:**

**On foot? Or did she spread her wings and fly?**

**ELAPHOS:**

**She has been shipped away by Menelaus,  
who came here with the news of his own death!**

**THEOCLYMENUS:**

**Oh, this is terrible! I can't believe it.  
How could she manage to escape by sea?**

**ELAPHOS:**

**In the ship you gave the stranger! With your crew!  
To put it briefly, they made off with it.**

**THEOCLYMENUS:**

How did this happen? Tell me everything.  
I wouldn't guess that one man by himself  
could gain the upper hand against so many.

**ELAPHOS:**

When she had left this royal residence  
and turned her delicate footsteps toward the sea,  
the child of Zeus made a clever show of grief,  
wailing loudly for her husband, who  
in fact was right there, very much alive!

Each man performed his task: the oars, the mast,  
the white sails set in place, the steering-oars  
were lowered on their ropes.

Amid this flurry  
of activity, a group of men approached—  
Greeks, the fellow-travelers of Menelaus—  
they had been waiting, watching for their moment.  
All of them were dressed in shipwreck tatters:  
handsome men, but haggard and unwashed.

The son of Atreus, in a sly display  
of empathy, addressed them with these words:  
“Poor creatures, what Greek ship has left you stranded?  
Clearly you've escaped its wreckage—how?  
Come help us, won't you?”

Atreus' son has died; his body's gone;  
Tyndareos' daughter here  
is going to honor him with a cenotaph."

They helped to bring the offerings on board,  
shedding their tears with great dramatic art.

We were suspicious, and whispered to each other—  
there were so many of them. But we remembered  
your words, and held our tongues; you did us in  
when you put him in charge—the foreigner.

Loading the ship was easy; everything  
was light.

The horse went willingly, with Menelaus  
persuading him by stroking his face and neck.

The last to board was Helen. Gracefully  
she flexed her lovely ankle as she placed  
her foot upon each rung to climb the ladder.  
She sat down on the quarterdeck, close by  
Menelaus, the alleged dead man.

The other Greeks sat down to the left and right,  
close together; they were hiding swords  
beneath their clothing.

The sound of rushing waves  
was almost drowned out by our lively shouts  
responding to the boatswain.

When we'd gone  
away from land—not too far, not too close—  
the helmsman said, “O stranger, you're in charge:  
is this good, or should we go farther out?”

The man replied, “This suits me fine.”

He took  
a sword in his right hand; he made no mention  
of any dead man, but spoke these words:  
“Poseidon, sea-lord, and you holy daughters  
of Nereus, please hear my prayer, and send me  
safely home, together with my wife,  
to Nauplia's shores.”

Someone spoke up: “This whole thing is a fraud.  
Let's turn back! Give the order to change course!  
And you, adjust the rudder!”

Then everyone jumped up. One side was armed  
with pieces of wood, the other side with swords.  
The ship ran red with blood, and in the stern



sat Helen, shouting out encouragement:  
“Where is the glory of Troy? Let’s show these men,  
these non-Greeks!” In the thick of it  
some men fell, and some got right back up—  
the ones who didn’t, you could see were dead.

Menelaus, since he was fully armed,  
was able to assist his struggling allies:  
if someone was in trouble, he stepped in  
with sword in hand, and forced the enemy  
to dive into the water; pretty soon  
he’d driven all your oarsmen off the ship.  
He told the helmsman, “Steer this ship to Greece.”  
They raised the mast; the winds were favorable.

They’re gone. I managed to escape the slaughter  
by throwing myself overboard, near the anchor.  
A fisherman found me just in time—I was  
exhausted—and he brought me back to land  
so I could bring this news.

#42:  
URGENT  
DRUMS

## **SCENE 12: THE GODS FIND A WAY**

[PHYLAX, GREEK & EGYPTIAN WOMEN, THEOCLYMENU, CASTOR &  
POLYDEUCES (the DIOSCURI)]

**THEOCLYMENUS:**

**Woe is me, I've lost my bride! A woman's ruses did me in!**

**If there were a way to chase that ship,**

**I'd catch those foreigners.**

**Anyway, I'll take revenge upon my sister. She had seen**

**Menelaus in our house, and never told me. Treachery!**

**I'll show *her*. I'll put an end to all her lying prophecies.**

**PHYLAX:**

**You! Where are you going? Master, will you be a murderer?**

**THEOCLYMENUS:**

**Justice guides my footsteps. Get your hands off me, and step  
aside.**

**PHYLAX:**

**No, I won't unhand your robes! You're hastening to do great  
evil!**

**THEOCLYMENUS: Oh, I see! A servant will command his master?**

**PHYLAX: I mean well!**

**THEOCLYMENUS: Not to me, you don't, if you won't let me  
through!**

**PHYLAX:** No, never! Stop!

**THEOCLYMENUS:** She's the worst, my sister! I will kill her!

**PHYLAX:** No, she's pious! Stop!

**THEOCLYMENUS:** She betrayed me...

**PHYLAX:** Yes, but she betrayed you in the name of justice.

**THEOCLYMENUS:** Stealing what was mine—my bride!

**PHYLAX:** Returning her where she belongs.

**THEOCLYMENUS:** She belongs to me!

**PHYLAX:** Oh no! Her father gave her to the Greek.

**THEOCLYMENUS:** Fortune made her mine!

**PHYLAX:** And then Necessity took her away.

**THEOCLYMENUS:** Who are you to judge me?

**PHYLAX:** I'm the one who's on the side of good.

**THEOCLYMENUS:**      *You would govern me?*

**PHYLAX:**      **You have the power—the power to do what’s right!**

**THEOCLYMENUS:**      **Clearly, death is what you want.**

**PHYLAX:**                      **Go on and kill me! I don’t care!**  
**Let your sister live, though; take my life instead.**  
**I would die happily to save her life.**

*Enter, on horseback, the Dioscuri: Castor & Polydeuces.*

**#44:  
flourish;  
THEME  
of the  
TWINS**

**CASTOR & POLYDEUCES:**

**Stop! Lord of this land, Theoclymenus,  
Your anger leads you astray. We are the two  
Dioscuri, the sons of Zeus, whom Leda  
bore, along with Helen—she who fled  
away from you. Now look: you’re getting angry  
over a marriage that was never meant to be.  
Your sister Theonoë, the Nereid’s daughter,  
has done you no injustice. She has honored  
the gods’ will, and her father’s just commandments;  
for Helen was supposed to live right here  
until the present day, and then depart.  
It’s finished now: Troy has been overturned  
and Helen has lent the gods the use of her name.**

She must go home, stay married to her husband.  
Hold back your black sword; do not kill your sister.  
Know that she acted wisely.

We would have saved our sister long ago—  
Zeus had made us deities, after all—  
but we were no match for the other gods,  
and couldn't alter what was meant to be.

You've heard my words. I turn now to my sister:  
Helen! Sail on with your husband! You shall have  
a favorable wind, and we—your brothers  
and saviors—we shall be your double escort,  
riding beside you over the sea to home.  
When you have reached your mortal life-span's end  
you shall be called a god, and you shall share  
in all libations and festivities  
that honor the Dioscuri—for this  
is Zeus' will.

Just offshore from Akte  
there is an island that protects the coast  
where Maia's son, Hermes, when he had lifted you  
up and away from Sparta, through the air,  
first set you down. This island, for all time,  
mortals shall now call "Helen," since it held  
your body, which was stolen from your home.

Menelaus the wanderer is fated  
to settle in the Islands of the Blessed.  
The gods have granted this: they do not hate  
the noble, though they send them many struggles.

**THEOCLYMENUS:**

Twin sons of Zeus and Leda, I release  
whatever grudge I held against your sister.  
Let Helen go home, if the gods see fit,  
and I won't kill my sister Theonoë.

Know that your blood-relative, your sister,  
possesses excellence and wise restraint  
in the highest degree. Rejoice, for Helen has  
a very noble mind—unlike most women.

#45:  
SONG  
8

**SONG 8: THE GODS FIND A WAY**

The designs of the deities take many forms;  
they often accomplish what no one would hope for.  
What we expect may not happen at all,  
while the gods find a way, against all expectation,  
to do what they want, however surprising.

END OF PLAY.