

Rhesus
By Euripides
 (Written *ca.* 450 B.C.E)

Dramatis Personae

CHORUS OF TROJAN SENTINELS ODYSSEUS
 HECTOR DIOMEDES
 AENEAS PARIS
 DOLON ATHENA
 MESSENGER, a shepherd THE MUSE
 RHESUS

Scene

Before Hector's tent at the gates of Troy. Enter CHORUS

CHORUS

To Hector's couch away, one of you wakeful squires that tend the prince, to see if he have any fresh tidings from the warriors who were set to guard the assembled host during the fourth watch of the night.

Calls to HECTOR in the tent

Lift up thy head! Prop thine arm beneath it! Unseal that louring eye from its repose; thy lowly couch of scattered leaves, O Hector, quit! 'Tis time to hearken.

HECTOR

Who goes there? Is it a friend who calls? Who art thou? Thy watchword? Speak! Who in the dark hours comes nigh my couch, must tell me who he is.

CHORUS

Sentinels we of the army.

HECTOR

Why this tumultuous haste?

CHORUS

Be of good courage.

HECTOR

Is there some midnight ambushade?

CHORUS

Nay.

HECTOR

Then why dost thou desert thy post and rouse the army, save thou have some tidings of the night? Art not aware how near the Argive host we take our night's repose in all our harness clad?

CHORUS

To arms! O Hector, seek thine allies' sleeping camp! Bid them wield the spear! Awake them! thine own company despatch a friend. Saddle and bridle the steeds. Who will to the son of Panthus? who to Europa's son, captain of the Lycian band? Where are they who should inspect the victims? Where be the leaders of the light-armed troops? Ye Phrygian archers, string your horn-tipped bows.

HECTOR

Now fear, now confidence thy tidings inspire; nothing is plainly set forth. Can it be that thou art smitten with wild affright by Pan, the son of Cronion, and leaving thy watch therefore dost rouse the host? What means thy noisy summons? What tidings can I say thou bringest? Thy words are many, but no plain statement hast thou made.

CHORUS

The long night through, O Hector, the Argive host hath kindled fires, and bright with torches shines the anchored fleet. To Agamemnon's tent the whole army moves clamorously by night, eager for fresh orders maybe, for never before have I seen such commotion among yon sea-faring folk. Wherefore I was suspicious of what might happen and came to tell thee, that thou mayest have no cause to blame me hereafter.

HECTOR

In good season com'st thou, albeit thy tidings are fraught with terror; for those cowards are bent on giving me the slip and stealing away from this land in their ships by night; their midnight signalling convinces me of this. Ah! Fortune, to rob me in my hour of triumph, a lion of his prey, or ever this spear of mine with one fell swoop had made an end for aye of yonder Argive host! Yea, had not the sun's bright lamp withheld his light, I had not stayed my victor's spear, ere I had fired their ships and made my way from tent to tent, drenching this hand in Achaean gore. Right eager was I to make a night attack and take advantage of the stroke of luck by heaven sent, but those wise seers of mine, who have heaven's will so pat, persuaded me to wait the dawn, and then leave not one Achaean in the land. But those others await not the counsels of my soothsayers; darkness turns runaways to heroes. Needs must we now without delay pass this word along the line "Arm, arm! from slumber cease!" for many a man of them, e'en as he leaps aboard his ship, shall be smitten through the back and sprinkle the ladders with blood, and others shall be fast bound with cords and learn to till our Phrygian glebe.

CHORUS

Thou hastest, Hector, before thou knowest clearly what is happening; for we do not know for certain whether our foes are flying.

HECTOR

What reason else had the Argive host to kindle fires?

CHORUS

I cannot say; my soul doth much misgive me.

HECTOR

If this thou fearest, be sure there's nought thou wouldst not fear.

CHORUS

Never aforetime did the enemy kindle such a blaze.

HECTOR

No, nor ever before did they suffer such shameful defeat and rout.

CHORUS

This thou didst achieve; look now to what remains to do.

HECTOR

I have but one word to say, "Arm, arm against the foe!"

CHORUS

Lo! where Aeneas comes, in hot haste too, as though he hath news to tell his friends.
Enter ENEAS.

AENEAS

Why, Hector, have the sentinels in terror made their way through the host to thy couch to hold a midnight conclave and disturb the army?

HECTOR

Case thee in thy coat of mail, Aeneas.

AENEAS

How now? are tidings come of some secret stratagem set on foot during the night by the foe?

HECTOR

They are flying, these foes of ours, and going aboard their ships.

AENEAS

What sure proof canst thou give of this?

HECTOR

The livelong night they are kindling blazing torches; methinks they will not wait for the morrow, but after lighting brands upon their ships' decks will leave this and to their homes.

AENEAS

And thou, wherefore dost thou gird thee with thy sword?

HECTOR

With my spear will I stop them even as they fly and leap aboard their ships, and my hand shall be heavy upon them; for shameful it were in us, aye, and cowardly as well as shameful, when God gives them into our hands, to let our foes escape without a blow after all the injuries they have done us.

AENEAS

Would thou wert as sage as thou art bold But lo! among mortals the same man is not dowered by nature with universal knowledge; each hath his special gift appointed him, thine is arms, another's is sage counsel. Thou hearest their torches are blazing, and art fired with the hope that the Achaeans are flying, and wouldst lead on our troops across the trenches in the calm still night. Now after crossing the deep yawning trench, supposing thou shouldst find the enemy are not flying from the land, but are awaiting thy onset, beware lest thou suffer defeat and so never reach this city again; for how wilt thou pass the palisades in a rout? And how shall thy charioteers cross the bridges without dashing the axles of their cars to pieces? And, if victorious, thou hast next the son of Peleus to engage; he will ne'er suffer thee to cast the firebrand on the fleet, no, nor to harry the Achaeans as thou dost fondly fancy. Nay, for yon man is fierce as fire, a very tower of valiancy. Let us rather then leave our men to sleep calmly under arms after the weariness of battle, while we send, as I advise, whoe'er will volunteer, to spy upon the enemy; and if they really are preparing to fly, let us arise and fall upon the Argive host, but if this signalling is a trap to catch us, we shall discover from the spy the enemy's designs and take our measures; such is my advice, O King.

CHORUS

It likes me well; so change thy mind and adopt this counsel. I love not hazardous commands in generals. What better scheme could be than for a fleet spy to approach the ships and learn why our foes are lighting fires in front of their naval station?

HECTOR

Since this finds favour with you all, prevail.

To AENEAS

Go thou and marshal our allies; mayhap the host hearing of our midnight council is disturbed. Mine shall it be to send one forth to spy upon the foe. And if I discover any plot amongst them, thou shalt fully hear thereof, and at the council-board shalt learn our will; but in case they be starting off in flight, with cager ear await the trumpet's call, for then I will not stay, but will this very night engage the Argive host there where their ships are hauled up.

AENEAS

Send out the spy forthwith; there's safety in thy counsels now. And thou shalt find me steadfast at thy side, whene'er occasion call.

HECTOR

What Trojan now af all our company doth volunteer to go and spy the Argive fleet? Who will be that patriot? Who saith "I will"? Myself cannot at every point serve my country and my friends in arms.

DOLON Comes from the rear

I for my country will gladly run this risk and go to spy the Argive fleet, and when I have learnt fully all that the Acheans plot I will return. Hear the conditions on which I undertake this toil.

HECTOR

True to his name in sooth, his country's friend is Dolon. Thy father's house was famed of yore, but thou hast made it doubly so.

DOLON

So must I toil, but for my pains a meet reward should I receive. For set a price on any deed, and then and there it gives to it a double grace.

HECTOR

Yea, that is but fair; I cannot gainsay it. Name any prize for thyself save the sway I bear.

DOLON

I covet not thy toilsome sovereignty.

HECTOR

Well then, marry a daughter of Priam and become my good brother.

DOLON

Nay, I care not to wed amongst those beyond my station.

HECTOR

There's gold, if this thou'lt claim as thy guerdon.

DOLON

Gold have I in my home; no sustenance lack I.

HECTOR

What then is thy desire of all that Ilium stores within her?

DOLON

Promise me my gift when thou dost conquer the Achaeans.

HECTOR

I will give it thee; do thou ask anything except the captains of the fleet.

DOLON

Slay them; I do not ask thee to keep thy hand off Menelaus.

HECTOR

Is it the son of Oileus thou wouldst ask me for?

DOLON

Ill hands to dig and delve are those mid luxury nursed.

HECTOR

Whom then of the Acheans wilt thou have alive to hold to ransom?

DOLON

I told thee before, my house is stored with gold.

HECTOR

Why then, thou shalt come and with thine own hands choose out some spoil.

DOLON

Nail up the spoils for the gods on their temple walls.

HECTOR

Prithee, what higher prize than these wilt ask me for?

DOLON

Achilles' coursers. Needs must the prize be worth the toil when one stakes one's life on Fortune's die.

HECTOR

Ah! but thy wishes clash with mine anent those steeds; for of immortal stock, they and their sires before them, are those horses that bear the son of Peleus on his headlong course. Them did king Poseidon, ocean's god, break and give to Peleus, so runs the legend-yet, for I did urge thee on, I will not break my word; to thee will I give Achilles' team, to add a splendour to thy house.

DOLON

I thank thee; in receiving them I avow I am taking a fairer gift than any other Phrygian for my bravery. Yet thee it needs not to be envious; countless joys besides this will glad thy heart in thy kingship o'er this land.

Exit HECTOR.

CHORUS

Great the enterprise, and great the boon thou designest to receive. Happy, ay, happy wilt thou be, if thou succeed; fair the fame thy toil shall win. Yet to wed with a prince's sister were a distinction high. On Heaven's decrees let Justice keep her eye! what man can give thou hast, it seems, in full.

DOLON

Now will I set forth, and going within my house will don such garb as suits, and then will hasten to the Argive fleet.

CHORUS

Why, what dress in place of this wilt thou assume?

DOLON

Such as suits my task and furtive steps.

CHORUS

One should ever learn wisdom from the wise; tell me wherewith thou wilt drape thy body.

DOLON

I will fasten a wolf skin about my back, and o'er my head put the brute's gaping jaws; then fitting its fore-feet to my hands and its hind-feet to my legs I will go on all-fours in imitation of its gait to puzzle the enemy when I approach their trenches and barriers round the ships. But whenever I come to a deserted spot, on two feet will I walk; such is the ruse I have decided on.

CHORUS

May Hermes, Maia's child, escort thee safely there and back, prince of tricksters as he is! Thou knowest what thou hast to do; good luck is all thou needest now.

DOLON

I shall return in safety, and bring to thee the head of Odysseus when I have slain him, or maybe the son of Tydeus, and with this clear proof before thee thou shalt avow that Dolon went unto the Argive fleet; for, ere the dawn appear, I will win back home with bloodstained hand.

Exit DOLON.

CHORUS

O Apollo, blest godhead, lord of Thymbra and of Delos, who hauntest thy fane in Lycia, come with all thy archery, appear this night, and by thy guidance save our friend now setting forth, and aid the Dardans' scheme, almighty god whose hands in days of yore upreared Troy's walls! Good luck attend his mission to the ships! may he reach the host of Hellas and spy it out, then turn again and reach the altars of his father's home in Ilium! Grant him to mount the chariot drawn by Phthia's steeds, when Hector, our master, hath sacked Achae's camp, those steeds that the sea-god gave to Peleus, son of Aeacus; for he and he alone had heart enough for home and country to go and spy the naval station; his spirit I admire; how few stout hearts there be, when on the sea the sunlight dies and the city labours in the surge; Phrygia yet hath left a valiant few, and bold hearts in the battle's press; 'tis only Mysia's sons who scorn us as allies.

Which of the Achaeans will their four-footed murderous foe slay in their beds, as he crosses the ground, feigning to be a beast? May he lay Menelaus low or slay Agamemnon and bring his head to Helen's hands, causing her to lament her evil kinsman, who hath come against my city, against the land of Troy with his countless host of ships.

DOLON reappears disguised and departs for the Greek camp.

MESSENGER a Shepherd

Great king, ever in days to come be it mine to bring my masters such news as I am bearing now unto thine ears.

Enter HECTOR.

HECTOR

Full oft the rustic mind is afflicted with dulness; so thou, as like as not, art come to this ill-suited place to tell thy master that his flocks are bearing well. Knowest thou not my palace or my father's throne? Thither thou shouldst carry thy tale when thou hast prospered with thy flocks.

MESSENGER

Dull herdsmen are; I do not gainsay thee.
But none the less I bring thee joyful news.

HECTOR

A truce to thy tale of how the sheep-fold fares; I have battles to fight and spears to wield.

MESSENGER

The very things of which I, too, came to tell thee; for a chieftain of a countless host is on his way to join thee as thy friend and to champion this land.

HECTOR

His country? and the home that he hath left?

MESSENGER

His country, Thrace: men call his father Strymon.

HECTOR

Didst say that Rhesus was setting foot in

MESSENGER

Thou hast it; and savest me half my speech.

HECTOR

How is it that he comes to Ida's meadows, wandering from the broad waggon track across the plain?

MESSENGER

I cannot say for certain, though I might guess. To make his entry by night is no idle scheme, when he hears that the plains are packed with foemen's troops. But he frightened us rustic hinds who dwell along the slopes of Ida, the earliest settlement in the land, as he came by night through yon wood where wild beasts couch. On surged the tide of Thracian warriors with loud shouts; whereat in wild amaze we drove our flocks unto the heights, for fear that some Argives were coming to plunder and harry thy steading, till that we caught the sound of voices other than Greek and ceased from our alarm. Then went I and questioned in the Thracian tongue those who

were reconnoitring the road, who it was that lead them, and whose he avowed him to be, that came to the city to help the sons of Priam. And when I had heard all I wished to learn, I stood still awhile; and lo! I see Rhesus mounted like a god upon his Thracian chariot. Of gold was the yoke that linked the necks of his steeds whiter than the snow; and on his shoulders flashed his targe with figures welded in gold; while a gorgon of bronze like that which gleams from the aegis of the goddess was bound upon the frontlet of his horses, ringing out its note of fear with many a bell. The number of his host thou couldst not reckon to a sum exact, for it was beyond one's comprehension; many a knight was there, and serried ranks of targeteers, and archers not a few, with countless swarms of light-armed troops, in Thracian garb arrayed, to bear them company. Such the ally who comes to Troy's assistance; him the son of Peleus will ne'er escape or if he fly or meet him spear to spear.

CHORUS

Whenso the gods stand by the burghers staunch and true, the tide of fortune glides with easy flow to a successful goal.

HECTOR

I shall find a host of friends now that fortune smiles upon my warring and Zeus is on my side. But no need have we of those who shared not our toils of erst, what time the War-god, driving all before him, was rending the sails of our ship of state with his tempestuous blast. Rhesus hath shewn the friendship he then bore to Troy; for he cometh to the feast, albeit he was not with the hunters when they took the prey, nor joined his spear with theirs.

CHORUS

Thou art right to scorn and blame such friends; yet welcome those who fain would help the state.

HECTOR

Sufficient we who long have kept Ilium safe.

CHORUS

Art so sure thou hast already caught the foe?

HECTOR

Quite sure I am; to-morrow's light will make that plain.

CHORUS

Beware of what may chance; full oft doth fortune veer.

HECTOR

I loathe the friend who brings his help too late.

MESSENGER

O prince, to turn away allies earns hatred. His mere appearing would cause a panic amongst the foe.

CHORUS

Let him, at least, since he is come, approach thy genial board as guest, if not ally, for the gratitude of Priam's sons is forfeit in his case.

HECTOR

Thou counsellest aright; thou too dost take the proper view. Let Rhesus in his gilded mail join the allies of this land, thanks to the messenger's report.

Exeunt the MESSENGER and HECTOR.

CHORUS

May Nemesis, daughter of Zeus, check the word that may offend; for lo! I will utter all that my soul fain would say. Thou art come, O son of the river god, art come, thrice welcome in thy advent, to the halls of Phrygia; late in time thy Pierian mother and Strymon thy sire, that stream with bridges fair, are sending thee to us-Strymon who begat thee his strong young son, that day his swirling waters found a refuge in the tuneful Muse's virgin bosom. Thou art my Zeus, my god of light, as thou comest driving thy dappled steeds. Now, O Phrygia, O my country, now mayst thou by God's grace address thy saviour Zeus! Shall old Troy once more at last spend the live-long day in drinking toasts and singing love's praise, while the wildering wine-cup sends a friendly challenge round, as o'er the sea for Sparta bound, the sons of Atreus quit the Ilian strand? Ah! best of friends, with thy strong arm and spear mayst thou this service do me, then safe return. Come, appear, brandish that shield of gold full in Achilles' face; raise it aslant along the chariot's branching rail, urging on thy steeds the while, and shaking thy lance with double point. For none after facing thee will ever join the dance on the lawns of Argive Hera; no, but he shall die by Thracians slain, and this land shall bear the burden of his corpse and be glad.

Enter RHESUS.

Hail, all hail O mighty prince! fair the scion thou hast bred, O Thrace, a ruler in his every look. Mark his stalwart frame cased in golden corslet! Hark to the ringing bells that peal so proudly from his targehandle hung. A god, O Troy, a god, a very Ares, a scion of Strymon's stream and of the tuneful Muse, breathes courage into thee.

Re-enter HECTOR.

RHESUS

Brave son of sire as brave, Hector, prince of this land, all hail! After many a long day I greet thee. Right glad am I of thy success, to see thee camped hard on the foemen's towers; I come to help thee raze their walls and fire their fleet of ships.

HECTOR

Son of that tuneful mother, one of the Muses nine, and of Thracian Strymon's stream, I ever love to speak plain truth; nature gave me not a double tongue. Long, long ago shouldst thou have come and shared the labours this land nor suffered Troy for any help of thine to fall o'er thrown by hostile Argive spears. Thou canst not say 'twas any want of invitation that kept thee from coming with thy help to visit us. How oft came heralds and embassies from Phrygia urgently requiring thine aid for our city? What sumptuous presents did we not send to thee? But thou, brother barbarian though thou wert, didst pledge away to Hellenes us thy barbarian brethren, for ill the help thou gavest. Yet 'twas I with this strong arm that raised thee from thy paltry principedom to high lordship over Thrace, that day I fell upon the Thracian chieftains face to face

around Pangaeus in Paeonia's land and broke their serried ranks, and gave their people up to thee with the yoke upon their necks; but thou hast trampled on this great favour done thee, and comest with laggard step to give thine aid when friends are in distress. While they, whom no natural tic of kin constrains, have long been here, and some are dead and in their graves beneath the heaped-up cairn, no mean proof of loyalty to the city, and others in harness clad and mounted on their cars, with steadfast soul endure the icy blast and parching heat of the sun, not pledging one another, as thou art wont, in long deep draughts on couches soft. This is the charge I bring against thee and utter to thy face, that thou mayst know how frank is Hector's tongue.

RHESUS

I too am such another as thyself; straight to the point I cut my way; no shuffling nature mine. My heart was wrung with sorer anguish than ever thine was at my absence from this land; I fumed and chafed, but Scythian folk, whose borders march with mine, made war on me on the very eve of my departure for Ilium; already had I reached the strand of the Euxine sea, there to transport my Thracian army. Then did my spear pour out o'er Scythia's soil great drops of bloody rain, and Thrace too shared in the mingled slaughter. This then was what did chance to keep me from coming to the land of Troy and joining thy standard. But soon as I had conquered these and taken their children as hostages and appointed the yearly tribute they should pay my house, I crossed the firth, and lo! am here; on foot I traversed all thy borders that remained to pass, not as thou in thy jeers at those carousals of my countrymen hintest, nor sleeping soft in gilded palaces, but amid the frozen hurricanes that vex the Thracian main and the Paeonian shores, learning as I lay awake what suffering is, this soldier's cloak-my only wrap. True my coming hath tarried, but yet am I in time; ten long years already hast thou been at the fray, and naught accomplished yet; day in, day out, thou riskest all in this game of war with Argives. While I will be content once to see the sungod rise, and sack yon towers and fall upon their anchored fleet and slay the Achaeans; and on the morrow home from Ilium will I go, at one stroke ending all thy toil. Let none of you lay hand to spear to lift it, for I, for all my late arrival, will with my lance make utter havoc of those vaunting Achaeans.

CHORUS

Joy, joy! sweet champion sent by Zeus! Only may Zeus, throned on high, keep jealousy, resistless foe, from thee for thy presumptuous words! Yon fleet of ships from Argos sent, never brought, nor formerly nor now, among all its warriors a braver than thee; how I wonder will Achilles, how will Aias stand the onset of thy spear? Oh! to live to see that happy day, my prince, that thou mayest wreak vengeance on them, gripping thy lance in thy deathdealing hand!

RHESUS

Such exploits am I ready to achieve to atone for my long absence; (with due submission to Nemesis I say this;) then when we have cleared this city of its foes and thou hast chosen out firstfruits for the gods, I fain would march with thee against the Argives' country and coming thither, lay Hellas waste with war, that they in turn may know the taste of ill.

HECTOR

If thou couldst rid the city of this present curse and restore it to its old security, sure I should feel deep gratitude towards heaven. But as for sacking Argos and the pasture-lands of Hellas, as thou sayest, 'tis no easy task.

RHESUS

Avow they not that hither came the choicest chiefs of Hellas?

HECTOR

Aye, and I scorn them not; enough have I to do in driving them away.

RHESUS

Well, if we slay these, our task is fully done.

HECTOR

Leave not the present need, nor look to distant schemes.

RHESUS

Thou art, it seems, content to suffer tamely and make no return.

HECTOR

I rule an empire wide enough, e'en though I here abide. But on the left wing or the right or in the centre of the allies thou mayst plant thy shield and marshal thy troops.

RHESUS

Alone will I face the foe, Hector. But if thou art ashamed, after all thy previous toil, to have no share in firing their ships' prows, place me face to face at least with Achilles and his host.

HECTOR

'Gainst him thou canst not range thy eager spear.

RHESUS

Why, 'twas surely said he sailed to Ilium.

HECTOR

He sailed and is come hither; but he is wroth and takes no part with the other chieftains in the fray.

RHESUS

Who next to him hath won a name in their host?

HECTOR

Aias and the son of Tydeus are, I take it, no whit his inferiors; there is Odysseus too, a noisy knave to talk, but bold enough withal, of all men he country. For he her image he made his a vagrant in a beggar's garb, and loudly did he curse the Argives, sent as a spy to Ilium; and then sneaked out again, when he had slain the sentinels and warders at the gate. He is ever to be found lurking in ambush about the altar of Thymbraean Apollo nigh the city. In him we have a troublous pest to wrestle with.

RHESUS

No brave man deigns to his foe in secret, but to meet him face to face. If I can catch this knave alive, who, as thou sayest, skulks in stealthy ambuscade and plots his mischief, I will impale him at the outlet of the gates and set him up for vultures of the air to make their meal upon. This is the death he ought to die, pirate and temple-robber that he is.

HECTOR

To your quarters now, for night draws on. For thee I will myself point out a spot where thy host can watch this night apart from our array. Our watchword is Phorbus, if haply there be need thereof; hear and mark it well and tell it to the Thracian army. Ye must advance in front of our ranks and keep a watchful guard, and so receive Dolon who went to spy the ships, for he, if safe he is, is even now approaching the camp of Troy.
Exeunt HECTOR and RHESUS.

CHORUS

Whose watch is it? who relieves me? night's earlier stars are on the wane, and the seven Pleiads mount the sky; athwart the firmament the eagle floats. Rouse ye, why delay? Up from your beds to the watch! See ye not the moon's pale beam? Dawn is near, day is coming, and lo! a star that heralds it.

SEMI-CHORUS

Who was told off to the first watch?
The son of Mygdon, whom men call Coroebus.
Who after him?
The Paconian contingent roused the Cilicians;
And the Mysians us.
Is it not then high time we went and roused the Lycians for the fifth watch, as the lot decided?

CHORUS

Hark! hark! a sound; 'tis the nightingale, that slew her child, singing where she sits upon her bloodstained nest by Simois her piteous plaint, sweet singer of the many trills; already along Ida's slopes they are pasturing the flocks, and o'er the night I catch the shrill pipe's note; sleep on my closing eyelids softly steals, the sweetest sleep that comes at dawn to tired eyes.

SEMI-CHORUS

Why doth not our scout draw near, whom Hector sent to spy the fleet?

He is so long away, I have my fears.
Is it possible he hath plunged into a hidden ambush and been slain?

Soon must we know.
My counsel is we go and rouse the Lycians to the fifth watch, as the lot ordained.
Exit SEMI-CHORUS.
Enter DIOMEDES and ODYSSEUS cautiously with drawn swords.

ODYSSEUS

Didst not hear, O Diomedes, the clash of arms? or is it an idle noise that rings in my ears?

DIOMEDES

Nay, 'tis the rattle of steel harness on the chariot-rails; me, too, did fear assail, till I perceived 'twas but the clang of horses' chains.

ODYSSEUS

Beware thou stumble not upon the guard in the darkness.

DIOMEDES

I will take good care how I advance even in this gloom.

ODYSSEUS

If however thou shouldst rouse them, dost know their watchword?

DIOMEDES

Yea, 'tis "Phorbus"; I heard Dolon use it.
They enter the tent, then return.

ODYSSEUS

Ha! the foe I see have left this bivouac.

DIOMEDES

Yet Dolon surely said that here was Hector's couch, against whom this sword of mine is drawn.

ODYSSEUS

What can it mean? Is his company withdrawn elsewhere?

DIOMEDES

Perhaps to form some stratagem against us.

ODYSSEUS

Like enough, for Hector now is grown quite bold by reason of his victory.

DIOMEDES

What then are we to do, Odysseus? we have not found our man asleep; our hopes are dashed.

ODYSSEUS

Let us to the fleet with what speed we may. Some god, whiche'er it be that gives him his good luck, is preserving him; 'gainst fate we must not strive.

DIOMEDES

Well, we twain must go against Eneas or Paris, most hateful of Phrygians, and without swords cut off their heads.

ODYSSEUS

How, pray, in the darkness canst thou find them amid a hostile army, and slay them without risk?

DIOMEDES

Yet 'twere base to go unto the Argive ships if we have worked the enemy no harm.

ODYSSEUS

What! no harm! Have we not slain Dolon who spied upon the anchored fleet, and have we not his spoils safe here? Dost thou expect to sack the entire camp? Be led by me, let us return; and good luck go with us!

ATHENA appears.

ATHENA

Whither away from the Trojan ranks, with sorrow gnawing at your hearts, because fortune granteth not you twain to slay Hector or Paris? Have ye not heard that Rhesus is come to succour Troy in no mean sort? If he survive this night until to-morrow's dawn, neither Achilles nor Aias, stout spearman, can stay him from utterly destroying the Argive fleet, razing its palisades and carrying the onslaught of his lance far and wide within the gates; slay him, and all is thine; let Hector's sleep alone, nor hope to leave him a weltering trunk, for he shall find death at another hand.

ODYSSEUS

Queen Athena, 'tis the well-known accent of thy voice I hear; for thou art ever at my side to help me in my toil. Tell us where the warrior lies asleep, in what part of the barbarian army he is stationed.

ATHENA

Here lies he close at hand, not marshalled with the other troops, but outside the ranks hath Hector given him quarters, till night gives place to day. And nigh him are tethered his white steeds to his Thracian chariot, easy to see in the darkness; glossy white are they like to the plumage of a river swan. Slay their master and bear them off, a glorious prize to any home, for nowhere else in all the world is such a splendid team to be found.

ODYSSEUS

Diomedes, either do thou slay the Thracian folk, or leave that to me, while thy care must be the horses.

DIOMEDES

I will do the killing, and do thou look to the steeds. For thou art well versed in clever tricks, and hast a ready wit. And 'tis right to allot a man to the work he can best perform.

ATHENA

Lo! yonder I see Paris coming towards us; he hath heard maybe from the guard a rumour vague that foes are near.

DIOMEDES

Are others with him or cometh he alone?

ATHENA

Alone; to Hector's couch he seems to wend his way, to announce to him that spies are in the camp.

DIOMEDES

Ought not he to head the list of slain?

ATHENA

Thou canst not o'erreach Destiny. And it is not decreed that he should fall by thy hand; but hasten on thy mission of slaughter fore-ordained, exeunt ODYSSEUS and DIOMEDES while I feigning to be Cypris, his ally, and to aid him in his efforts will answer thy foe with cheating words. Thus much I have told you, but the fated victim knoweth not, nor hath he heard one word, for all he is so near.
Enter PARIS.

PARIS

To thee I call, general and brother, Hector! Sleep'st thou? shouldst not thou awake? Some foeman draws anigh our host, or thieves maybe, or spies.

ATHENA

Courage! lo! Cypris watches o'er thee in gracious mood. Thy warfare is my care, for I do not for the honour thou once didst me, and I thank thee for thy good service. And now, when the host of Troy is triumphant, am I come bringing to thee a powerful friend, the Thracian child of the Muse, the heavenly songstress, whose father's name is Strymon.

PARIS

Ever unto this city and to me a kind friend art thou, and I am sure that decision I then made conferred upon this city the highest treasure life affords in thy person. I heard a vague report, and so I came, for there prevailed amongst the guard a rumour that Achaean spies are here. One man, that saw them not, saith so, while another, that saw them come, cannot describe them, and so I am on my way to Hector's tent.

ATHENA

Fear naught; all is quiet in the host, and Hector is gone to assign a sleeping-place to the Thracian army.

PARIS

Thou dost persuade me, and I believe thy words, and will go to guard my post, free of fear.

ATHENA

Go, for 'tis my pleasure ever to watch thy interests, that so I may see my allies prosperous. Yea, and thou too shalt recognize my zeal.

Exit PARIS.

Enter ODYSSEUS and DIOMEDES.

O son of Laertes, I bid you sheathe your whetted swords, ye warriors all too keen; for dead before you lies the Thracian chief, his steeds are captured, but the foe have wind thereof, and are coming forth against you; fly with all speed to the ships' station. Why delay to save your lives when the foemen's storm is just bursting on you?

CHORUS

On, on! strike, strike, lay on, lay on! deal death in every blow!

SEMI-CHORUS

Who goes there?

Look you, that man I mean. There are the thieves who in the gloom disturbed this host. Hither, come hither, every man of you! I have them-I have clutched them fast.

What is the watchword? Whence cam'st thou? Thy country?

ODYSSEUS

'Tis not for thee to know.

SEMI-CHORUS

Speak, or thou diest as a vile traitor this day.

Wilt not the watchword declare, ere my sword finds its way to thy heart?

ODYSSEUS

What! hast thou slain Rhesus?

SEMI-CHORUS

Nay, I am asking thee about him who came to slay us.

ODYSSEUS

Be of good heart, approach.

SEMI-CHORUS

Strike every man of you, strike, strike home!

ODYSSEUS

Stay every man of you!

SEMI-CHORUS

No, no, lay on!

ODYSSEUS

Ah! slay not a friend.

SEMI-CHORUS

What is the watchword, then?

ODYSSEUS

Phoebus.

SEMI-CHORUS

Right! stay every man his spear! Dost know whither those men are gone?

ODYSSEUS

Somewhere here I caught a sight of them.

SEMI-CHORUS

Close on their track each man of you, or else must we shout for aid.

ODYSSEUS

Nay, 'twere conduct strange to disturb our friends with wild alarms by night.
Exeunt ODYSSEUS and DIOMEDES.

CHORUS

Who was that man who slipped away? Who was he that will loudly boast his daring in escaping me? How shall I catch him now? to whom liken him? the man who came by night with fearless step passing through our ranks and the guard we set. Is he a Thessalian or a dweller in some seacoast town of Locris, or hath he his home amid the scattered islands of the main? Who was he, and whence came he? What is his fatherland? What god doth he avow as lord of the rest?

SEMI-CHORUS

Whose work is this? is it the deed of Odysseus?
If one may conjecture from his former acts, of course it is.
Dost think so really? Why, of course.
He is a bold foe for us.
Who is? whom art thou praising for valiancy?
Odysseus.
Praise not the crafty weapons that a robber uses.

CHORUS

Once before he came into this city, with swimming bleary eyes, in rags and tatters clad, his sword hidden in his cloak. And like some vagrant menial he slunk about begging his board, his hair all tousled and matted with filth, and many a bitter curse he uttered against the royal house of the Atreidae, as though forsooth he were to those chiefs opposed. Would, oh! Would, oh! would he had perished, as was his due, or ever he set foot on Phrygia's soil!

SEMI-CHORUS

Whether it were really Odysseus or not, I am afeard.
 Aye surely, for Hector will blame us sentinels.
 What can he allege?
 He will suspect.
 What have we done? why art afeard?
 By us did pass-
 Well, who?
 They who this night came to the Phrygian host.
 Enter CHARIOTEER.

CHARIOTEER

O crue! stroke of fate. Woe, woe!

CHORUS

Hush! be silent all! Crouch low, for maybe there cometh someone into the snare.

CHARIOTEER

Oh, oh! dire mishap to the Thracian allies.

CHORUS

Who is he that groans?

CHARIOTEER

Alack, alack! Woe is me and woe is thee, O king of thrace! How curst the sight of Troy to thee!
 how sad the blow that closed thy life!

CHORUS

Who art thou? an ally? which? night's gloom hath dulled these eyes, I cannot clearly recognize thee.

CHARIOTEER

Where can I find some Trojan chief? Where doth Hector take his rest under arms? Alack and well-a-day! To which of the captains of the host am I to tell my tale? What sufferings ours! What dark deeds someone hath wrought on us and gone his way, when he had wound up a clew of sorrow manifest to every Thracian!

CHORUS

From what I gather of this man's words, some calamity, it seems, is befalling the Thracian host.

CHARIOTEER

Lost is all our host, our prince is dead, slain by a treacherous blow. Woe worth the hour! woe worth the day! O the cruel anguish of this bloody wound that inly racks my frame! Would I were dead! Was it to die this inglorious death that Rhesus and I did come to Troy?

CHORUS

This is plain language; in no riddles he declares the disaster; all too clearly he asserts our friends' destruction.

CHARIOTEER

A sorry deed it was, and more than that a deed most foul; yea, 'tis an evil doubly bad; to die with glory, if die one must, is bitterness enough I trow to him who dies; assuredly it is; though to the living it add dignity and honour for their house. But we, like fools, have died a death of shame. No sooner had great Hector given us our quarters and told us the watchword than we laid us down to sleep upon the ground, o'ercome by weariness. No guard our army set to watch by night. Our arms we set not in array, nor were the whips hung ready on the horses' yokes, for our prince was told that you were masters now, and had encamped hard on their ships; so carelessly we threw us down to sleep. Now I with thoughtful mind awoke from my slumber, and with ungrudging hand did measure out the horses' feed, expecting to harness them at dawn unto the fray; when lo! through the thick gloom two men I see roaming around our army. But when I roused myself they fled away, and were gone once more; and I called out to them to keep away from our army, for I thought they might be thieves from our allies. No answer made they, so I too said no more, but came back to my couch and slept again. And lo! as I slept came a strange fancy o'er me: I saw, methought as in a dream, those steeds that I had groomed and used to drive, stationed at Rhesus' side, with wolves mounted on their backs; and these with their tails did lash the horses' flanks and urge them on, while they did snort and breathe fury from their nostrils, striving in terror to unseat their riders. Up I sprang to defend the horses from the brutes, for the horror of the night scared me. Then as I raised my head I heard the groans of dying men, and a warm stream of new-shed blood bespattered me where I lay close to my murdered master as he gave up the ghost. To my feet I start, but all unarmed; and as I peer about and grope to find my sword, a stalwart hand from somewhere nigh dealt me a sword-thrust beneath the ribs. I know the sword that dealt that blow from the deep gaping wound it gave me. Down on my face I fell, while they fled clean away with steeds and chariot. Alack, alack! Tortured with pain, too weak to stand, a piteous object I know what happened, for I saw it; but how the victims met their death I cannot say, nor whose the hand that smote them; but I can well surmise we have our friends to thank for this mischance.

CHORUS

O charioteer of Thrace's hapless king, never suspect that any but foes have had a hand in this. Lo! Hector himself is here, apprized of thy mischance; he sympathizes as he should with thy hard fate.

Enter HECTOR.

HECTOR

Ye villains who have caused this mischief dire, how came the foemen's spies without your knowledge, to your shame, and spread destruction through the host, and you drove them not away as they passed in or out? Who but you shall pay the penalty for this? You, I say, were stationed here to the host. But they are gone without a wound, with many a scoff at Phrygian cowardice, and at me their leader. Now mark ye this-by father Zeus I swear at least the scourge,

if not the headsman's axe, awaits such conduct; else count Hector a thing of naught, a mere coward.

CHORUS

Woe, woe is me! A grievous, grievous woe came on me, I can see, great lord of my city, in the hour that I brought my news to thee that the Argive host was kindling fires about the ships; for by the springs of Simois I vow my eye kept sleepless watch by night, nor did I slumber or sleep. O be not angered with me, my lord; I am guiltless of all; yet if hereafter thou find that I in word or deed have done amiss, bury me alive beneath the earth; I ask no mercy.

CHARIOTEER

Why threaten these? Why try to undermine my poor barbarian wit by crafty words, barbarian thou thyself? Thou didst this deed; nor they who have suffered ail, nor we by wounds disabled will believe it was any other. A long and subtle speech thou'lt need to prove to me thou didst not slay thy friends because thou didst covet the horses, and to gain them didst murder thine own allies, after bidding them come so straitly. They came, and they are dead. Why, Paris found more decent means to shame the rights of hospitality than thou, with thy slaughter of thy allies. Never tell me some Argive came and slaughtered us. Who could have passed the Trojan lines and come against us without detection? Thou and thy Phrygian troops were camped in front of us. Who was wounded, who was slain amongst thy friends, when that foe thou speak'st of came? 'Twas we were wounded, while some have met a sterner fate and said farewell to heaven's light. Briefly, then, no Achaean do I blame. For what enemy could have come and found the lowly bed of Rhesus in the dark, unless some deity were guiding the murderers' steps? They did not so much as know of his arrival. No, 'tis thy plot this!

HECTOR

'Tis many a long year now since I have had to do with allies, aye, ever since Achoea's host settled in this land, and never an ill word have I known them say of me; but with thee I am to make a beginning. Never may such longing for horses seize me that I should slay my friends! This is the work of Odysseus. Who of all the Argives but he would have devised or carried out such a deed? I fear him much; and somewhat my mind misgives me lest he have met and slain Dolon as well; for 'tis long since he set out, nor yet appears.

CHARIOTEER

I know not this Odysseus of whom thou speakest. 'Twas no foe's hand that smote me.

HECTOR

Well, keep that opinion for thyself, if it please thee.

CHARIOTEER

O land of my fathers, would I might die in thee!

HECTOR

Die! No! Enough are those already dead.

CHARIOTEER

Where am I to turn, I ask thee, reft of my master now?

HECTOR

My house shall shelter thee and cure thee of thy hurt.

CHARIOTEER

How shall murderers' hands care for me?

HECTOR

This fellow will never have done repeating the same story.

CHARIOTEER

Curses on the doer of this deed! On thee my tongue doth fix no charge, as thou complainest; but justice is over all.

HECTOR

Ho! him hence! Carry him to my palace and tend him carefully, that he may have no fault to find. And you must go to those upon the walls, to Priam and his aged councillors, and tell them to give orders for the burial of the dead at the place where folk turn from the road to rest.

CHARIOTEER is carried off.

CHORUS

Why, with what intent doth fortune change and bring Troy once again to mourning after her famous victory? See, see! O look! What goddess, O king, is hovering o'er our heads, bearing in her hands as on a bier the warrior slain but now? I shudder at this sight of woe.

THE MUSE appears.

THE MUSE

Behold me, sons of Troy! Lo! I the Muse, one of the sisters nine, that have honour among the wise, am here, having seen the piteous death his foes have dealt my darling son. Yet shall the crafty Odysseus, that slew him, one day hereafter pay a fitting penalty. O my son, thy mother's grief, I mourn for thee in self-taught strains of woe! What a journey thou didst make to Troy, a very path of woe and sorrow! starting, spite of all my warnings and thy father's earnest prayers, in defiance of us. Woe is me for thee, my dear, dear son! Ah, woe! my son, my son!

CHORUS

I, too, bewail and mourn thy son, as far as one can who hath no common tie of kin.

THE MUSE

Curses on the son of Oeneus! Curses on Laertes' child! who hath reft me of my fair son and made me childless! and on that woman, too, that left her home in Hellas, and sailed hither with her Phrygian paramour, bringing death to thee, my dearest son, 'neath Ilium's walls, and stripping countless cities of their heroes brave. Deep, deep the wounds, son of Philammon, hast thou inflicted on my heart, in life, nor less in Hades' halls. Yea, for 'twas thy pride, thy own undoing, and thy rivalry with us Muses that made me mother of this poor son of mine. For as I

crossed the river's streams I came too nigh to Strymon's fruitful couch, that day we Muses came unto the brow of Mount Pangaeus with its soil of gold, with all our music furnished forth for one great trial of minstrel skill with that clever Thracian bard, and him we reft of sight, even Thamyras, the man who oft reviled our craft. Anon, when I gave birth to thee, because I felt shame of my sisters and my maiden years, I sent thee to the swirling stream of thy sire, the water-god; and Strymon did not entrust thy nurture to mortal hands, but to the fountain nymphs. There wert thou reared most fairly by the maiden nymphs, and didst rule o'er Thrace, a leader amongst men, my child. So long as thou didst range thy native land in quest of bloody deeds of prowess I feared not for thy death, but I bade thee ne'er set out for Troy-town, for well I knew thy doom; but Hector's messages and those countless embassies urged thee to go and help thy friends. This was thy doing, Athena; thou alone art to blame for his death (neither Odysseus nor the son of Tydeus had aught to do with it); think not it hath escaped mine eye. And yet we sister Muses do special honour to thy city, thy land we chiefly haunt; yea, and Orpheus, own cousin of the dead whom thou hast slain, did for thee unfold those dark mysteries with their torch processions. Musaeus, too, thy holy citizen, of all men most advanced in lore, him did Phoebus with us sisters train. And here is my reward for this; dead in my arms I hold my child and mourn for him. Henceforth no other learned man I'll bring to thee.

CHORUS

Vainly it seems the Thracian charioteer reviled us with plotting this man's murder, Hector.

HECTOR

I knew it; it needed no seer to say that he had perished by the arts of Odysseus. Now I, when I saw the Hellene host camped in my land, of course would not hesitate to send heralds to my friends, bidding them come and help my country; and so I sent, and he as in duty bound came my toils to share. It grieves me sorely to see him dead; and now am I ready to raise a tomb for him and burn at his pyre great store of fine raiment; for he came as a friend and in sorrow is he going hence.

THE MUSE

He shall not descend into earth's darksome soil; so earnest a prayer will I address to the bride of the nether world, the daughter of the goddess Demeter, giver of increase, to release his soul, and debtor, as she is to me, show that she honours the friends of Orpheus. Yet from henceforth will he be to me as one dead that seeth not the light; for never again will he meet me or see his mother's face, but will lurk hidden in a cavern of the land with veins of silver, restored to life, no longer man but god, even as the prophet of Bacchus did dwell in a grotto 'neath Pangaeus, a god whom his votaries honoured. Lightly now shall I feel the grief of the sea-goddess, for her son too must die. First then for thee we sisters must chaunt our dirge, and then for Achilles when Thetis mourns some day. Him shall not Pallas, thy slayer, save; so true the shaft Loxias keeps in his quiver for him. Ah me! the sorrows that a mother feels! the troubles of mortals! whoso fairly reckons you up will live and die a childless man and will have no children to bury.

THE MUSE disappears.

CHORUS

His mother now must see to this her son's burial; but for thee, Hector, if thou wilt carry out any scheme, now is the time, for day is dawning.

HECTOR

Go, bid our comrades arm at once; yoke the horses; torch in hand ye must await the blast of the Etrurian trumpet; for I hope with this day's mounting sun to pass beyond their lines and walls and fire ships of the Acheans, restoring freedom's light once more to Troy.

CHORUS

Obedience to our prince! let us array ourselves in mail, and go forth and these orders tell to our allies, and haply the god who is on our side will grant us victory.

THE END