

THE HERACLEIDAE

by Euripides

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translated by E. P. Coleridge

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CHARACTERS IN THE PLAY

IOLAUS, friend of Heracles
COPREUS, herald of EURYSTHEUS
DEMOPHON, King of Athens
MACARIA, daughter of Heracles
SERVANT, of Hyllus, son of Heracles
ALCMENA, mother of Heracles
MESSENGER
EURYSTHEUS; King of Argos
CHORUS OF AGED ATHENIANS
Acamas, the brother of DEMOPHON, younger sons of Heracles,
attendants, guards, etc.

(SCENE:—Before the altar and temple of Zeus
at Marathon. IOLAUS, an old man, and the
children of Heracles are seen on the steps of the altar.)

IOLAUS

I HOLD this true, and long have held: Nature hath made one man upright for his neighbours' good, while another hath a disposition wholly given over to gain, useless alike to the state and difficult to have dealings with, but for himself the best of men; and this I know, not from mere hearsay. For I, from pure regard and reverence for my kith and kin, though might have lived at peace in Argos, alone of all my race shared with Heracles his labours, while he was yet with us, and now that he dwells in heaven, I keep these his children safe beneath my wing, though myself need protection. For when their father passed from earth away, Eurystheus would first of all have slain us, but we escaped. And though our home is lost, our life was saved. But in exile we wander from city to city, ever forced to roam. For, added to our former wrongs, Eurystheus thought it fit to put this further outrage upon us: wheresoe'er he heard that we were settling, thither would he send heralds demanding our surrender and driving us from thence, holding out this threat, that Argos is no meal city to make a friend or foe, and furthermore pointing to his own prosperity. So they, seeing how weak my means, and these little ones left without a father, bow to his superior might and drive us from their land. And I share the exile of these children, and help them bear their evil lot by my sympathy, loth to betray them, lest someone say, "Look you! now that the children's sire is dead, Iolaus no more protects them, kinsman though he is." Not one corner left us in the whole of Hellas, we are come to Marathon and its neighbouring land, and here we sit as suppliants at the altars of the gods, and pray their aid; for 'tis said two sons of Theseus dwell upon these plains, the lot of their inheritance, scions of Pandion's stock, related to these children; this the reason we have come on this our way to the borders of glorious Athens. To lead the flight two aged guides are we; my care is centred on these boys, while she, I mean Alcmena, clasps her son's daughter in her arms, and bears her for safety within this shrine, for we shrink from letting tender maidens come anigh the crowd or stand as suppliants at the altar. Now Hyllus and the elder of his brethren are seeking some place for us to find a refuge, if we are driven by force from this land. O children, children, come hither! hold unto my robe; for lo! I see a herald coming towards us from Eurystheus, by whom we are persecuted, wanderers excluded from every land. A curse on the and him that sent thee, hateful wretch! for that same tongue

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of thine hath oft announced its master's evil hests to these children's noble sire as well.

(COPREUS, the herald of EURYSTHEUS, enters.)

COPREUS

Doubtless thy folly lets thee think this is a good position to have taken up, and that thou art come to a city that will help thee. No! there is none that will prefer thy feeble arm to the might of Eurystheus. Begone! why take this trouble? Thou must arise and go to Argos, where awaits thee death by stoning.

IOLAUS

Not so, for the god's altar will protect me, and this land of freedom, wherein we have set foot.

COPREUS

Wilt give me the trouble of laying hands on thee?

IOLAUS

By force at least shalt thou never drag these children hence.

COPREUS

That shalt thou soon learn; it seems thou wert a poor prophet, after all, in this.

(COPREUS seizes the children.)

IOLAUS

This shall never happen while I live.

COPREUS

Begone! for I will take them hence, for all thy refusals, for I hold that they belong to Eurystheus, as they do indeed.

(He throws IOLAUS to the ground.)

IOLAUS

Help, ye who long have had your home in Athens! we suppliants at Zeus' altar in your market-place are being haled by force away, our sacred wreaths defiled, shame to your city, to the gods dishonour.

(The CHORUS OF AGED ATHENIANS enters.)

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

Hark, hark! What cry is this that rises near the altar? At once explain the nature of the trouble.

IOLAUS

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See this aged frame hurled in its feebleness upon the ground! Woe is me!

LEADER

Who threw thee down thus pitiably?

IOLAUS

Behold the man who flouts your gods, kind sirs, and tries by force to drag me from my seat before the altar of Zeus.

CHORUS (chanting)

From what land, old stranger, art thou come to this confederate state of four cities? or have ye left Euboea's cliffs, and, with the oar that sweeps the sea, put in here from across the firth?

IOLAUS

Sirs, no island life I lead, but from Mycenae to thy land I come.

CHORUS (chanting)

What do they call thee, aged sir, those folk in Mycenae?

IOLAUS

Maybe ye have heard of Iolaus, the comrade of Heracles, for he was not unknown to fame.

CHORUS (chanting)

Yea, I have heard of him in bygone days; but tell me, whose are the tender boys thou bearest in thine arms?

IOLAUS

These, sirs, are the sons of Heracles, come as suppliants to you and your city.

CHORUS (chanting)

What is their quest? Are they anxious, tell me, to obtain an audience of the state?

IOLAUS

That so they may escape surrender, nor be torn with violence from thy altars, and brought to Argos.

COPREUS

Nay, this will nowise satisfy thy masters, who o'er thee have a right, and so have tracked thee hither.

CHORUS (chanting)

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Stranger, 'tis but right we should reverence the gods' suppliants, suffering none with violent hand to make them leave the altars, for that will dread justice ne'er permit.

COPREUS

Do thou then drive these subjects of Eurystheus forth, and this hand of mine shall abstain from violence.

CHORUS (chanting)

'Twere impious for the state to neglect the suppliant stranger's prayer.

COPREUS

Yet 'tis well to keep clear of troubles, by adopting that counsel, which is the wiser.

LEADER

Thou then shouldst have told the monarch of this land thy errand before being so bold, out of regard to his country's freedom, instead of trying to drag strangers by force from the altars of the gods.

COPREUS

Who is monarch of this land and state?

LEADER

Demophon, son of gallant Theseus.

COPREUS

Surely it were most to the purpose to discuss this matter somewhat with him; all else has been said in vain.

LEADER

Lo! here he comes in person, in hot haste, and Acamas his brother, to hear what thou hast to say.

(DEMOPHON, Acamas, and their retinue enter.)

DEMOPHON

Since thou for all thy years hast outstripped younger men in coming to the rescue to this altar of Zeus, do thou tell me what hath chanced to bring this crowd together.

LEADER

There sit the sons of Heracles as suppliants, having wreathed the altar, as thou seest, O king, and with them is Iolaus, trusty comrade of their sire.

DEMOPHON

Why should this event have called for cries of pain?

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LEADER (turning to COPREUS)

This fellow caused the uproar by trying to drag them forcibly from this altar, and he hurled down the old man, till my tears for pity flowed.

DEMOPHON

Hellenic dress and fashion in his robes doth he no doubt adopt, but deeds like these betray the barbarian. Thou, sirrah, tell me straight the country whence thou camest thither.

COPREUS

An Argive I; since that thou seek'st to know. Who sent me, and the object of my coming, will I freely tell. Eurystheus, king of Mycenae, sends me hither to fetch these back; and I have come, sir stranger, with just grounds in plenty, alike for speech or action. An Argive myself, Argives I come to fetch, taking with me these runaways from my native city, on whom the doom of death was passed by our laws there; and we have right, since we rule our city independently, to ratify its sentences. And though they have come as suppliants to the altars of numerous others, we have taken our stand on these same arguments, and no one has ventured to bring upon himself evils of his own getting. But they have come hither, either because they perceived some folly in thee, or, in their perplexity, staking all on one risky throw to win or lose; for surely they do not suppose that thou, if so thou hast thy senses still, and only thou, in all the breadth of Hellas they have traversed, wilt pity their foolish troubles. Come now, put argument against argument: what will be thy gain, suppose thou admit them to thy land, or let us take them hence? From us these benefits are thine to win: this city can secure as friends Argos, with its far-reaching arm, and Eurystheus' might complete; whilst if thou lend an ear to their piteous pleading and grow soft, the matter must result in trial of arms; for be sure we shall not yield this struggle without appealing to the sword. What pretext wilt thou urge? Of what domains art thou robbed that thou shouldst take and wage war with the Tirynthian Argives? What kind of allies art thou aiding? For whom will they have fallen whom thou buriest? Surely thou wilt get an evil name from the citizens, if for the sake of an old man near the grave, a mere shadow I may say, and for these children, thou wilt plunge into troublous waters. The best thou canst say is, that thou wilt find in them a hope, and nothing more; and yet this falls far short of the present need; for these would be but a poor match for Argives even when fully armed and in their prime, if haply that raises thy spirits; moreover, the time 'twixt now and then is long, wherein ye may be blotted out. Nay, hearken to me; give me naught, but let me take mine own, and so gain Mycenae; but forbear to act now, as is your Athenian way, and take the weaker side, when it is in thy power to choose the stronger as thy friends.

LEADER

Who can decide a cause or ascertain its merits, till from both sides he clearly learn what they would say?

IOLAUS

O king, in thy land I start with this advantage, the right to hear and speak in turn, and none, ere that, will drive me hence as elsewhere they would. 'Twixt us and him is naught in common, for we no longer have aught to do with Argos since that decree was passed, but we are exiles from our native land; how then can he justly drag us back as subjects of Mycenae, seeing that they have banished us? For we are strangers. Or do ye claim that every exile from Argos is exiled from the bounds of Hellas? Not from Athens surely; for ne'er will she for fear of Argos drive the children of Heracles from her land. Here is no Trachis, not at all; no! nor that Achaean town, whence thou, defying justice, but boasting of the might of Argos in the very words thou now art using, didst drive the suppliants from their station at the altar. If this shall be, and they thy words approve, why then I trow this is no more Athens, the home of freedom. Nay, but I know the temper and nature of these citizens; they would rather die, for honour ranks before mere life with men of worth. Enough of Athens! for excessive praise is apt to breed disgust; and oft

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ere now have myself felt vexed at praise that knows no bounds. But to thee, as ruler of this land, fain would show the reason why thou art bound to save these children. Pittheus was the son of Pelops; from him sprung Aethra, and from her Theseus thy sire was born. And now will I trace back these children's lineage for thee. Heracles was son of Zeus and Alcmena; Alcmena sprang from Pelops' daughter; therefore thy father and their father would be the sons of first cousins. Thus then art thou to them related, O Demophon, but thy just debt to them beyond the ties of kinship do I now declare to thee; for I assert, in days gone by, I was with Theseus on the ship, as their father's squire, when they went to fetch that girdle fraught with death; yea, and from Hades' murky dungeons did Heracles bring thy father up; as all Hellas doth attest. Wherefore in return they crave this boon of thee, that they be not surrendered up nor torn by force from the altars of thy gods and cast forth from the land. For this were shame on thee, and hurtful likewise in thy state, should suppliants, exiles, kith and kin of thine, be haled away by force. In pity cast one glance at them. I do entreat thee, laying my suppliant bough upon thee, by thy hands and beard, slight not the sons of Heracles, now that thou hast them in thy power to help. Show thyself their kinsman and their friend; be to them father, brother, lord; for better each and all of these than to fall beneath the Argives' hand.

LEADER

O king, I pity them, hearing their sad lot. Now more than ever do see noble birth o'ercome by fortune; for these, though sprung from noble sire, are suffering what they ne'er deserved.

DEMOPHON

Three aspects of the circumstance constrain me, Iolaus, not to spurn the guests thou bringest; first and foremost, there is Zeus, at whose altar thou art seated with these tender children gathered round thee; next come ties of kin, and the debt I owe to treat them kindly for their father's sake; and last, mine honour, which before all I must regard; for if I permit this altar to be violently despoiled by stranger hands, men will think the land I inhabit is free no more, and that through fear I have surrendered suppliants to Argives, and this comes nigh to make one hang oneself. Would that thou hadst come under a luckier star! yet, as it is, fear not that any man shall tear thee and these children from the altar by force. (to COPREUS) Get thee to Argos and tell Eurystheus so; yea and more, if he have any charge against these strangers, he shall have justice; but never shalt thou drag them hence.

COPREUS

Not even if I have right upon my side and prove my case?

DEMOPHON

How can it be right to drag the suppliant away by force?

COPREUS

Well, mine is the disgrace; no harm will come to thee.

DEMOPHON

'Tis harm to me, if I let them be haled away by thee.

COPREUS

Banish them thyself, and then will I take them from elsewhere.

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DEMOPHON

Nature made thee a fool, to think thou knowest better than the god.

COPREUS

It seems then evildoers are to find a refuge here.

DEMOPHON

A temple of the gods is an asylum open to the world.

COPREUS

Maybe they will not take this view in Mycenae.

DEMOPHON

What! am I not lord of this domain?

COPREUS

So long as thou injure not the Argives, and if wise, thou wilt not.

DEMOPHON

Be injured for all I care, provided I sin not against the gods.

COPREUS

I would not have thee come to blows with Argos.

DEMOPHON

I am of like mind in this; but I will not dismiss these from my protection.

COPREUS

For all that, I shall take and drag my own away.

DEMOPHON

Why then perhaps thou wilt find a difficulty in returning to Argos.

COPREUS

That shall I soon find out by making the attempt.

DEMOPHON

Touch them and thou shalt rue it, and that without delay.

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LEADER

I conjure thee, never dare to strike a herald.

DEMOPHON

Strike I will, unless that herald learn discretion.

LEADER

Depart; and thou, O king, touch him not.

COPREUS

I go; for 'tis feeble fighting with a single arm. But I will come again, bringing hither a host of Argive troops, spearmen clad in bronze; for countless warriors are awaiting my return, and king Eurystheus in person at their head; anxiously he waits the issue here on the borders of Alcathous' realm. And when he hears thy haughty answer, he will burst upon thee, and thy citizens, on this land and all that grows therein; for all in vain should we possess such hosts of picked young troops in Argos, should we forbear to punish thee.

(COPREUS departs.)

DEMOPHON

Perdition seize thee! I am not afraid of thy Argos. Be very sure thou shalt not drag these suppliants hence by force, to my shame; for I hold not this city subject unto Argos, but independently.

CHORUS (singing)

'Tis time to use our forethought, ere the host of Argos approach our frontier, for exceeding fierce are the warriors of Mycenae, and in the present case still more than heretofore. For all heralds observe this custom, to exaggerate what happened twofold. Bethink the what a tale he will tell his master of his dreadful treatment, how he came near losing his life altogether.

IOLAUS

Children have no fairer prize than this, the being born of a good and noble sire, and the power to wed from noble families; but whoso is enslaved by passion and makes a lowborn match, I cannot praise for leaving to his children a legacy of shame, to gratify himself. For noble birth offers a stouter resistance to adversity than base parentage; for we, in the last extremity of woe, have found friends and kinsmen here, the only champions of these children through all the length and breadth of this Hellenic world. Give, children, give to them your hand, and they the same to you; draw near to them. Ah! children, we have made trial of our friends, and if ever ye see the path that leads you back to your native land, and possess your home and the honours of your father, count them ever as your friends and saviours, and never lift against their land the foeman's spear, in memory of this, but hold this city first midst those ye love. Yea, they well deserve your warm regard, in that they have shifted from our shoulders to their own the enmity of so mighty a land as Argos and its people, though they saw we were vagabonds and beggars; still they did not give us up nor drive us forth. So while I live, and after death,—come when it will,—loudly will I sing thy praise, good friend, and will extol thee as I stand at Theseus' side, and cheer his heart, as I tell how thou didst give kind welcome and protection to the sons of Heracles, and how nobly thou dost preserve thy father's fame through the length of Hellas, and hast not fallen from the high estate to which thy father brought thee, a lot which few others can boast; for 'mongst the many wilt thou find one maybe, that is not

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degenerate from his sire.

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

This land is ever ready in an honest cause to aid the helpless. Wherefore ere now it hath endured troubles numberless for friends, and now in this I see a struggle nigh at hand.

DEMOPHON

Thou hast spoken well, and I feel confident their conduct will be such; our kindness will they not forget. Now will I muster the citizens and set them in array, that I may receive Mycenae's host with serried ranks. But first will I send scouts to meet them, lest they fall upon me unawares; for at Argos every man is prompt to answer to the call, and I will assemble prophets and ordain a sacrifice. But do thou leave the altar of Zeus and go with the children into the house; for there are those who will care for thee, even though I be abroad. Enter then my house, old man.

IOLAUS

I will not leave the altar. Let us sit here still, praying for the city's fair success, and when thou hast made a glorious end of this struggle, will we go unto the house; nor are the gods who champion us weaker than the gods of Argos, O king; Hera, wife of Zeus, is their leader; Athena ours. And this I say is an omen of success, that we have the stronger deity, for Pallas will not brook defeat.

(DEMOPHON and his retinue go out.)

CHORUS (singing)

strophe

Though loud thy boasts, there be others care no more for thee for that, O stranger from the land of Argos; nor wilt thou scare my soul with swelling words. Not yet be this the fate of mighty Athens, beauteous town! But thou art void of sense, and so is he, who lords it o'er Argos, the son of Sthenelus,

antistrophe

thou that comest to another state, in no wise weaker than Argos, and, stranger that thou art, wouldst drag away by force suppliants of the gods, wanderers that cling to my land for help, refusing to yield to our king, nor yet having any honest plea to urge. How can such conduct count as honourable, at least in wise men's judgment?

epode

I am for peace myself; yet I tell thee, wicked king, although thou come unto my city, thou shalt not get so easily what thou expectest. Thou art not the only man to wield a sword or targe with plates of brass. Nay, thou eager warrior, I warn thee, bring not war's alarms against our lovely town; restrain thyself.

(DEMOPHON re-enters.)

IOLAUS

My son, why, prithee, art thou returned with that anxious look? Hast thou news of the enemy? Are they coming, are they here, or what thy tidings? For of a surety yon herald will not play us false. No! sure I am their captain, prosperous heretofore, will come, with thoughts exceeding proud against Athens. But Zeus doth punish

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overweening pride.

DEMOPHON

The host of Argos is come, and Eurystheus its king; my own eyes saw him, for the man who thinks he knows good generalship must see the foe not by messengers alone. As yet, however, he hath not sent his host into the plain, but, camped upon a rocky brow, is watching—I only tell thee what I think this means—to see by which road to lead his army hither without fighting, and how to take up a safe position in this land. However, all my plans are by this time carefully laid; the city is under arms, the victims stand ready to be slain to every god, whose due this is; my seers have filled the town with sacrifices, to turn the foe to flight and keep our country safe. All those who chant prophetic words have I assembled, and have examined ancient oracles, both public and secret, as means to save this city. And though the several answers differ in many points, yet in one is the sentiment of all clearly the same; they bid me sacrifice to Demeter's daughter some maiden from a noble father sprung. Now I, though in your cause I am as zealous as thou seest, yet will not slay my child, nor will I compel any of my subjects to do so against his will; for who of his own will doth harbour such an evil thought as to yield with his own hands the child he loves? And now thou mayest see angry gatherings, where some declare, 'tis right to stand by suppliant strangers, while others charge me with folly; but if I do this deed, a civil war is then and there at hand. Do thou then look to this and help to find a way to save yourselves and this country without causing me to be slandered by the citizens. For I am no despot like a barbarian monarch; but provided do what is just, just will my treatment be.

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

Can it be that heaven forbids this city to help strangers, when it hath the will and longing so to do?

IOLAUS

My children, we are even as those mariners, who have escaped the storm's relentless rage, and have the land almost within their reach, but after all are driven back from shore by tempests to the deep again. Even so we, just as we reach the shore in seeming safety, are being thrust back from this land. Ah me! Why, cruel hope, didst thou then cheer my heart, though thou didst not mean to make the boon complete? The king may well be pardoned, if he will not slay his subjects' children; and with my treatment here I am content; if indeed 'tis heaven's will, I thus should fare, still is my gratitude to thee in no wise lost. Children, I know not what to do for you. Whither shall we turn? for what god's altar have we left uncrowned? to what fenced city have we failed to go? Ruin and surrender are our instant lot, poor children! If I must die, 'tis naught to me, save that thereby I give those foes of mine some cause for joy. But you, children, I lament and pity, and that aged mother of your sire, Alcmena. Ah, woe is thee for thy long span of life! and woe is me for all my idle toil! 'Twas after all our destined doom to fall into the hands of our hated foe, and die a death of shame and misery. But lend me thine aid, thou knowest how; for all hope of these children's safety has not yet left me. Give me up instead of them to the Argives, O king; run no risk, but let me save the children; to love my life becomes me not; let it pass. Me will Eurystheus be most glad to take and treat despitely, as I was Heracles' companion; for the man is but a boor; wherefore wise men ought to pray to get a wise man for their foe, and not a proud senseless fool; for so, even if by fortune flouted, one would meet with much consideration.

LEADER

Old man, blame not this city; for though perhaps a gain to us, yet would it be a foul reproach that we betrayed strangers.

DEMOPHON

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A generous scheme is thine, but impossible. 'Tis not in quest of the yon king comes marching hither; what would Eurystheus gain by the death of one so old? Nay, 'tis these children's blood he wants. For there is danger to a foe in the youthful scions of a noble race, whose memory dwells upon their father's wrongs; all this Eurystheus must foresee. But if thou hast any scheme besides, that better suits the time, be ready with it, for, since I heard that oracle, I am at a loss and full of fear.

(MACARIA enters from the temple.)

MACARIA

Sirs, impute not boldness to me, because I venture forth; this shall be my first request, for a woman's fairest crown is this, to practise silence and discretion, and abide at home in peace. But when I heard thy lamentations, Iolaus, I came forth, albeit I was not appointed to take the lead in my family. Still in some sense am I fit to do so, for these my brothers are my chiefest care, and I fain would ask, as touching myself, whether some new trouble, added to the former woes, is gnawing at thy heart.

IOLAUS

My daughter, 'tis nothing new that I should praise thee, as I justly may, above all the children of Heracles. Our house seemed to be prospering, when back it fell again into a hopeless state; for the king declares the prophets signify that he must order the sacrifice, not of bull or heifer, but of some tender maid of noble lineage, if we and this city are to exist. Herein is our perplexity; the king refuses either to sacrifice his own or any other's child. Wherefore, though he use not terms express, yet doth he hint, that, unless we find some way out of this perplexity, we must seek some other land, for he this country fain would save.

MACARIA

Are these indeed the terms on which our safety depends?

IOLAUS

Yea, on these; if, that is, we are successful otherwise.

MACARIA

No longer then cower before the hated Argive spear; for I, of my own free will, or ever they bid me, am ready to die and offer myself as a victim. For what excuse have we, if, while this city deems it right to incur great danger on our behalf, we, though we might save ourselves, fly from death, by foisting our trouble on others? No! indeed, 'twere surely most ridiculous to sit and mourn as suppliants of the gods, and show ourselves but cowards, children as we are of that illustrious sire. Where among the brave is such conduct seen? Better, I suppose, this city should be taken and I (which Heaven forefend!) fall into the hands of the enemy, and then, for all I am my noble father's child, meet an awful doom, and face the Death—god none the less. Shall I wander as an exile from this land? Shall I not feel shame then, when someone says, as say they will, "Why are ye come hither with suppliant boughs, loving your lives too well? Begone from our land! for we will not succour cowards." Nay, if these be slain and I alone be saved, I have no hope in any wise of being happy, though many ere now have in this hope betrayed their friends, For who will care to wed a lonely maid or make me mother of his children? 'Tis better I should die than meet such treatment, little as I merit it. This were fitter treatment for some other, one that is not born to fame as I am. Conduct me to the scene of death, crown me with garlands, and begin the rites, if so it please you; then be victorious o'er the foe, for here I offer my life freely and without constraint, and for my brothers and myself I undertake to die. For I, by loving not my life too well, have found a treasure very fair, a glorious means to leave it.

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LEADER

Ah, what shall I say on hearing the maid's brave words, she that is ready to die for her brothers? Who can speak more noble words or do more noble deeds henceforth for ever?

IOLAUS

Daughter, thou art his own true child, no other man's but Heracles', that godlike soul; proud am I of thy words, though I sorrow for thy lot. Yet will I propose a fairer method: 'tis right to summon hither all the sisters of this maiden, and then let her, on whom the lot shall fall, die for her family; for that thou shouldst die without the lot is not just.

MACARIA

My death shall no chance lot decide; there is no graciousness in that; peace! old friend. But if ye accept and will avail you of my readiness, freely do I offer my life for these, and without constraint.

IOLAUS

Ah, this is even nobler than thy former word; that was matchless, but thou dost now surpass thy bravery and noble speech. I cannot bid, will not forbid thy dying, O my daughter! for by thy death thou dost thy brothers serve.

MACARIA

A cautious bidding thine! Fear not to take a stain of guilt from me, only let me die as one whose death is free. Follow me, old friend, for in thy arms I fain would die; stand by and veil my body with my robe, for I will go even to the dreadful doom of sacrifice, seeing whose daughter I avow myself. IOLAUS

I cannot stand by and see thee bleed.

MACARIA

At least do thou beg me this boon of the king, that I may breathe out my life in women's arms instead of men's.

DEMOPHON

It shall be so, unhappy maid; for this were shame to me to refuse the honour due, for many reasons: because thou hast a soul so brave; because 'tis right; and thou hast shown more courage than any of thy sex my eyes have ever seen. Now, if thou hast aught to say to these children or thy aged guide. oh! say the last thou hast to say—then go.

MACARIA

Farewell, old friend, farewell and prithee teach these children to be like thyself, wise at every point; let them strive no further, for that will suffice them. And seek to save them from death, even as thou art anxious to do; thy children are we, thy care it was that nurtured us. Thou seest how I yield my bridal bloom to die for them. For you, my brothers gathered here, may you be happy! and may every blessing be yours, for the which my blood shall pay the price! Honour this old friend, and her that is within the house, Alcmena, the aged mother of my sire, and these strangers too. And if ever heaven for you devise release from trouble and a return to your home, remember the burial due to her that saved you, funeral fair as I deserve; for I have not failed, but stood by you, and died to save my race. This shall be my pearl of price instead of children, and for the maiden life I leave, if there be really aught beyond the grave—God grant there may not be! For if, e'en there, we who are to die shall find a life of care, I know

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not whither one shall turn; for death is held a sovereign cure for every ill.

IOLAUS

Maiden of heroic soul, transcending all thy race, be sure the fame that thou shalt win from us, in life, in death, shall leave the rest of women far behind; farewell to thee! I dare not say harsh words of her to whom thou art devoted, the goddess—daughter of Demeter.

(DEMOPHON leads MACARIA away.)

Children, I am undone, grief unnerves my limbs; take hold and support me to a seat hard by, when ye have drawn my mantle o'er my face, my sons. For I am grieved at what hath happened, and yet, were it not fulfilled, we could not live; thus were our fate worse, though this is grief enough.

CHORUS (singing)

strophe

Without the will of heaven none is blest, none curst, I do maintain; nor doth the same house for ever tread the path of bliss; for one kind of fortune follows hard upon another; one man it brings to naught from his high estate, another though of no account it crowns with happiness. To shun what fate decrees, is no wise permitted; none by cunning shall thrust it from him; but he, who vainly would do so, shall have unceasing trouble.

antistrophe

Then fall not prostrate thou, but bear what heaven sends, and set limit to thy soul's grief; for she, poor maid! in dying for her brothers and this land, hath won a glorious death, and splendid fame shall be her meed from all mankind; for virtue's path leads through troublous ways. Worthy of her father, worthy of her noble birth is this she does. And if thou dost honour the virtuous dead, I share with thee that sentiment.

(The SERVANT OF HYLLUS enters.)

SERVANT OF HYLLUS

All hail, ye children! Where is aged Iolaus? where the mother of your 'sire, absent from their place at this altar?

IOLAUS

Here am I, so far as I can be here at all.

SERVANT

Why dost thou lie there? Why that downcast look?

IOLAUS

There is come a sorrow on my house, whereby I suffer.

SERVANT

Arise, lift up thy head.

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IOLAUS

I am old, and all my strength is gone.

SERVANT

But I come with tidings of great joy for thee.

IOLAUS

Who art thou? Where have I met thee? I have no remembrance.

SERVANT

I am a vassal of Hyllus; dost not recognize me now?

IOLAUS

Best of friends, art thou come to save us twain from hurt?

SERVANT

Assuredly; and moreover thou art lucky in the present case.

IOLAUS

Alcmena, mother of a noble son, to thee I call! come forth, hear this welcome news. For long has anguish caused thee inwardly to waste, wondering if those, who now are here, would ever come.

(ALCMENA enters from the temple in answer to the call.)

ALCMENA

What means that shout, that echoes throughout the house? Hath there come yet a herald from Argos, O Iolaus, and is he treating thee with violence? Feeble is any strength of mine; yet thus much let me tell thee, stranger, never, whilst I live, shalt thou drag them hence. Shouldst thou succeed, no more let me be thought the mother of that hero. And if thou lay a finger on them, thou wilt struggle to thy shame with two aged foes.

IOLAUS

Courage, aged dame, fear not; not from Argos is a herald come, with hostile messages.

ALCMENA

Why then didst raise a cry, fear's harbinger?

IOLAUS

I called thee to come to me in front of this temple.

ALCMENA

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I know not what it means; who is this?

IOLAUS

A messenger who says thy grandson cometh hither.

ALCMENA

All hail to thee for these thy tidings! But why is he not here, where is he? if in this land he hath set foot. What hath happened to keep him from coming hither with thee, to cheer my heart?

SERVANT

He is posting the army he brought with him, and seeing it marshalled.

ALCMENA

Then have I no concern herein.

IOLAUS

Yes, thou hast; though it is my business to inquire.

SERVANT

What then wouldst thou learn of these events?

IOLAUS

About how many allies has he with him?

SERVANT

A numerous force; I cannot otherwise describe the number.

IOLAUS

The leaders of the Athenians know this, I suppose?

SERVANT

They do; already is their left wing set in array.

IOLAUS

Is then the host already armed for battle?

SERVANT

Yea, and already are the victims brought near the ranks.

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IOLAUS

About what distance is the Argive host from us?

SERVANT

Near enough for their general to be plainly seen.

IOLAUS

What is he about? marshalling the enemy's line?

SERVANT

So we guessed; we could not hear exactly. But I must go, for I would not that my master should engage the foe without me, if I can help it.

IOLAUS

I also will go with thee; for I like thee am minded, so it seems, to be there and help my friends.

SERVANT

It least of all becomes thee thus to utter words of folly.

IOLAUS

Far less to shrink from sharing with my friends the stubborn fight.

SERVANT

Mere looks can wound no one, if the arm do naught.

IOLAUS

Why, cannot I smite even through their shields?

SERVANT

Smite perhaps, more likely be smitten thyself.

IOLAUS

No foe will dare to meet me face to face.

SERVANT

Friend, the strength, that erst was thine, is thine no more.

IOLAUS

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Well, at any rate, I will fight with as many as ever I did.

SERVANT

Small the weight thou canst throw into the balance for thy friends,

IOLAUS

Detain me not, when I have girded myself for action.

SERVANT

The power to act is thine no more, the will maybe is there.

IOLAUS

Stay here I will not, say what else thou wilt.

SERVANT

How shalt thou show thyself before the troops unarmed?

IOLAUS

There be captured arms within this shrine; these will I use, and, if I live, restore; and, if I am slain, the god will not demand them of me back. Go thou within, and from its peg take down a suit of armour and forthwith bring it to me. To linger thus at home is infamous, while some go fight, and others out of cowardice remain behind.

(The SERVANT goes into the temple.)

CHORUS (singing)

Not yet hath time laid low thy spirit, 'tis young as ever; but thy body's strength is gone. Why toil to no purpose? 'Twill do thee hurt and benefit our city little. At thy age thou shouldst confess thy error and let impossibilities alone. Thou canst in no way get thy vigour back again.

ALCMENA

What means this mad resolve to leave me with my children undefended here?

IOLAUS

Men must fight; and thou must look to them.

ALCMENA

And what if thou art slain? what safety shall I find?

IOLAUS

Thy son's surviving children will care for thee.

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ALCMENA

Suppose they meet with some reverse? which Heaven forefend!

IOLAUS

These strangers will not give thee up, fear not.

ALCMENA

They are my last and only hope, I have no other.

IOLAUS

Zeus too, I feel sure, cares for thy sufferings.

ALCMENA

Ah! of Zeus will I never speak ill, but himself doth know whether he is just to me.

(The SERVANT enters from the temple, carrying the arms.)

SERVANT

Lo! here thou seest a full coat of mail; make haste to case thyself therein; for the strife is nigh, and bitterly doth Ares loathe loiterers; but if thou fear the weight of the armour, go now without it, and in the ranks do on this gear; meantime will I carry it.

IOLAUS

Well said! keep the harness ready to my hand, put a spear within my grasp, and support me on the left side, guiding my steps.

SERVANT

Am I to lead this warrior like a child?

IOLAUS

To save the omen, we must go without stumbling.

SERVANT

Would thy power to act were equal to thy zeal!

IOLAUS

Hasten; I shall feel it grievously, if I am too late for the battle.

SERVANT

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'Tis thou who art slow, not I, though thou fanciest thou art doing wonders.

IOLAUS

Dost not mark how swift my steps are hasting?

SERVANT

I mark more seeming than reality in thy haste,

IOLAUS

Thou wilt tell a different tale when thou seest me there.

SERVANT

What shall I see thee do? I wish thee all success, at any rate.

IOLAUS

Thou shalt see me smite some foeman through the shield.

SERVANT

Perhaps, if ever we get there. I have my fears of that.

IOLAUS

Ah! would to Heaven that thou, mine arm, e'en as I remember thee in thy lusty youth, when with Heracles thou didst sack Sparta, couldst so champion me to-day! how I would put Eurystheus to flight! since he is to craven to wait the onslaught. For prosperity carries with it this error too, a reputation for bravery; for we think the prosperous man a master of all knowledge.

(IOLAUS and the SERVANT depart.)

CHORUS (singing)

strophe 1

O earth, and moon that shines by night, and dazzling radiance of the god, that giveth light to man, bear the tidings to me, shout aloud to heaven for joy, and beside our ruler's throne, and in the shrine of grey-eyed Athene. For my fatherland and home will I soon decide the issue of the strife with the gleaming sword, because I have taken suppliants under my protection.

antistrophe 1

'Tis a fearful thing, that a city prosperous as Mycenae is, one famed for martial prowess, should harbour wrath against my land; still, my countrymen, it were a shameful thing in us to yield up suppliant strangers at the bidding of Argos. Zeus is on my side, I am not afraid; Zeus hath a favour unto me, as is my due; never by me shall gods be thought weaker than mortal men.

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strophe 2

O dread goddess, thine the soil whereon we stand, thine this city, for thou art its mother, queen, and saviour; wherefore turn some other way the impious king, who leadeth a host from Argos with brandished lance against this land; for, such my worth, I little merit exile from my home.

antistrophe 2

For thy worship is aye performed with many a sacrifice, and never art thou forgotten as each month draweth to its close, when young voices sing and dancers' music is heard abroad, while on our wind-swept hill goes up the cry of joy to the beat of maidens' feet by night.

(The SERVANT enters.)

SERVANT

Mistress, the message that I bring is very short for thee to hear and fair for me, who stand before thee, to announce. O'er our foes we are victorious, and trophies are being set up, with panoplies upon them, taken from thy enemies.

ALCMENA

Best of friends! this day hath wrought thy liberty by reason of these tidings. But there still remains one anxious thought thou dost not free me from;—a thought of fear;—are those, whose lives I cherish, spared to me?

SERVANT

They are, and high their fame through all the army spreads.

ALCMENA

The old man Iolaus,—is he yet alive?

SERVANT

Aye, that he is, a hero whom the gods delight to honour.

ALCMENA

How so? Did he perform some deed of prowess?

SERVANT

He hath passed from age to youth once more.

ALCMENA

Thy tale is passing strange; but first I would that thou shouldst tell me how our friends won the day.

SERVANT

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One speech of mine puts it all clearly before thee. When we had deployed our troops and marshalled them face to face with one another, Hyllus dismounted from his four-horsed chariot and stood midway betwixt the hosts. Then cried he, "Captain, who art come from Argos, why cannot we leave this land alone? No hurt wilt thou do Mycenae, if of one man thou rob her; come! meet me in single combat. and if thou slay me, take the children of Heracles away with thee, but, if thou fall, leave me to possess my ancestral honours and my home." The host cried yes! saying the scheme he offered was a fair one, both to rid them of their trouble and satisfy their valour. But that other, feeling no shame before those who heard the challenge or at his own cowardice, quailed, general though he was, to come within reach of the stubborn spear, showing himself an abject coward; yet with such a spirit he came to enslave the children of Heracles. Then did Hyllus withdraw to his own ranks again, and the prophets seeing that no reconciliation would be effected by single combat, began the sacrifice without delay and forthwith let flow from a human throat auspicious streams of blood. And some were mounting chariots, while others couched beneath the shelter of their shields, and the king of the Athenians, as a highborn chieftain should, would exhort his host—"Fellow-citizens, the land, that feeds you and that gave you birth, demands to-day the help of every man." Likewise Eurystheus besought his allies that they should scorn to sully the fame of Argos and Mycenae. Anon the Etrurian trumpet sounded loud and clear, and hand to hand they rushed; then think how loudly clashed their ringing shields, what din arose of cries and groans confused! At first the onset of the Argive spearmen broke our ranks; then they in turn gave ground; next, foot to foot and man to man, they fought their stubborn fray, many falling the while. And either chief cheered on his men, "Sons of Athens! Ye who till the fields of Argos! ward from your land disgrace." Do all we could, and spite of every effort, scarce could we turn the Argive line in flight. When lo! old Iolaus sees Hyllus starting from the ranks, whereon he lifts his hands to him with a prayer to take him up into his chariot. Thereon he seized the reins and went hard after the horses of Eurystheus. From this point onward must I speak from hearsay, though hitherto as one whose own eyes saw. For as he was crossing Pallene's hill, sacred to the goddess Athene, he caught sight of Eurystheus' chariot, and prayed to Hebe and to Zeus, that for one single day he might grow young again and wreak his vengeance on his foes. Now must thou hear a wondrous tale: two stars settled on the horses' yokes and threw the chariot into dark shadow, which—at least so say our wiser folk—were thy son and Hebe; and from that murky gloom appeared that aged man in the form of a youth with strong young arms; then by the rocks of Sciron the hero Iolaus o'ertakes Eurystheus' chariot. And he bound his hands with gyves, and is bringing that chieftain once so prosperous as a trophy hither, whose fortune now doth preach a lesson, clear as day, to all the sons of men, that none should envy him, who seems to thrive, until they see his death; for fortune's moods last but a day.

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

O Zeus, who puttest my foes to flight, now may I behold the day that frees me from cruel fear!

ALCMENA

At last, O Zeus, hast thou turned a favouring eye on my affliction; yet do I thank thee for what has happened. And though ere this I did not believe my son was gathered to the gods, now am I convinced thereof. My children, now at last from toil shall ye be free, free from him, whom hideous death awaits, Eurystheus; now shall ye behold your father's city, and set foot in the land of your inheritance, and sacrifice to those ancestral gods, from whom ye have been debarred and forced to lead in strangers' lands a life of wretched vagrancy. But tell me, what sage purpose Iolaus nursed in his heart, that he spared the life of Eurystheus, for to my mind this is no wisdom, to catch a foe and wreak no vengeance on him.

SERVANT

'Twas his regard for thee, that thou might'st see him subject to thy hand, and triumph o'er him. Rest assured, 'twas no willing prisoner he made, but by strong constraint he bound him, for Eurystheus was loth indeed to come alive into thy presence and pay his penalty. Farewell, my aged mistress; I pray thee remember thy first promise when I was beginning my story; set me free; for, at such a time as this, sincerity becometh noble lips.

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(The SERVANT departs.)

CHORUS (singing)

strophe 1

Sweet is the dance to me, whenso the clear-toned flute and lovely Aphrodite shed grace upon the feast; and a joyful thing too it is, trow, to witness the good luck of friends, who till then ne'er dreamt of it. For numerous is the offspring of Fate, that bringeth all to pass, and of Time, the son of Cronus.

antistrophe 1

Thine is the path of justice, O my city; this must no man wrest from thee, thy reverence for the gods, and, whoso denieth it of thee, draws nigh to frenzy's goal, with these plain proofs in view. Yea, for the god proclaims it clearly, by cutting short the bad man's pride in every case.

strophe 2

In heaven, mother, lives thy son, passed from earth away; that he went down to Hades' halls, his body burnt by the fire's fierce flame, is past belief; in golden halls reclined he has to wife Hebe, lovely nymph. Thou, O Hymen, hast honoured them, children both of Zeus.

antistrophe 2

Things for the most part form a single chain; for men say Athene used to champion their father, and now the citizens of that goddess have saved his children, and checked the insolence of him whose heart preferred violence to justice. God save me from such arrogance, such greed of soul!

(A MESSENGER enters. He is followed by

guards who bring in EURYSTHEUS bound.)

MESSENGER

Mistress, though thine eyes see him, yet will I announce we have brought Eurystheus hither for thy pleasure, an unexpected sight, for him no less a chance he ne'er foresaw; for little he thought of ever falling into thy hands, what time he marched from Mycenae with his toil-worn warriors, to sack Athens, thinking himself far above fortune. But a power divine hath reversed our destinies, changing their position. Now Hyllus and brave Iolaus I left raising an image to Zeus, who routs the foe, for their triumphant victory, whilst they bid me bring this prisoner to thee, wishing to gladden thy heart; for 'tis the sweetest sight to see a foe fall on evil days after prosperity.

ALCMENA

Art come, thou hateful wretch? Hath justice caught thee then at last? First, turn thy head this way to me, and endure to look thy enemies in the face, for thou art no more the ruler, but the slave. Art thou the man—for this I fain would learn—who didst presume to heap thy insults on my son, who now is where he is, thou miscreant? What outrage didst thou abstain from putting upon him? Thou that didst make him go down alive even to Hades, and wouldst send him with an order to slay hydras and lions? Thy other evil schemes I mention not, for to tell them were a tedious task for me. Nor did it content thee to venture thus far only; no! but from all Hellas wouldst thou drive me and my children, heaven's suppliants though we were, grey-beards some of us, and some still

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tender babes. But here hast thou found men and a free city, that feared not thee. Die in torment must thou, and e'en so wilt thou gain in every way, for one death is not thy due, after all the sorrow thou hast caused.

MESSENGER

Thou mayst not slay him.

ALCMENA

Then have we taken him captive in vain. But say, what law forbids his death?

MESSENGER

It is not the wiff of the rulers of this land.

ALCMENA

Why, what is this? Do they not approve of slaying enemies?

MESSENGER

Not such as they have taken alive in battle.

ALCMENA

Did Hyllus uphold this decision?

MESSENGER

He, I suppose, ought to have disobeyed the law of the land.

ALCMENA

The prisoner's life ought not to have been spared a moment.

MESSENGER

It was then that he was wronged, by not being slain at first.

ALCMENA

Why, then, he is still in time to pay his penalty.

MESSENGER

There is no one who will slay him now.

ALCMENA

I will; and yet I count myself someone.

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MESSENGER

Well, thou wilt incur great blame, if thou do this deed.

ALCMENA

I love this city well; that cannot be gainsaid. But since this man hath fallen into my power, no mortal hand shall wrest him from me. Wherefore let who will, call me the woman bold, with thoughts too high for her sex; yet shall this deed be brought to pass by me.

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

Lady, full well I understand thou hast a dire quarrel with this man, and 'tis pardonable.

EURYSTHEUS

Woman, be sure I will not flatter thee nor say aught to save my life, that can give any occasion for a charge of cowardice. It was not of my own free will I took this quarrel up; I am aware that I was born thy cousin, and kinsman to Heracles, thy son; but whether I would or no, Hera, by her power divine, caused me to be afflicted thus. Still, when undertook to be his foe, and when I knew I had to enter on this struggle, I set myself to devise trouble in plenty, and oft from time to time my midnight communing bore fruit, scheming how to push aside and slay my foes, and for the future divorce myself from fear; for I knew that son of thine was no mere cipher, but a man indeed; yea, for, though he was my foe, I will speak well of him, because he was a man of worth. Now, after he was taken hence, was I not forced, by reason of these children's hatred, and because I was conscious of an hereditary feud, to leave no stone unturned by slaying, banishing, and plotting against them? So long as I did so, my safety was assured. Suppose thyself hadst had my lot, wouldst not thou have set to harassing the lion's angry whelps, instead of letting them dwell at Argos undisturbed? Thou wilt not persuade us otherwise. Now therefore, since they did not slay me then, when I was prepared to die, by the laws of Hellas my death becomes a curse on him who slays me now. The city wisely let me go, in that she regarded the gods more than her hatred of me. Thou hast had my answer to thy words; henceforth must I be called avenging spirit and noble hero too. 'Tis even thus with me; to die have I no wish, but, if I leave my life, I shall in no way be grieved.

LEADER

Alcmena, fain I would advise thee somewhat; let this man go, for 'tis the city's will.

ALCMENA

Suppose he die, and yet I obey the city?

LEADER

That would be best of all; but how can this be?

ALCMENA

I will teach thee easily. I will slay him and then give up his corpse to those of his friends who come for it, for, as regards his body, I will not disobey the state; but by his death shall he pay me the penalty.

EURYSTHEUS

THE HERACLEIDAE

Slay me, I do not ask thee for mercy; yet since this city let me go and shrunk from slaying me, I will reward it with an old oracle of Loxias, which in time will benefit them more than doth appear. Bury my body after death in its destined grave in front of the shrine of the virgin goddess at Pallene. And I will be thy friend and guardian of thy city for ever, where I lie buried in a foreign soil, but a bitter foe to these children's descendants, whensoever with gathered host they come against this land, traitors to your kindness now; such are the strangers ye have championed. Why then came I hither, if I knew all this, instead of regarding the god's oracle? Because I thought, that Hera was mightier far than any oracle, and would not betray me. Waste no drink—offering on my tomb, nor spill the victim's blood; for I will requite them for my treatment here with a journey they shall rue; and ye shall have double gain from me, for I will help you and harm them by my death.

ALCMENA

Why, why delay to kill this man, after hearing this, since this is needed to secure the safety of your city and your children? Himself points out the safest road. Though the man is now our foe, yet after death is he our gain. Away with him, ye servants, and cast him to the dogs when ye have slain him. Think not thou shalt live to cast me forth from my native land again.

(The guards lead out EURYSTHEUS.)

CHORUS (chanting)

I agree. Lead on, servants. Our conduct shall bring no stain of guilt upon our rulers.

—THE END—