



# **THE SUPPLIANTS**

**AESCHYLUS**

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# THE SUPPLIANTS

BY  
AESCHYLUS

TRANSLATED BY E. D. A. MORSHEAD

*The Suppliants By Aeschylus.*

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Like her I wail and wail, in soft Ionian tones,  
 And as she wastes, even so  
 Wastes my soft cheek, once ripe with Nilus' suns  
 And all my heart dissolves in utter woe  
 Sad flowers of grief I cull,

Fleeing from kinsmen's love unmerciful—  
 Yea, from the clutching hands, the wanton crowd,  
 I sped across the waves, from Egypt's land of cloud<sup>1</sup>

Gods of the ancient cradle of my race,  
 Hear me, just gods! With righteous grace  
 On me, on me look down!  
 Grant not to youth its heart's unchaste desire,  
 But, swiftly spurning lust's unholy fire,  
 Bless only love and willing wedlock's crown  
 The war-worn fliers from the battle's wrack  
 Find refuge at the hallowed altar-side,  
 The sanctuary divine,—  
 Ye gods! such refuge unto me provide—  
 Such sanctuary be mine!  
 Though the deep will of Zeus be hard to track,  
 Yet doth it flame and glance,  
 A beacon in the dark, 'mid clouds of chance  
 That wrap mankind  
 Yea, though the counsel fall, undone it shall not be,  
 Whate'er be shaped and fixed within Zeus' ruling mind—  
 Dark as a solemn grove, with sombre leafage shaded,  
 His paths of purpose wind,  
 A marvel to man's eye

<sup>1</sup> “ἀερίας ἀπὸ γᾶς.” This epithet may appear strange to modern readers accustomed to think of Egypt as a land of cloudless skies and pellucid atmosphere. Nevertheless both Pindar (*Pyth* iv 93) and Apollonius Rhodius (iv 267) speak of it in the same way as Aeschylus. It has been conjectured that they allude to the fog banks that often obscure the low coasts—a phenomenon likely to impress the early navigators and to be reported by them.

Smitten by him, from towering hopes degraded,  
 Mortals lie low and still  
 Tireless and effortless, works forth its will  
 The arm divine!  
 God from His holy seat, in calm of unarmed power,  
 Brings forth the deed, at its appointed hour!  
 Let Him look down on mortal wantonness!  
 Lo! how the youthful stock of Belus' line  
 Craves for me, uncontrolled—  
 With greed and madness bold—  
 Urged on by passion's sunless stress—  
 And, cheated, learns too late the prey has 'scaped their hold!  
 Ah, listen, listen to my grievous tale,  
 My sorrow's words, my shrill and tearful cries!  
 Ah woe, ah woe!  
 Loud with lament the accents use,  
 And from my living lips my own sad dirges flow!  
 O Apian land of hill and dale,  
 Thou kennest yet, O land, this faltered foreign wail—  
 Have mercy, hear my prayer!  
 Lo, how again, again, I rend and tear  
 My woven raiment, and from off my hair  
 Cast the Sidonian veil!

Ah, but if fortune smile, if death be driven away,  
 Vowed rites, with eager haste, we to the gods will pay!  
 Alas, alas again!  
 O wither drift the waves? and who shall loose the pain?

O Apian land of hill and dale,  
 Thou kennest yet, O land, this faltered foreign wail!  
 Have mercy, hear my prayer!  
 Lo, how again, again, I rend and tear  
 My woven raiment, and from off my hair  
 Cast the Sidonian veil!

The wafting oar, the bark with woven sail,  
From which the sea foamed back,  
Sped me, unharmed of storms, along the breeze's track—  
Be it unblamed of me!  
But ah, the end, the end of my emprise!  
May He, the Father, with all-seeing eyes,  
Grant me that end to see!  
Grant that henceforth unstained as heretofore  
I may escape the forced embrace  
Of those proud children of the race  
That sacred lo bore.

And thou, O maiden-goddess chaste and pure—  
Queen of the inner fane,—  
Look of thy grace on me, O Artemis,  
Thy willing suppliant—thine, thine it is,  
Who from the lustful onslaught fled secure,  
To grant that I too without stain  
The shelter of thy purity may gain!

Grant that henceforth unstained as heretofore  
I may escape the forced embrace  
Of those proud children of the race  
That sacred lo bore!

Yet if this may not be,  
We, the dark race sun-smitten, we  
Will speed with suppliant wands  
To Zeus who rules below, with hospitable hands  
Who welcomes all the dead from all the lands:  
Yea by our own hands strangled, we will go,  
Spurned by Olympian gods, unto the gods below!

Zeus, hear and save!

The searching, poisonous hate, that lo vexed and drave,  
 Was of a goddess: well I know  
 The bitter ire, the wrathful woe  
 Of Hera, queen of heaven—  
 A storm, a storm her breath, whereby we yet are driven!  
 Bethink thee, what dispraise  
 Of Zeus himself mankind will raise,  
 If now he turn his face averted from our cries!  
 If now, dishonoured and alone,  
 The ox-horned maiden's race shall be undone,  
 Children of Epaphus, his own begotten son—  
 Zeus, listen from on high!—to thee our prayers arise.

Zeus, hear and save!  
 The searching poisonous hate, that lo vexed and drave,  
 Was of a goddess: well I know  
 The bitter ire, the wrathful woe  
 Of Hera, queen of heaven—  
 A storm, a storm her breath, whereby we yet are driven!

DANAUS.

Children, be wary—wary he with whom  
 Ye come, your trusty sire and steersman old:  
 And that same caution hold I here on land,  
 And bid you hoard my words, inscribing them  
 On memory's tablets. Lo, I see afar  
 Dust, voiceless herald of a host, arise;  
 And hark, within their grinding sockets ring  
 Axles of hurrying wheels! I see approach,  
 Borne in curved cars, by speeding horses drawn,  
 A speared and shielded band. The chiefs, perchance,  
 Of this their land are hitherward intent  
 To look on us, of whom they yet have heard  
 By messengers alone. But come who may,  
 And come he peaceful or in ravening wrath  
 Spurred on his path, 'twere best, in any case,

Damsels, to cling unto this altar-mound  
 Made sacred to their gods of festival,—  
 A shrine is stronger than a tower to save,  
 A shield that none may cleave. Step swift thereto,  
 And in your left hands hold with reverence  
 The white-crowned wands of suppliance, the sign  
 Beloved of Zeus, compassion's lord, and speak  
 To those that question you, words meek and low  
 And piteous, as beseems your stranger state,  
 Clearly avowing of this flight of yours  
 The bloodless cause; and on your utterance  
 See to it well that modesty attend;  
 From downcast eyes, from brows of pure control,  
 Let chastity look forth; nor, when ye speak,  
 Be voluble nor eager—they that dwell  
 Within this land are sternly swift to chide.  
 And be your words submissive: heed this well;  
 For weak ye are, outcasts on stranger lands,  
 And froward talk beseems not strengthless hands.

CHORUS.

O father, warily to us aware  
 Thy words are spoken, and thy wisdom's best  
 My mind shall hoard, with Zeus our sire to aid.

DANAUS.

Even so—with gracious aspect let him aid.

CHORUS.

Fain were I now to seat me by thy side.

DANAUS.

Now dally not, but put our thought in act.

CHORUS.

Zeus, pity our distress, or e'er we die.

DANAUS.

If so he will, your toils to joy will turn.

CHORUS.

Lo, on this shrine, the semblance of a bird.<sup>2</sup>

DANAUS.

Zeus' bird of dawn it is; invoke the sign.

CHORUS.

Thus I invoke the saving rays of morn.

DANAUS.

Next, bright Apollo, exiled once from heaven.

CHORUS.

The exiled god will pity our exile.

DANAUS.

Yea, may he pity, giving grace and aid.

CHORUS.

Whom next invoke I, of these other gods?

DANAUS.

Lo, here a trident, symbol of a god.

CHORUS.

Who<sup>3</sup> gave sea-safety; may he bless on land!

DANAUS.

This next is Hermes, carved in Grecian wise.

CHORUS.

Then let him herald help to freedom won.

<sup>2</sup> The whole of this dialogue in alternate verses is disarranged in the MSS. The re-arrangement which has approved itself to Paley has been here followed. It involves, however, a hiatus, instead of the line to which this note is appended. The substance of the lost line being easily deducible from the context, it has been supplied in the translation.

<sup>3</sup> Poseidon



DANAUS.

Lastly, adore this altar consecrate  
 To many lesser gods in one; then crouch  
 On holy ground, a flock of doves that flee,  
 Scared by no alien hawks, a kin not kind,  
 Hateful, and fain of love more hateful still.  
 Foul is the bird that rends another bird,  
 And foul the men who hale unwilling maids,  
 From sire unwilling, to the bridal bed.  
 Never on earth, nor in the lower world,  
 Shall lewdness such as theirs escape the ban:  
 There too, if men say right, a God there is  
 Who upon dead men turns their sin to doom,  
 To final doom. Take heed, draw hitherward,  
 That from this hap your safety ye may win.

*Enter the KING OF ARGOS.*

THE KING OF ARGOS.

Speak—of what land are ye? No Grecian band  
 Is this to whom I speak, with Eastern robes  
 And wrappings richly dight: no Argive maid,  
 No woman in all Greece such garb doth wear.  
 This too gives marvel, how unto this land,  
 Unheralded, unfriended, without guide,  
 And without fear, ye came? yet wands I see,  
 True sign of suppliance, by you laid down  
 On shrines of these our gods of festival.  
 No land but Greece can read such signs aright.  
 Much else there is, conjecture well might guess,  
 But let words teach the man who stands to hear.

CHORUS.

True is the word thou spakest of my garb;  
 But speak I unto thee as citizen,  
 Or Hermes' wandbearer, or chieftain king?

## THE KING OF ARGOS.

For that, take heart and answer without fear.  
 I am Pelasgus, ruler of this land,  
 Child of Palaichthon, whom the earth brought forth;  
 And, rightly named from me, the race who reap  
 This country's harvests are Pelasgian called.  
 And o'er the wide and westward-stretching land,  
 Through which the lucent wave of Strymon flows  
 I rule; Perrhaebia's land my boundary is  
 Northward, and Pindus' further slopes, that watch  
 Paeonia, and Dodona's mountain ridge.  
 West, east, the limit of the washing seas  
 Restrains my rule—the interspace is mine.  
 But this whereon we stand is Apian land,  
 Styled so of old from the great healer's name;  
 For Apis, coming from Naupactus' shore  
 Beyond the strait, child of Apollo's self  
 And like him seer and healer, cleansed this land  
 From man-devouring monsters, whom the earth,  
 Stained with pollution of old bloodshedding,  
 Brought forth in malice, beasts of ravening jaws,  
 A grisly throng of serpents manifold.  
 And healings of their hurt, by knife and charm,  
 Apis devised, unblamed of Argive men,  
 And in their prayers found honour, for reward.  
 —Lo, thou hast heard the tokens that I give:  
 Speak now thy race, and tell a forthright tale;  
 In sooth, this people loves not many words.

## CHORUS.

Short is my word and clear. Of Argive race  
 We come, from her, the ox-horned maiden who  
 Erst bare the sacred child. My word shall give  
 Whate'er can 'stablish this my soothfast tale.

THE KING OF ARGOS.

O stranger maids, I may not trust this word,  
That ye have share in this our Argive race.  
No likeness of our country do ye bear,  
But semblance as of Libyan womankind.  
Even such a stock by Nilus' banks might grow;  
Yea and the Cyprian stamp, in female forms,  
Shows to the life, what males impressed the same.  
And, furthermore, of roving Indian maids  
Whose camping-grounds by Aethiopia lie,  
And camels burdened even as mules, and bearing  
Riders, as horses bear, mine ears have heard;  
And tales of flesh-devouring mateless maids  
Called Amazons: to these, if bows ye bare,  
I most had deemed you like. Speak further yet,  
That of your Argive birth the truth I learn.

CHORUS.

Here in this Argive land—so runs the tale—  
Io was priestess once of Hera's fane.

THE KING OF ARGOS.

Yea, truth it is, and far this word prevails:  
Is't said that Zeus with mortal mingled love?

CHORUS.

Ay, and that Hera that embrace surmised.

THE KING OF ARGOS.

How issued then this strife of those on high?

CHORUS.

By Hera's will, a heifer she became.

THE KING OF ARGOS.

Held Zeus aloof then from the horned beast?

CHORUS.

'Tis said, he loved, in semblance of a bull.

THE KING OF ARGOS.

And his stern consort, did she aught thereon?

CHORUS.

One myriad-eyed she set, the heifer's guard.

THE KING OF ARGOS.

How namest thou this herdsman many-eyed?

CHORUS.

Argus, the child of Earth, whom Hermes slew.

THE KING OF ARGOS.

Still did the goddess vex the beast ill-starred?

CHORUS.

She wrought a gadfly with a goading sting.

THE KING OF ARGOS.

Thus drave she lo hence, to roam afar?

CHORUS.

Yea—this thy word coheres exact with mine.

THE KING OF ARGOS.

Then to Canopus and to Memphis came she?

CHORUS.

And by Zeus' hand was touched, and bare a child.

THE KING OF ARGOS.

Who vaunts him the Zeus-mated creature's son?

CHORUS.

Epaphus, named rightly from the saving touch.

THE KING OF ARGOS.

And whom in turn did Epaphus beget?<sup>4</sup>

<sup>4</sup> Here one verse at least has been lost. The conjecture of Bothe seems to be verified, as far as substance is concerned, by the next line, and has consequently been adopted.













CHORUS.

Strange votive tablets shall these statues deck.

THE KING OF ARGOS.

Mysterious thy resolve—avow it clear.

CHORUS.

Swiftly to hang me on these sculptured gods!

THE KING OF ARGOS.

Thy word is as a lash to urge my heart.

CHORUS.

Thou seest truth, for I have cleared thine eye

THE KING OF ARGOS.

Yea, and woes manifold, invincible,

A crowd of ills, sweep on me torrent-like.

My bark goes forth upon a sea of troubles

Unfathomed, ill to traverse, harbourless.

For if my deed shall match not your demand,

Dire, beyond shot of speech, shall be the bane

Your death's pollution leaves unto this land.

Yet if against your kin, Aegyptus' race,

Before our gates I front the doom of war,

Will not the city's loss be sore? Shall men

For women's sake incarnadine the ground?

But yet the wrath of Zeus, the suppliants' lord

I needs must fear: most awful unto man

The terror of his anger. Thou, old man,

The father of these maidens, gather up

Within your arms these wands of suppliance,

And lay them at the altars manifold

Of all our country's gods, that all the town

Know, by this sign, that ye come here to sue.

Nor, in thy haste, do thou say aught of me.

Swift is this folk to censure those who rule;

But, if they see these signs of suppliance,

It well may chance that each will pity you,  
 And loathe the young men's violent pursuit;  
 And thus a fairer favour you may find:  
 For, to the helpless, each man's heart is kind.

DANAUS.

To us, beyond gifts manifold it is  
 To find a champion thus compassionate;  
 Yet send with me attendants, of thy folk,  
 Rightly to guide me, that I duly find  
 Each altar of your city's gods that stands  
 Before the fane, each dedicated shrine;  
 And that in safety through the city's ways  
 I may pass onwards: all unlike to yours  
 The outward semblance that I wear—the race  
 that Nilus rears is all dissimilar  
 That of Inachus. Keep watch and ward  
 Lest heedlessness bring death: full oft, I ween,  
 Friend hath slain friend, not knowing whom he slew.

THE KING OF ARGOS.

Go at his side, attendants,—he saith well.  
 On to the city's consecrated shrines!  
 Nor be of many words to those ye meet,  
 The while this suppliant voyager ye lead.

[*Exit DANAUS with attendants.*]

CHORUS.

Let him go forward, thy command obeying.  
 But me how biddest, how assurest thou?

THE KING OF ARGOS.

Leave there the new-plucked boughs, thy sorrow's sign.

CHORUS.

Thus beckoned forth, at thy behest I leave them.

THE KING OF ARGOS.

Now to this level precinct turn thyself.

CHORUS.

Unconsecrate it is, and cannot shield me.

THE KING OF ARGOS.

We will not yield thee to those falcons' greed.

CHORUS.

What help? more fierce they are than serpents fell.

THE KING OF ARGOS.

We spake thee fair—speak thou them fair in turn.

CHORUS.

What marvel that we loathe them, scared in soul?

THE KING OF ARGOS.

Awe towards a king should other fears transcend.

CHORUS.

Thus speak, thus act, and reassure my mind.

THE KING OF ARGOS.

Not long thy sire shall leave thee desolate.

But I will call the country's indwellers,

And with soft words th' assembly will persuade,

And warn your sire what pleadings will avail.

Therefore abide ye, and with prayer entreat

The country's gods to compass your desire;

The while I go, this matter to provide,

Persuasion and fair fortune at my side.

[*Exit the KING OF ARGOS.*]

CHORUS.

O King of Kings, among the blest

Thou highest and thou happiest,

Listen and grant our prayer,

And, deeply loathing, thrust  
 Away from us the young men's lust,  
 And deeply drown  
 In azure waters, down and ever down,  
 Benches and rowers dark,  
 The fatal and perfidious bark!  
 Unto the maidens turn thy gracious care;  
 Think yet again upon the tale of fame,  
 How from the maiden loved of thee there sprung  
 Mine ancient line, long since in many a legend sung!  
 Remember, O remember, thou whose hand  
 Did lo by a touch to human shape reclaim.  
 For from this Argos erst our mother came  
 Driven hence to Egypt's land,  
 Yet sprung of Zeus we were, and hence our birth we claim.  
 And now have I roamed back  
 Unto the ancient track  
 Where lo roamed and pastured among flowers,  
 Watched o'er by Argus' eyes,  
 Through the lush grasses and the meadow bowers.  
 Thence, by the gadfly maddened, forth she flies  
 Unto far lands and alien peoples driven  
 And, following fate, through paths of foam and surge,  
 Sees, as she goes, the cleaving strait divide  
 Greece, from the Eastland riven.  
 And swift through Asian borders doth she urge  
 Her course, o'er Phrygian mountains' sheep-clipt side;  
 Thence, where the Mysian realm of Teuthras lies  
 Towards Lydian lowlands hies,  
 And o'er Cilician and Pamphylian hills  
 And ever-flowing rills,  
 And thence to Aphrodite's fertile shore,<sup>5</sup>  
 The land of garnered wheat and wealthy store  
 And thence, deep-stung by wild unrest,

<sup>5</sup> Cyprus.

By the winged fly that goaded her and drave,  
 Unto the fertile land, the god-possesst,  
 (Where, fed from far-off snows,  
 Life-giving Nilus flows,  
 Urged on by Typho's strength, a fertilizing wave)  
 She roves, in harassed and dishonoured flight  
 Scathed by the blasting pangs of Hera's dread despite.  
 And they within the land  
 With terror shook and wanned,  
 So strange the sight they saw, and were afraid—  
 A wild twy-natured thing, half heifer and half maid.  
 Whose hand was laid at last on Io, thus forlorn,  
 With many roamings worn?  
 Who bade the harassed maiden's peace return?  
 Zeus, lord of time eterne.  
 Yea, by his breath divine, by his unscathing strength,  
 She lays aside her bane,  
 And softened back to womanhood at length  
 Sheds human tears again.  
 Then, quickened with Zeus' veritable seed,  
 A progeny she bare,  
 A stainless babe, a child of heavenly breed.  
 Of life and fortune fair.  
*His is the life of life—so all men say,—*  
*His is the seed of Zeus.*  
*Who else had power stern Hera's craft to stay,*  
*Her vengeful curse to loose?*

Yea, all from Zeus befell!  
 And rightly wouldst thou tell  
 That we from Epaphus, his child, were born:  
 Justly his deed was done;  
 Unto what other one,  
 Of all the gods, should I for justice turn?  
 From him our race did spring;













With fight unsated; thou too know'st it well.

In their wrath they o'ertake us; the prow is deep-dark  
In the which they have sped,  
And dark is the bench and the crew of the bark!

DANAUS.

Yea but a crew as stout they here shall find,  
And arms well steeled beneath a noon-day sun.

CHORUS.

Ah yet, O father, leave us not forlorn!  
Alone, a maid is nought, a strengthless arm.  
With guile they pursue me, with counsel malign,  
And unholy their soul;  
And as ravens they seize me, unheeding the shrine!

DANAUS.

Fair will befall us, children, in this chance,  
If thus in wrath they wrong the gods and you.

CHORUS.

Alas, nor tridents nor the sanctity  
Of shrines will drive them, O my sire, from us!

Unholy and daring and cursed is their ire,  
Nor own they control  
Of the gods, but like jackals they glut their desire!

DANAUS.

Ay, but *Come wolf, flee jackal*, saith the saw;  
Nor can the flax-plant overbear the corn.

CHORUS.

Lustful, accursèd, monstrous is their will  
As of beasts ravening—'ware we of their power!

DANAUS.

Look you, not swiftly puts a fleet to sea,

Nor swiftly to its moorings; long it is  
 Or e'er the saving cables to the shore  
 Are borne, and long or e'er the steersmen cry,  
*The good ship swings at anchor—all is well.*  
 Longest of all, the task to come aland  
 Where haven there is none, when sunset fades  
 In night. *To pilot wise, the adage saith,*  
*Night is a day of wakefulness and pain.*  
 Therefore no force of weaponed men, as yet  
 Scatheless can come ashore, before the bank  
 Lie at her anchorage securely moored.  
 Bethink thee therefore, nor in panic leave  
 The shrine of gods whose succour thou hast won  
 I go for aid—men shall not blame me long,  
 Old, but with youth at heart and on my tongue.

[Exit DANAUS.]

CHORUS.

O land of hill and dale, O holy land,  
 What shall befall us? whither shall we flee,  
 From Apian land to some dark lair of earth?

O would that in vapour of smoke I might rise to the clouds of the sky,  
 That as dust which flits up without wings I might pass and vanish and die!  
 I dare not, I dare not abide: my heart yearns, eager to fly;  
 And dark is the cast of my thought; I shudder and tremble for fear.  
 My father looked forth and beheld: I die of the sight that draws near.  
 And for me be the strangling cord, the halter made ready by Fate,  
 Before to my body draws nigh the man of my horror and hate.  
 Nay, ere I will own him as lord, as handmaid to Hades I go!  
 And oh, that aloft in the sky, where the dark clouds are frozen to snow,  
 A refuge for me might be found, or a mountain-top smooth and too high  
 For the foot of the goat, where the vulture sits lonely, and none may descry  
 The pinnacle veiled in the cloud, the highest and sheerest of all,  
 Ere to wedlock that rendeth my heart, and love that is loveless, I fall!

Yea, a prey to the dogs and the birds of the mount will I give me to be,—  
 From wailing and curse and pollution it is death, only death, sets me free:  
 Let death come upon me before to the ravisher's bed I am thrust;  
 What champion, what saviour but death can I find, or what refuge from lust?  
 I will utter my shriek of entreaty, a prayer that shrills up to the sky,  
 That calleth the gods to compassion, a tuneful, a pitiful cry,  
 That is loud to invoke the releaser. O father, look down on the fight;  
 Look down in thy wrath on the wronger, with eyes that are eager for right.  
 Zeus, thou that art lord of the world, whose kingdom is strong over all,  
 Have mercy on us! At thine altar for refuge and safety we call.  
 For the race of Aegyptus is fierce, with greed and with malice afire;  
 They cry as the questing hounds, they sweep with the speed of desire.  
 But thine is the balance of fate, thou rulest the wavering scale,  
 And without thee no mortal emprise shall have strength to achieve or  
 prevail.

Alack, alack! the ravisher—  
 He leaps from boat to beach, he draweth near!  
 Away, thou plunderer accurst!  
 Death seize thee first,  
 Or e'er thou touch me—off! God, hear our cry,  
 Our maiden agony!  
 Ah, ah, the touch, the prelude of my shame.  
 Alas, my maiden fame!  
 O sister, sister, to the altar cling,  
 For he that seizeth me,  
 Grim is his wrath and stern, by land as on the sea.  
 Guard us, O king!

*Enter the HERALD OF AEGYPTUS.*

HERALD OF AEGYPTUS.

Hence to my barge—step swiftly, tarry not.

CHORUS.

Alack, he rends—he rends my hair! O wound on wound!  
 Help! my lopped head will fall, my blood gush o'er the ground!

HERALD OF AEGYPTUS.

Aboard, ye cursèd—with a new curse, go!

CHORUS.

Would God that on the wand'ring brine  
 Thou and this braggart tongue of thine  
 Had sunk beneath the main—  
 Thy mast and planks, made fast in vain!  
 Thee would I drive aboard once more,  
 A slayer and a dastard, from the shore!

HERALD OF AEGYPTUS.

Be still, thou vain demented soul;  
 My force thy craving shall control.  
 Away, aboard! What, clingest to the shrine?  
 Away! this city's gods I hold not for divine.

CHORUS.

Aid me, ye gods, that never, never  
 I may again behold  
 The mighty, the life-giving river,  
 Nilus, the quickener of field and fold!  
 Alack, O sire, unto the shrine I cling—  
 Shrine of this land from which mine ancient line did spring!

HERALD OF AEGYPTUS.

Shrines, shrines, forsooth!—the ship, the ship be shrine!  
 Aboard, perforce and will-ye nill-ye, go!  
 Or e'er from hands of mine  
 Ye suffer torments worse and blow on blow.

CHORUS.

Alack, God grant those hands may strive in vain  
 With the salt-streaming wave,  
 When 'gainst the wide-blown blasts thy bark shall strain  
 To round Sarpedon's cape, the sandbank's treach'rous grave.

HERALD OF AEGYPTUS.

Shrill ye and shriek unto what gods ye may,  
Ye shall not leap from out Aegyptus' bark,  
How bitterly soe'er ye wail your woe.

CHORUS.

Alack, alack my wrong!  
Stern is thy voice, thy vaunting loud and strong.  
Thy sire, the mighty Nilus, drive thee hence  
Turning to death and doom thy greedy violence!

HERALD OF AEGYPTUS.

Swift to the vessel of the double prow,  
Go quickly! let none linger, else this hand  
Ruthless will hale you by your tresses hence.

CHORUS.

Alack, O father! from the shrine  
Not aid but agony is mine.  
As a spider he creeps and he clutches his prey,  
And he hales me away.  
A spectre of darkness, of darkness. Alas and alas! well-a-day!  
O Earth, O my mother! O Zeus, thou king of the earth, and her child!  
Turn back, we pray thee, from us his clamour and threatenings wild!

HERALD OF AEGYPTUS.

Peace! I fear not this country's deities.  
They fostered not my childhood nor mine age.

CHORUS.

Like a snake that is human he comes, he shudders and crawls to my side;  
As an adder that biteth the foot, his clutch on my flesh doth abide.  
O Earth, O my mother! O Zeus, thou king of the earth, and her child!  
Turn back, we pray thee, from us his clamour and threatenings wild!

HERALD OF AEGYPTUS.

Swift each unto the ship; repine no more,  
Or my hand shall not spare to rend your robe.



CHORUS.

O chiefs, O leaders, aid me, or I yield!

HERALD OF AEGYPTUS.

Peace! if ye have not ears to hear my words,  
Lo, by these tresses must I hale you hence.

CHORUS.

Undone we are, O king! all hope is gone.

HERALD OF AEGYPTUS.

Ay, kings enow ye shall behold anon,  
Aegyptus' sons—Ye shall not want for kings.

*Enter the* KING OF ARGOS.

THE KING OF ARGOS.

Sirrah, what dost thou? in what arrogance  
Darest thou thus insult Pelasgia's realm?  
Deemest thou this a woman-hearted town?  
Thou art too full of thy barbarian scorn  
For us of Grecian blood, and, erring thus,  
Thou dost bewray thyself a fool in all!

HERALD OF AEGYPTUS.

Say thou wherein my deeds transgress my right.

THE KING OF ARGOS.

First, that thou play'st a stranger's part amiss.

HERALD OF AEGYPTUS.

Wherein? I do but search and claim mine own.

THE KING OF ARGOS.

To whom of our guest-champions hast appealed?

HERALD OF AEGYPTUS.

To Hermes, herald's champion, lord of search.

THE KING OF ARGOS.

Yea, to a god—yet dost thou wrong the gods!

HERALD OF AEGYPTUS.

The gods that rule by Nilus I revere.

THE KING OF ARGOS.

Hear I aright? our Argive gods are nought?

HERALD OF AEGYPTUS.

The prey is mine, unless force rend it from me.

THE KING OF ARGOS.

At thine own peril touch them—'ware, and soon!

HERALD OF AEGYPTUS.

I hear thy speech, no hospitable word.

THE KING OF ARGOS.

I am no host for sacrilegious hands.

HERALD OF AEGYPTUS.

I will go tell this to Aegyptus' sons.

THE KING OF ARGOS.

Tell it! my pride will ponder not thy word.

HERALD OF AEGYPTUS.

Yet, that I have my message clear to say  
 (For it behooves that heralds' words be clear,  
 Be they or ill or good), how art thou named?  
 By whom despoiled of this sister-band  
 Of maidens pass I homeward?—speak and say!  
 For lo, henceforth in Ares' court we stand,  
 Who judges not by witness but by war:  
 No pledge of silver now can bring the cause  
 To issue: ere this thing end, there must be  
 Corpse piled on corpse and many lives gasped forth.

THE KING OF ARGOS.

What skills it that I tell my name to thee?  
 Thou and thy mates shall learn it ere the end.  
 Know that if words unstained by violence

Can change these maidens' choice, then mayest thou,  
 With full consent of theirs, conduct them hence.  
 But thus the city with one voice ordained—

*No force shall bear away the maiden band.*

Firmly this word upon the temple wall  
 Is by a rivet clenched, and shall abide:  
 Not upon wax inscribed and delible,  
 Nor upon parchment sealed and stored away.—  
 Lo, thou hast heard our free mouths speak their will:  
 Out from our presence—tarry not, but go!

HERALD OF AEGYPTUS.

Methinks we stand on some new edge of war:  
 Be strength and triumph on the young men's side!

THE KING OF ARGOS.

Nay but here also shall ye find young men,  
 Unsodden with the juices oozed from grain.<sup>6</sup>

[Exit HERALD OF AEGYPTUS.]

But ye, O maids, with your attendants true,  
 Pass hence with trust into the fenced town,  
 Ringed with a wide confine of guarding towers.  
 Therein are many dwellings for such guests  
 As the State honours; there myself am housed  
 Within a palace neither scant nor strait.  
 There dwell ye, if ye will to lodge at ease  
 In halls well-thronged: yet, if your soul prefer,  
 Tarry secluded in a separate home.  
 Choose ye and cull, from these our proffered gifts,  
 Whiche'er is best and sweetest to your will:

<sup>6</sup> For this curious taunt, strongly illustrative of what Browning calls "nationality in drinks," see Herodotus, ii. 77. A similar feeling may perhaps be traced in Tacitus' description of the national beverage of the Germans: "Potui humor ex hordeo aut frumento, in quandam similitudinem vini corruptus" (*Germania*, chap. xxiii).

And I and all these citizens whose vote  
 Stands thus decreed, will your protectors be.  
 Look not to find elsewhere more loyal guard.

CHORUS.

O godlike chief, God grant my prayer:  
*Fair blessings on thy proffers fair,*  
*Lord of Pelasgia's race!*  
 Yet, of thy grace, unto our side  
 Send thou the man of courage tried,  
 Of counsel deep and prudent thought,—  
 Be Danaus to his children brought;  
 For his it is to guide us well  
 And warn where it behoves to dwell—  
 What place shall guard and shelter us  
 From malice and tongues slanderous:  
 Swift always are the lips of blame  
 A stranger-maiden to defame—  
 But Fortune give us grace!

THE KING OF ARGOS.

A stainless fame, a welcome kind  
 From all this people shall ye find:  
 Dwell therefore, damsels, loved of us,  
 Within our walls, as Danaus  
 Allots to each, in order due,  
 Her dower of attendants true.

*Re-enter DANAUS.*

DANAUS

High thanks, my children, unto Argos con,  
 And to this folk, as to Olympian gods,  
 Give offerings meet of sacrifice and wine;  
 For saviours are they in good sooth to you.  
 From me they heard, and bitter was their wrath,  
 How those your kinsmen strove to work you wrong,

And how of us were thwarted: then to me  
 This company of spearmen did they grant,  
 That honoured I might walk, nor unaware  
 Die by some secret thrust and on this land  
 Bring down the curse of death, that dieth not.  
 Such boons they gave me: it behoves me pay  
 A deeper reverence from a soul sincere.  
 Ye, to the many words of wariness  
 Spoken by me your father, add this word,  
 That, tried by time, our unknown company  
 Be held for honest: over-swift are tongues  
 To slander strangers, over-light is speech  
 To bring pollution on a stranger's name.  
 Therefore I rede you, bring no shame on me  
 Now when man's eye beholds your maiden prime.  
 Lovely is beauty's ripening harvest-field,  
 But ill to guard; and men and beasts, I wot,  
 And birds and creeping things make prey of it.  
 And when the fruit is ripe for love, the voice  
 Of Aphrodite bruiteth it abroad,  
 The while she guards the yet unripened growth.  
 On the fair richness of a maiden's bloom  
 Each passer looks, o'ercome with strong desire,  
 With eyes that waft the wistful dart of love.  
 Then be not such our hap, whose livelong toil  
 Did make our pinnace plough the mighty main:  
 Nor bring we shame upon ourselves, and joy  
 Unto my foes. Behold, a twofold home—  
 One of the king's and one the people's gift—  
 Unbought, 'tis yours to hold,—a gracious boon.  
 Go—but remember ye your sire's behest,  
 And hold your life less dear than chastity.

CHORUS.

The gods above grant that all else be well.  
 But fear not thou, O sire, lest aught befall

Of ill unto our ripened maidenhood.  
 So long as Heaven have no new ill devised,  
 From its chaste path my spirit shall not swerve.

SEMI-CHORUS.

Pass and adore ye the Blessed, the gods of the city who dwell  
 Around Erasinus, the gush of the swift immemorial tide.

SEMI-CHORUS.

Chant ye, O maidens; aloud let the praise of Pelasgia swell;  
 Hymn we no longer the shores where Nilus to ocean doth glide.

SEMI-CHORUS.

Sing we the bounteous streams that ripple and gush through the city;  
 Quickening flow they and fertile, the soft new life of the plain.

SEMI-CHORUS.

Artemis, maiden most pure, look on us with grace and with pity—  
 Save us from forced embraces: such love hath no crown but a pain.

SEMI-CHORUS.

Yet not in scorn we chant, but in honour of Aphrodite;  
 She truly and Hera alone have power with Zeus and control.  
 Holy the deeds of her rite, her craft is secret and mighty,  
 And high is her honour on earth, and subtle her sway of the soul.

SEMI-CHORUS.

Yea, and her child is Desire: in the train of his mother he goeth—  
 Yea and Persuasion soft-lipped, whom none can deny or repel:  
 Cometh Harmonia too, on whom Aphrodite bestoweth  
 The whispering parley, the paths of the rapture that lovers love well.

SEMI-CHORUS.

Ah, but I tremble and quake lest again they should sail to reclaim!  
 Alas for the sorrow to come, the blood and the carnage of war.  
 Ah, by whose will was it done that o'er the wide ocean they came,  
 Guided by favouring winds, and wafted by sail and by oar?

SEMI-CHORUS.

Peace! for what Fate hath ordained will surely not tarry but come;  
Wide is the counsel of Zeus, by no man escaped or withstood:  
Only I pray that whate'er, in the end, of this wedlock he doom,  
We as many a maiden of old, may win from the ill to the good.<sup>7</sup>

SEMI-CHORUS.

Great Zeus, this wedlock turn from me—  
Me from the kinsman bridegroom guard!

SEMI-CHORUS.

Come what come may, 'tis Fate's decree.

SEMI-CHORUS.

Soft is thy word—the doom is hard.

SEMI-CHORUS.

Thou know'st not what the Fates provide.

SEMI-CHORUS.

How should I scan Zeus' mighty will,  
The depth of counsel undescried?

SEMI-CHORUS.

Pray thou no word of omen ill.

SEMI-CHORUS.

What timely warning wouldst thou teach?

SEMI-CHORUS.

Beware, nor slight the gods in speech.

SEMI-CHORUS.

Zeus, hold from my body the wedlock detested, the bridegroom abhorred!  
It was thou, it was thou didst release  
Mine ancestress Io from sorrow: thine healing it was that restored,  
The touch of thine hand gave her peace.

<sup>7</sup> The ambiguity of these two lines is reproduced from the original. The Semi-Chorus appear to pray, in one aspiration, that the threatened wedlock may never take place, and, *if it does take place*, may be for weal, not woe.

SEMI-CHORUS.

Be thy will for the cause of the maidens! of two ills, the lesser I pray—  
The exile that leaveth me pure.

May thy justice have heed to my cause, my prayers to thy mercy find way!  
For the hands of thy saving are sure.

[*Exeunt omnes.*]

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