**HELEN OF SPARTA**

**By**

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**CHARACTERS IN THE PLAY**

4 FEMALE / 3 MALE

**Helen of Sparta**  The world’s most beautiful woman. **(F-20s)**

**Paris**  A Trojan prince. Madly in love with Helen. **(M-20s)**

**Oenone** Wife of Paris. Jilted and jaded. **(F-20s)**

**Cassandra / Chorus** A bearer of tidings, some true. **(F-20s)**

**Menelaus**  King of Sparta, Helen’s husband. **(M-30s)**

**Protesilaus** King of the Phylaceans. **(M-45-60)**

**Laodamia** Wife of Protesilaus. **(F-45-60)**

**TIME & PLACE**

This play is intended to be an exploration of myth and fantasy….

**A NOTE ON SUBTITLES**

The subtitles/scene headings are intended to be either projected or read aloud. Successful productions will experiment with these headings and may choose to present them selectively or even to alter them as necessary.

**A NOTE ON THE VOICE OF THE GODS**

The gods are called upon to speak on several occasions during the course of this play. Please keep in mind that these are benevolent, generous gods, who volunteer their time because they are sincerely trying to be helpful.

**ACT ONE**

**1. Troy. A hilltop. Helen and Paris. Then Cassandra.**

 *(Paris enters, carrying Helen over his shoulder. Helen is*

*bound hand-and-foot and gagged. Paris sets her down,*

*leaning her against a tree or wall, as necessary.)*

**PARIS**

Behold! Troy.

 *(Paris waits for Helen’s reaction. She says nothing.)*

Pretty impressive, huh?

**HELEN**

 *(Through her gag)*

Mmmph!

**PARIS**

I guess I can take that off you now…but please don’t start shouting again….

**HELEN**

Mmmph! Mmmmmmph—

 *(Paris removes her gag.)*

—claw your goddam eyes out!

**PARIS**

 *(Ignoring Helen’s outburst, focused on the view)*

Well? What do you think?

 **HELEN**Honestly, it looks so…suburban.

 **PARIS**

Pastoral.

**HELEN**

Since when are strip malls pastoral?

 **PARIS**

Trust me on this one, Helen. The schools are excellent. It’s safe to walk a dog late at night. When we retire, we’ll be able to raise tomatoes in our own garden….Did I mention that the schools are excellent?

  **HELEN**

I don’t like dogs. Or tomatoes.

 **PARIS**

Not yet.

**HELEN**

I’m hungry.

**PARIS**

I’ll be back in a moment. Don’t go anywhere.

 *(Calling off stage.)*

Cassandra…! Cassandra…!

 *(Paris walks to the corner of the stage in search of his*

*sister. Cassandra enters, pushing a wheelbarrow full of*

*pears.)*

 **PARIS**

You’ve got the pears!

 **CASSANDRA**

These are just the Bartletts and the Boscs. I left the Forelles and the Red Anjous at the bottom of the hill….But I’m telling you, this is not going to work.

 **PARIS**

That’s *your* opinion.

 **CASSANDRA**

I know what I’m taking about, Paris. Only *one* pear. And tempt her with it.

 **PARIS**What kind of woman is impressed by only *one* pear?

 **CASSANDRA**

You’re not trying to impress her—you’re trying to make her fall in love with you. There’s a difference.

 **PARIS**

I bet she hasn’t seen this many pears in her entire life.

 *(Paris takes several pears from the barrow and juggles.)*

 **CASSANDRA**

If impressive were the same as romantic, men would weep to death over female shotputters…. The reality is that good courting is like good fishing. First you get the hook in and then you run in the opposite direction.

 **PARIS**That doesn’t sound very romantic.

 **CASSANDRA**

The romance comes *later*. In taking the hook out together. In tending to the wound…. But do you know what *you’re* doing with all these pears? You’re running *at* her—and you don’t have a hook in yet.

 **PARIS**
I was trained as a shepherd, not a fisherman.

 **CASSANDRA**

I hate to break this to you, big brother, but what works on sheep doesn’t always work on women….

 **PARIS**

We’ll see about that….Do you want to meet your future sister-in-law?

 **CASSANDRA**

You’re already married. And so is she.

 **PARIS**

Keep your voice down.

 *(Paris leads Cassandra to Helen.)*

Helen, darling. This is my baby sister, Cassandra.

 **CASSANDRA**

It’s so good to finally meet you….after everything Paris wrote about you in his letters.

 *(Cassandra extends her hand to shake Helen’s, but Helen is*

*bound and cannot reciprocate.)*

 **HELEN**Did he mention the part about how he kidnapped me in the middle of the night—how he dragged me kicking and screaming out of my husband’s bed?

 **PARIS**

I told you I don’t like that word. *Kidnapped.* Can’t you humor me and say *rescued*?

 **HELEN**

Nobody asked you to *rescue* me….

**PARIS**

 *(Paris opens his copy of “Romance for Dummies.”)*

It says right here that true love means doing things for your beloved without ever having to be asked….

**HELEN**

But I’m not your beloved….I hardly know you…..

**PARIS**

My grandparents went on three dates before they got married and they’ve been together for fifty years. My great-grandparents had an arranged marriage in the Old Country and they were together for sixty years.

**HELEN**

This is ludicrous. I have a husband back in Sparta. My husband is the *king* of Sparta.

**PARIS**

Please, darling. None of that. The key to a successful relationship is keeping focused on the future—never letting yourself dwell on the past….

**HELEN**

Goddammit! Once and for all, we are *not* having a relationship.

**PARIS**

Calm down, darling. Do you know what I’ve brought you?

 **HELEN**

 *(Helen looks at the wheelbarrow full of pears)*

Pears?

 **PARIS**

Aren’t you impressed? These are the finest pears in the entire kingdom.

 **HELEN**

What am I going to do with a wheelbarrow full of pears?

 **PARIS**

Eat them.

 **HELEN**
I don’t eat foods whose names begin with the letter P.

 **PARIS**You don’t?

 **HELEN**I’ve *never* eaten foods that begin with P. Not since I was a little girl. No pears. No potatoes. No pasta.

 **CASSANDRA**

I told you so.

 **PARIS**

You did not. You said give her *one* pear. Even *one* pear begins with a P.

 **CASSANDRA**

I said *tempt* her with one pear. I didn’t say to give it to her….Now do you want me to carry up the rest of that fruit, big brother? I have ten more barrows.

 **PARIS**

What I want to do is throw myself from the battlements in despair.

 **CASSANDRA**

Then I might as well leave the pears for you at the bottom of the hill….

 **PARIS**

 *(To Cassandra, exasperated.)*

Keep the pears. She’ll come around.

 **CASSANDRA**

I’ll make preserves….I wonder what Professor Schliemann and his archeologists are going to think someday when they unearth five thousand jars of pear jam….

 **PARIS**

What are you blathering about?

 **CASSANDRA**

Nothing. I’m just keeping focused on the future.

 *(Cassandra exits with the wheelbarrow.)*

 **HELEN**

Why do men always try to impress me with pears? Pears are terribly impractical. They spoil easily. They stimulate indigestion. In large doses, they cause cancer in rats….

 **PARIS**

*(To Helen)*

In large enough doses, *everything* causes cancer in rats….Do you know how hard it is to get pears out of season in the Ancient World? Can’t you show some appreciation?

 **HELEN**

I’m the most beautiful woman in the world. I don’t have to show any appreciation….

 **PARIS**

You *are* the most beautiful woman in the world.

 **HELEN**

And the hungriest.

 **PARIS**

Okay, no more foods beginning with the letter P. How about some fresh strawberries? Or a fillet of scrod? Steamed, not poached.

 **HELEN**

That’s very sweet of you….But I don’t eat foods that begin with the letter S either.

 **PARIS**You’ve got to be joking.

 **HELEN**

I don’t mean to make things difficult. Honestly. Other than a few first-letter preferences, I’m really not very picky….

 **PARIS**

So how do you feel about apples?

 **HELEN**

I have nothing against them….I just don’t eat them.

 **PARIS**

Bagels?

 **HELEN**

Unfortunately, no.

 **PARIS**

Carrots?

 **HELEN**

Sorry.

 **PARIS**

Duck à l’orange? Escargot? Fettuccini alfredo?

 **HELEN**

Never. Never. Never.

 **PARIS**This is getting us nowhere. For God’s sake: What *do* you eat?

 **HELEN**Foods that begin with the letter Z.

 **PARIS**Z?

 **HELEN**In Sparta, I dine every night on zebra cookies and Zamorano cheese and zwieback. Topped off with a glass of zinfandel.

 **PARIS**If I bring you zebra cookies and zinfandel, then will you fall in love with me?

 **HELEN**

Let me put it this way. If you bring me zebra cookies and zinfandel, I won’t go on a hunger strike.

**2. Sparta. The Waterfront. Menelaus and Cassandra as Port Security Officer.**

 *(Cassandra, wearing the uniform of a port security officer,*

*stands before the gangplank of a warship. Menelaus,*

*sporting travel clothes and a briefcase, waits opposite her.*

*After a substantial pause, Cassandra looks up from a*

*scroll of parchment.)*

 **CASSANDRA AS PORT SECURITY OFFICER**

I’m sorry, Your Majesty. Now is that Menelaus with an A or an E?

  **MENELAUS**

King Menelaus. M-E-N-E-L-A-U-S.

**CASSANDRA AS PORT SECURITY OFFICER**

Oh. My husband has a cousin Menalaus—M-E-N-*A*-L-A-U-S—who sells anvils in Syracuse. I thought you might be related….

  **MENELAUS**

Well, we’re not.

**CASSANDRA AS PORT SECURITY OFFICER**

It could be a corruption, you know. Sometimes the same family spells a name in multiple ways, particularly if the older generation was illiterate….

  **MENELAUS**

Nobody in my family is illiterate. Or sells anvils. Or lives in Syracuse. My father was a Greek king, and his father was a Greek king, and his father sat with the gods at Mount Olympus….You can trace our lineage all the way back to prehistoric times and even then none of us were illiterate….Say, how are you doing with that boarding pass?

**CASSANDRA AS PORT SECURITY OFFICER**

I’m afraid there’s a minor glitch, Your Majesty.

  **MENELAUS**

What sort of glitch?

**CASSANDRA AS PORT SECURITY OFFICER**

I can’t issue you a boarding pass. You’re on the do-not-sail list.

**MENELAUS**

The do-not-sail list?

**CASSANDRA AS PORT SECURITY OFFICER**

You can either be on the list *or* on the ship—but not both.

 **MENELAUS**

But I’m the king! Obviously, there’s been some kind of mistake.

**CASSANDRA AS PORT SECURITY OFFICER**

Most likely. It’s not a very accurate list. Poseidon himself was on the list for a while…. Nonetheless, a rule is a rule….

  **MENELAUS**

I don’t think you understand what’s at stake here. My wife has been kidnapped….I *order* you to let me board that ship…

**CASSANDRA AS PORT SECURITY OFFICER**

I can’t do that without proper authorization. Here at Pan-Hellenic Travel, security is our first priority….

  **MENELAUS**

So how am I supposed to get this proper authorization?

**CASSANDRA AS PORT SECURITY OFFICER**

That’s above my pay grade. You’ll have to take that up with the gods.

**3. The Flagship of the Phylacean Fleet. King Protesilaus and Queen Laodamia.**

 *(Protesilaus enters. Laodamia follows. They have been*

 *arguing.)*

 **PROTESILAUS**

I don’t see what you’re all worked up about. You’re the one who suggested taking a trip.

 **LAODAMIA**A trip, sure. But I meant the Riviera. Or sitting on the beach in Crete….Who ever heard of going on vacation to Troy?

 **PROTESILAUS**

Don’t say that so loud….As far as the world is concerned, this isn’t a holiday. This is a business trip. Troy may not be as balmy as Crete, but it *is* tax deductible.

 **LAODOMIA**

You and your tax deductions….What good are tax deductions when you’re about to get slaughtered by Trojans….?

 **PROTESILAUS**

*(Protesilaus sits down on a chaise longue and begins*

*reading the newspaper, possibly* The Wall Street Journal*.)*

Tax deductions are like vacations. Once you’ve enjoyed a good one, nobody can ever take it away from you….

 **LAODAMIA**

I don’t see how you can remain so calm. If I were that calm, it would make me uneasy…. I’d think something was wrong with my nervous system. I’d die of a stroke worrying about being that a calm.

 **PROTESILAUS**

What’s the worst thing that could possibly happen?

 **LAODAMIA**

The worst thing that could possible happen? Hold on a minute. I’ve composed a list.

 *(Laodamia removes the list from her pocket and reads; she*

 *slowly works herself into a frenzy.)*

We could have left the gas range on while we were gone, and the children could asphyxiate in their sleep, or we could have left a pack of matches on the kitchen table, and the children could set the house on fire, or they could set the babysitter on fire, or the baby sitter could be a carrier of typhoid, or yellow fever, or Lyme disease, or the children could resent us for leaving them alone with the babysitter, and they could grow up psychologically damaged—like the apples at the supermarket that have those ugly welts on one side, or we could encounter a band of marauding pirates who make us walk the plank, who make us walk the plank naked, who laugh at us while we walk the plank naked, or the Trojans could grind us into chopped meat and serve us in fast food restaurants, or they could tie us up and tickle the soles of our feet until we reveal the secret access codes to the nuclear-equipped intercontinental ballistic missile launchers, or they could send us back to junior high school….Oh, God! I could have to be an ugly little Greek girl in a junior high school full of Trojans. Popular Trojans who make fun of me because once in biology class I read aloud “orgasm” instead or “organism” by mistake….And after that, they’ll follow me around moaning and calling me “Orgasm Girl.” You can’t imagine what it’s like being called “Orgasm Girl” all through high school when you’ve never even had one!

 *(Pausing to compose herself; dignified.)*

I suppose *that’s* the worst thing that could happen.

 **PROTESILAUS**

See. That’s not really so bad, is it?

 **LAODAMIA**

I hate it when you downplay my anxiety.

**PROTESILAUS**

I’m not downplaying your anxiety. I’m trying to comfort you.

 *(Looking up from his newspaper)*

And Lyme disease isn’t carried by people. It’s carried by ticks….

 **LAODAMIA**

Anxiety is important. It’s an evolutionary advantage. Without anxiety, people would go around poking grizzly bears and tickling lions….Oh please, dearest. It’s still not too late to turn back.

 *(Suddenly seductive)*

 If we go to Crete, I’ll make it worth your while.

 **PROTESILAUS**

 *(Sitting up, turning serious)*

Look, honey. This trip is extremely important to me. If I tell you something, please promise me you won’t worry….

 **LAODAMIA**

If I did that, I’d worry about breaking my promise…..

**PROTESILAUS**

When we get to Troy, I’m going to be the first one off the ship.

 **LAODAMIA**

Have you lost your mind?

 **PROTESILAUS**

I’ve never felt so sane in my entire life.

 **LAODAMIA**

But you heard the oracle. The first Greek to step foot on the shores of Troy is doomed to die on the battlefield.

 **PROTESILAUS**

Don’t believe everything you hear from the oracle…..I’m quite determined.

**LAODAMIA**

What’s gotten into you?

 **PROTESILAUS**

You want to know the truth, honey? I have a list too. A list of worries. Just like yours.

 **LAODAMIA**You do?

 **PROTESILAUS**

I do.

*(Protesilaus removes the list from his pocket, clears his*

*throat as though preparing to deliver a long speech, and*

 *reads.)*

I’m afraid I’ll die and be forgotten.

 *(A long pause.)*

 **LAODAMIA**

That’s it?

 **PROTESILAUS**

The first warrior to land on the beach at Troy will be remembered forever. The name Protesilaus will rank alongside Odysseus and Agamemnon in the annals of history. In three thousand years, school children will recite my name with awe and wonder.

 **LAODAMIA**But you’ll be dead.

 **PROTESILAUS**

In three thousand years? Of course, I’ll be dead.

 **LAODAMIA**

You’ll be dead sooner. *I’ll be alive* and you’ll be dead.

 **PROTESILAUS**

I’ll be immortal.

 **LAODAMIA**

Please don’t do this. I’m begging you.

 **PROTESILAUS**

Everything is going to be fine, honey. In any case, I’m confident that the oracle doesn’t know what he’s talking about. He’s not a doctor, you know. You don’t need a license to become an oracle….

 **LAODAMIA**

Are you sure it’s going to be okay?

 **PROTESILAUS**

I’m positive.

 **LAODAMIA**Will you keep telling me it’s going to be okay? Over and over again? Ten thousand times?

 **PROTESILAUS**

Of course, it’s going to be okay. You know what? I bet those Trojans will surrender without a fight.

**4. Oenone and Helen.**

  *(Oenone enters the hilltop where Helen is still bound.*

*Oenone is sipping from a wine glass, or possibly a wine*

*bottle, and appears conspicuously tipsy. The two women*

*examine each other warily. After a pause, Oenone*

*speaks.)*

 **OENONE**

Let me guess. You’ve been kidnapped by bandits.

**HELEN**

Actually, I—

**OENONE**

No, don’t tell me….It wouldn’t be bandits, would it? They’d have taken your clothes…. I’ve got it. You’re to be a human sacrifice, and the high priest went to find firewood….

**HELEN**

If you’ll please just—

**OENONE**

That’s very noble of you, if you don’t mind my saying so. Stupid, but noble. Not many pretty young girls are willing to be burned on an altar these days….

**HELEN**

*Please.* You’ve got to help me.

**OENONE**

In my day, lots of girls volunteered to be sacrificed. It was either that—or marriage….

**HELEN**

What do you mean “in your day”? How old are you?

**OENONE**

Twenty-eight. The end of the line.

**HELEN**

Twenty-eight isn’t *that* old.

**OENONE**

It’s one hundred ninety-six in dog years.

**HELEN**

 *(Calculating)*

Seven dog years for each human year….times twenty-eight….carry the one….I suppose it *is* one hundred ninety-six in dog years.

**OENONE**

Now it seems old, doesn’t it?

**HELEN**

 *(Suddenly desperate)*

You’ve got to help me. I’m not being sacrificed—I’ve been kidnapped by a madman.

**OENONE**

I guessed bandits. That was close.

**HELEN**

Quick. He might come back at any moment. Could you please untie me?

**OENONE**

I could….but I won’t.

**HELEN**

You won’t?!

**OENONE**

You *say* you’ve been kidnapped by a madman. But that’s not *proof*. Maybe *you’re* the lunatic and you’ve been tied up for your own protection….Or you’re a slave being punished… Or you and your partner are into some kinky fetish—I wouldn’t want to spoil all the fun….

**HELEN**

It’s not like that. I’m Helen, Queen of Sparta.

**OENONE**

Yeah, sure. And I’m Athena, Goddess of Wisdom.

**HELEN**

 *(Sobbing)*

I’m begging you. Show some compassion….as a woman….

**OENONE**

I really wish that I could help you. But there are liability issues to think of….my legal duty to third parties….You might be tied up out here for a very good reason. In any case, I’m confident this will all straighten itself out on its own….one way or another….In the meantime, would you like a sip of wine?

 **HELEN**

What type is it?

 **OENONE**Chablis.

**HELEN**

I drink only Zinfandel.

 **OENONE**

Suit yourself.

 *(Oenone takes a swig and starts to leave.)*

 **HELEN**

Wait!

**OENONE**

I knew you’d reconsider. When you get right down to it, wine is wine….

**HELEN**

Can you at least tell someone that I’m out here? That the prince has gone mad and taken me captive?

**OENONE**

 *(Suddenly interested)*

The prince?

**HELEN**

Paris, son of Priam. He was in Sparta on court business, and we had this fling—it was nothing, really, just letting off some steam—and then he goes stark-raving mad and decides he can’t live without me.

**OENONE**

That’s *so* like him, the selfish bastard.

**HELEN**

You know him?

**OENONE**

Do I *know* him? I’m married to him.

**HELEN**

He’s *married*?!

**OENONE**

He pulled the same stunt with me, you know. Kidnapped me from the mountains….Has he tried the bit where he offers you the pears yet?

**HELEN**

I don’t eat pears. They cause cancer in rats.

**OENONE**

I ate all of them. All twelve barrows full….What a fool I was….

 *(Oenone grows misty-eyed.)*

**HELEN**

You okay?

**OENONE**

Oh—I’m fine. But I really loved that bastard. Enough to gorge myself sick on pears…. But that’s not the worst of it….Do you know what the worst part is?

**HELEN**

Worse than pear cancer?

**OENONE**

That the goddam bastard loved me too. Just like he loves you now….He really believes you’re the most beautiful woman on the face of the planet.

 **HELEN**

I *am* the most beautiful woman on the face of the planet.

 **OENONE**

I suppose it’s all in the eye of the beholder.

 **HELEN**

What is that supposed to mean?

**OENONE**

It means: Don’t be a fool like I was. Take advantage of your beauty….You know how they say “knowledge is power.” That’s nonsense. Rationalization. Made up by clever, ugly women who teach elementary school. If I ever taught elementary school, I’d tell the little girls the truth: Beauty is power.

 **HELEN**

Some good it has done me….I have this awful itch on my nose.

**OENONE**

How old are you, dear?

 **HELEN**

Twenty-six. I’ll be twenty-seven on my birthday.

 **OENONE**

You’re running out of time.

 **HELEN**Excuse me?

 **OENONE**A woman only has nine assets, dear. Years eighteen through twenty-seven…..We used to have eleven assets, but then they raised the minimum age of consent.

 **HELEN**

You’re terribly cynical.

 **OENONE**

Just pragmatic, my dear. But trust me on this one: Use your beauty while you still can.

 **HELEN**

I’d trade all of my beauty for a little bit of freedom….

 *(Helen tries to scratch her itch. She cannot reach.)*

Can you please scratch my nose?…Just above the left nostril….

**OENONE**

Don’t be a fool….You don’t want freedom.

 **HELEN**

I don’t?

**OENONE**

Of course, you don’t. When Paris brought me up here for the first time, he said he’d give me anything I wanted. Silks. Jewels. The rarest perfumes of Arabia….But all I asked for was his love. His undying devotion was to be my trove of gold…..And look where that’s left me! High and dry. Take it from the first wife, girl, you’ve got to get yourself an airtight pre-nup and hold it over his head like a dagger.

 **HELEN**

But I don’t want to marry your husband. I already have a husband. Why don’t you reclaim *your* husband, and I’ll go back to *my* husband, and we’ll put all this kidnapping business behind us? There are plenty of husbands to go around.

**OENONE**

And do you really think it will be any different with your own husband?….That’s the amazing thing about love. It makes people stupid….It gives them a false sense of immunity. Sure, everybody else’s husband may turn out to be a selfish bastard—but never your own…..Trust me, girl. The day you hit twenty-eight, that husband of yours will be cruising the Aegean for sea nymphs.

 **HELEN**

I don’t believe a word your saying.

 **OENONE**

You can believe the earth is round if you want to. Just don’t walk off the edge.

 **HELEN**

Menelaus and I are soul mates.

 **OENONE**

You’ll know if you’re soul-mates in sixty years, when your beard is longer than his and you don’t mind the way he rolls the toothpaste tube or that he leaves the seat up in the outhouse. That’s when you and Menelaus will be soul-mates. Right now, you’re just two strangers who enjoy screwing around under the covers.

 **HELEN**

If you’re going to say nasty things, I’m not going to listen to you.

 **OENONE**You know what I should have asked Paris for? Not jewels. Not silks…..*Troy.* The entire kingdom.

 **HELEN**

I can’t hear a word you’re saying.

 **OENONE**

Or I could have traded him for it, piece by piece. A piece of land for a piece of me…. That’s what you’ll do, honey: You’ll work out a sliding scale. Let’s say one acre per kiss...a blowjob for a small village…an old-fashioned roll in the hay will cost him a large village—

 **HELEN**

Whose side are you on, for God’s sake? I’m not a prostitute.

 **OENONE**

I’m just trying to help you, girl. Depending on how often you put out, you could own the entire kingdom, free and clear, by Christmas.

 **HELEN**

But I don’t *want* Troy.

 **OENONE**

Suit yourself. If you change your mind, just holler. I know a good lawyer. He’ll write you a pre-nup as tight as a chastity belt.

 *(Oenone starts to leave again.)*

 **HELEN**Wait! Please scratch my nose.

 **OENONE**

I’ll do one better than that. I’ll untie you.

 **HELEN**

You will?

 **OENONE**

Of course, I will. But it will cost you.

 **HELEN**Anything I have is yours. Name your price.

 **OENONE**

Half of Troy.

 *(A long pause. Helen is struggling with herself.)*

 **HELEN**

Do you really think Menelaus might dump me for a sea nymph?

 **OENONE**

I hate to break it to you, girl, but men are men. He’s probably cavorting with sea nymphs as we speak.

**5. Menelaus and the gods.**

 *(Menelaus enters; he is distraught. He address the gods*

 *when he speaks.)*

 **MENELAUS**

Gods! Can you hear me? It’s me, Menelaus….Menelaus with an E. The king of Sparta. Not the anvil-salesman from Syracuse….Are you there, gods? Look, I confess I haven’t always believed in you in the past….You must understand: It’s nothing personal. It’s only that I’m an Aristotelian at heart—empirical evidence is my mantra—and let’s just say the empirical evidence isn’t on your side….

 *(Suddenly breaking down.)*

But I swear, if you’ll help me this one time, I’ll believe in you forever and I’ll never ask you for anything again…..Oh Zeus! Apollo!

 *(A corkscrew falls from the sky. Menelaus retrieves it with*

 *wonder and suspicion.)*

What in the world is this? It looks like some kind of weapon….I suppose you put this part up against your victim’s skull and you twist this other part until you’ve bored a hole into him…..

 **VOICE OF THE GODS**

It’s a corkscrew.

 **MENELAUS**

Yes, of course. Why didn’t I see that?….Wait! What am I supposed to do with a corkscrew?

 *(The gods do not reply.)*

Oh, for Chrissake! Be reasonable….I like my mysterious omens just as much as the next fellow, but this is really not a good time…..

**6. Paris and Helen.**

 *(Helen is sitting on the hilltop, unbound, looking seductive.*

*Paris enters with a full wheelbarrow.)*

 **PARIS**

Someone untied you!

 **HELEN**

I had an itch on my nose.

 **PARIS**

But you didn’t run away. That means you *do* love me.
 **HELEN**It was a very bad itch.

 **PARIS**

Look what I brought you.

 **HELEN**

Oversized cucumbers?

 **PARIS**

 *(Obviously disappointed)*

Zucchini. All of the zucchini in Troy.

 **HELEN**

 *(Helen removes one of the zucchini from the wheelbarrow and*

 *examines it.)*

They look like cucumbers.

 **PARIS**

What do you say I fry us up some zucchini and you fall in love with me?

 **HELEN**

What kind of woman do you take me for? Do you really think you can buy my love with a wheelbarrow full of disguised cucumbers?

 **PARIS**

Zucchini! They’re a variety of squash.

**HELEN**

Besides, if I were going to fall in love with you, it would cost you a lot more than a wheelbarrow of unripe squash.

 **PARIS**

They *are* ripe.

 **HELEN**

Then why are they green?

 **PARIS**

They’re *supposed* to be green.

**HELEN**

Whatever. At least the pears were ripe.

 **PARIS**

Okay, you don’t want the zucchini. Fine. I can take a hint.

 *(Paris takes the wheelbarrow of zucchini and empties it*

*over the side of the hill. One zucchini falls at his feet. He*

*picks it up and throws it offstage with full force.)*

Most women would be grateful to have an admirer who brings them exotic vegetables.

 **HELEN**

But I’m not most women, now am I?

 **PARIS**

Nope. You’re the most beautiful woman in the world.

**HELEN**

Exactly. So if you want me to fall in love with you, it’s going to cost you.

 **PARIS**

Name your price. I’ll climb Mount Ida and return with the aegis of Zeus. Or fight Jason and his Argonauts for the Golden Fleece.

 **HELEN**

Don’t be so melodramatic.

 **PARIS**

Wow, you’re touchy.

 **HELEN**

There’s no need to fight anybody for anything. You already have what I want.

 **PARIS**

I do? You mean my Adonis-like looks and captivating charisma?

 **HELEN**

I mean Troy.

**PARIS**

Troy?!

 **HELEN**

Troy.

 **PARIS**

What do you mean: Troy?

 **HELEN**

I couldn’t be any clearer. You sign a pre-nuptial agreement giving me Troy—all of it—and I’ll fall in love with you.

 **PARIS**

But Troy isn’t mine. I’m not the king….

 **HELEN**You will be eventually.

 **PARIS**

But I *won’t* be king. *Ever*. I have two older brothers.

**HELEN**

Try not to think of them as brothers, Paris. Try to think of them as impediments.

 **PARIS**You don’t mean….?

 **HELEN**

What are a few brothers, more or less, to a man in love?

 **PARIS**

Please be reasonable, darling. I do love you, but a man can’t go killing off his brothers on a whim….

 **HELEN**

It’s not a whim. It’s a well thought-out proposition

 **PARIS**

Couldn’t I interest you in someone else’s kingdom? I could invade Rhodes….Or Thebes….Or Persia. You could be Helen of Persia.

 **HELEN**

Troy, Paris. I want Troy.

 **PARIS**

Thanks for being so flexible.

 **HELEN**

And another thing. It’s Helen *of Sparta*. I said I’d fall in love with you—I didn’t say anything about subverting my identity. If I ever hear you introducing me as Helen of Troy, so help me Zeus, I’ll go back to Menelaus and take my chances with the sea nymphs.

**7. Menelaus and the gods. Again.**

*(Menelaus enters, lugging a sack. He address the gods*

 *when he speaks.)*

**MENELAUS**

Like I said, I have nothing against a little divine mystery now and again, but this is getting out of hand….Sure, the corkscrew was funny. Ha ha. And the ukulele. But I’m not preparing to appear on *Let’s Make A Deal*.

 *(Menelaus empties the sack onto the ground. It contains*

*various random household objects, such as egg-beaters and*

*toaster ovens and wooden spoons, as well as a ukulele.)*

I don’t need a ukulele or a rolling pin! I need a boarding pass! Can you get that through your celestial skulls….? Or if you’re not going to give me a boarding pass, at least have the decency to let me know that I’m on my own. At this point, I’d settle for clarity.

 *(A barrow-full of zucchini rains down upon Menelaus.)*

Which part of clarity don’t you understand? Do these look like boarding passes? What am I supposed to do with two dozen cucumbers?

 **VOICE OF THE GODS**

Zucchini.

 **MENELAUS**They *look* like cucumbers.

 *(The gods do not respond.)*

This is because I’m Greek, isn’t it?

**8. Protesilaus Writes to Cassandra.**

 **PROTESILAUS**

A letter to a controversial prophet on the eve of the invasion of Troy.

 *(As though dictating a letter)*

Dear Cassandra….I want you to know up front that I’ve never had much patience for prophecy myself….the way I see it, prophets are like economists….if their predictions actually panned out, they’d be rich….but my wife is a devoted fan of yours…She reads the transcripts of your prophesies religiously….So I was hoping that you might be willing to reassure her—reassure us—that there’s no danger in attacking Troy.

 *(Cassandra enters, dressed as a psychiatrist.)*

 **CASSANDRA**

What exactly do you mean by “danger”?

 **PROTESILAUS**

You know. Danger. Hazard. Peril.

 **CASSANDRA**

You mean you want to know if you’re going to be killed in battle.

 **PROTESILAUS**

That’s one way of putting it.

 **CASSANDRA**

Because if you are going to be killed, you’re going to jettison all that heroism and immortality and sail back home….

**PROTESILAUS**

It’s not just about me, you understand….I have children back in Sparta.

 **CASSANDRA**

So what you’re basically saying is that you want to be remembered for your heroism, but you don’t actually want to take any risks….

 **PROTESILAUS**

I’d take *small* risks.

 **CASSANDRA**

But nothing life-threatening.

**PROTESILAUS**

Well, no….Short of that, I’ll do just about anything.

 **CASSANDRA**

Very well. You can reassure your wife that you have nothing to worry about.

**PROTESILAUS**

Even if I step off the ship first?

**CASSANDRA**

*Especially* if you step off the ship first. The first Greek warrior off his ship will be welcomed back to Greece with a year of banquets and pageants.

 **PROTESILAUS**

So let’s be clear about this: You’re *guaranteeing* me that I’m not going to be killed in battle.

 **CASSANDRA**

You’ll die peacefully in your sleep on the far side of one hundred twenty.

**PROTESILAUS**

Will you put that in writing?

**CASSANDRA**

Have your lawyers contact my prophets.

**PROTESILAUS**

Thank you! That’s wonderful news….I mean: My wife will be relieved.

 *(Coming to a sudden realization)*

But wait! She’ll never believe me.

**CASSANDRA**

Your wife?

**PROTESILAUS**

She’s a brilliant woman, you understand. Just a tad anxious.

 **CASSANDRA**

Would you like me to speak to her?

**PROTESILAUS**

You be willing to do that?

**CASSANDRA**

Not a problem.

**PROTESILAUS**

I can’t afford to pay you that much….I’m merely a minor king….more like a peasant with a small kingdom….

 **CASSANDRA**

I don’t want your money. I *enjoy* predicting the future.

**PROTESILAUS**

You do?

**CASSANDRA**

It makes me feel useful. Otherwise, I’d think too much about the present—about how nobody ever believes my predictions….A word to the wise: Never become a female prophet in a male-dominated age. You might as well shout into a well.

**PROTESILAUS**

I’m sure it’s nothing personal.

 **CASSANDRA**

Besides, I’m in a lose-lose situation. I keep telling anyone who’ll listen that an army of Greeks in a wooden horse is going to sack Troy. And needless to say, nobody believes a word I’m saying. But when my prediction does come true, I won’t have much time to say “I told you so” before I’m carried off as a prize of war.

 **PROTESILAUS**Maybe you’re wrong.

 **CASSANDRA**

I’m never wrong, unfortunately. Which is why I’ll be glad to talk to your wife. At least, *she* has absolutely nothing to worry about….

**9. Cassandra Reassures Laodamia.**

 *(Protesilaus exits. Laodamia enters. Cassandra approaches her.)*

 **CASSANDRA**

Trust me, Laodamia. Your husband is going to return home a hero. He’ll live one hundred twenty years, and school children three millennia from now will recite the name Protesilaus with awe and wonder.

 **LAODAMIA**I don’t believe you.

**CASSANDRA**

Why would I lie to you?

 **LAODAMIA**

The Hellenic oracles say the first Greek warrior off the ship is a dead man.

 **CASSANDRA**

The Hellenic oracles are men.

 **LAODAMIA**

So?

**CASSANDRA**

So they say what they think you want to hear. Whatever will get rid of you the fastest.

 **LAODAMIA**

People have been listening to the oracles for two thousand years.

 **CASSANDRA**

You’ve been brainwashed. Trust me.

 **LAODAMIA**

Well, I’d rather be brainwashed than a widow, thank you very much.

 **CASSANDRA**

I thought your husband said you read my prophesies religiously.

**LAODAMIA**

Did he tell you that? *He’s* the one who reads your prophesies.

 **CASSANDRA**

So there’s nothing I can say to convince you….

 **LAODAMIA**

You can speak until you turn blue in the face. I was born an oracle-fearing pagan and I’m going to die an oracle-fearing pagan.

 **CASSANDRA**

Suit yourself. Buy into the dominant paradigm. Drink the patriarchal Kool-Aid.

Swallow the poisonous morsels of the totalitarian hegemon. But you just wait three thousand years, and you’ll see….

 *(Cassandra exits.)*

 **LAODAMIA**

 *(Exasperated)*

A female prophet. Really!

**10. Protesilaus and Laodamia.**

 **PROTESILAUS**

Feeling better?

 **LAODAMIA**

No.

 **PROTESILAUS**

You will be when I’m a hero. Just think, Laodamia: You’ll be a hero’s wife.

 **LAODAMIA**

I wish we could die *simultaneously*.

**PROTESILAUS**

I read somewhere that the Babylonians remit a man’s taxes if he displays courage during combat….That’s not *why* I want to be the first warrior off the ship, of course. But it would certainly be a windfall…..

 **LAODAMIA**

Wouldn’t it be glorious to be struck by the same bolt of lightning and then to descend to Hades together on the same escalator?

**PROTESILAUS**

That would be rather a blow to the children, wouldn’t it?

 **LAODAMIA**

We’d have to take them with us. We could make a family vacation out of it.

**PROTESILAUS**

Shhh…..Don’t say that word!

 **LAODAMIA**

What word?

**PROTESILAUS**

 (*Mumbling*)

Vacation….

 **LAODAMIA**

What word?

**PROTESILAUS**

 (*Still mumbling*)

Vacation….

 **LAODAMIA**

I can’t understand you. All I said was that we could make a family vacation—

**PROTESILAUS**

*That* word! Please say *business trip*. Officially, we’d be going to Hades to look at investment properties for the afterlife…..

 **LAODAMIA**

This is another one of your tax schemes, isn’t it? I swear! Here I am talking about the death of your beloved children—the extinction of your entire line—and you’re hung up on getting audited.

**PROTESILAUS**

Death is inevitable. *Taxes* can be avoided.

 **LAODAMIA**

I don’t understand how you can be blasé about dying….

**PROTESILAUS**

How would you like me to be about it, dear? Every day, men and women in the prime of their lives are carried off by marauding wolves and giant squids and Anatolian mercenaries. Or they blind themselves in moments of sudden and impassioned derangement. Or they cross paths with the wrong god and are turned to stone.

*(A zucchini flies across the stage and hits Protesilaus in*

 *the head. He falls to the ground, then dusts himself off as*

 *though nothing remarkable has happened and continues.)*

Every day, innocent men and women are crippled by flying cucumbers—

 **VOICE OF THE GODS**

It’s a zucchini. It’s a goddam variety of squash.

 **PROTESILAUS**

Every day, innocent men and women are decapitated by flying vegetables. But there’s nothing to be done. Nothing! That’s just the way of the world. All you can do is pinch your pennies and hope your legacy outlives you.

 **LAODAMIA**

But there’s *so much* to be done. I’ve been making a list.

**PROTESILAUS**

A list?

 **LAODAMIA**

A list of things I have to do if you’re killed on the beach at Troy…..My goal is to make such a long list that completing it keeps me occupied for the rest of my earthly days, so I don’t have any time to miss you….Do you want to hear it?

 *(Laodamia removes a parchment from her robe.)*

**PROTESILAUS**

Maybe later, honey. Right now, I have to see about polishing my armor.

 **LAODAMIA**

But I need your help. I might have forgotten something!

**PROTESILAUS**

I have complete faith in you.

 *(Protesilaus kisses her on the forehead and exits.)*

 **LAODAMIA**

 *(Reading from the parchment)*

Task #1: Place quarters over your eyes. Task #2: Empty our your pockets and itemize the contents. Task #3: Weep inconsolably, if so inclined. Task #4: Contact the undertaker regarding disposition of your body. Task #5: Make certain to obtain a receipt for the quarters. Task #6: Continue to weep inconsolably, rending garments as appropriate….

 *(Looking up, calling after Protesilaus)*

Don’t you get killed on me! Don’t you dare!

 *(Shouting.)*

VACATION! VACATION! VACATION!

**11. Sparta. The Waterfront. Menelaus Deciphers His Omens.**

*(Cassandra is still wearing the uniform of a port security*

*officer and standing before the gangplank of a warship.*

*Menelaus appears as though he has been sleeping in his*

*travel clothes.)*

 **MENELAUS**A corkscrew has to be a good sign, doesn’t it?

**CASSANDRA AS PORT SECURITY OFFICER**

It *could* be a good sign. Then again, it could be a bad sign.

 **MENELAUS**

How so?

**CASSANDRA AS PORT SECURITY OFFICER**

Do you have a bottle of wine that you’re trying to open?

 **MENELAUS**

No.

**CASSANDRA AS PORT SECURITY OFFICER**

Then most likely it’s a bad sign.

 **MENELAUS**

I could easily *get* a bottle of wine.

**CASSANDRA AS PORT SECURITY OFFICER**

Or it could be neither a good sign nor a bad sign. It could be a mistake.

 **MENELAUS**

How’s that?

**CASSANDRA AS PORT SECURITY OFFICER**

Maybe the corkscrew has nothing to do with you at all. Maybe the gods were having a banquet, and somebody dropped it. Inadvertently. An accident.

 **MENELAUS**

And the ukulele? And the Cuisinart?

**CASSANDRA AS PORT SECURITY OFFICER**

Maybe you’re standing beneath a very clumsy god.

 **MENELAUS**

The great irony is that I didn’t even want to marry her.

**CASSANDRA AS PORT SECURITY OFFICER**

That’s really none of my business, Your Majesty.

**MENELAUS**

We were an arranged match, after all. My brother, Agamemnon, went off to the House of Tyndareus one morning with a coffer full of sapphires, and he returned the next afternoon with Helen draped over one shoulder.

**CASSANDRA AS PORT SECURITY OFFICER**

You were a very lucky man.

**MENELAUS**

I didn’t think so at the time. I would have much preferred one of those stout Spartan peasant girls….someone who could cook a good pancake….but it wasn’t to be. What I’m saying is: Helen is beautiful, but she’s not terribly useful. And she’s not very accommodating either. We’d been married less than an hour when she insisted upon dismissing Eloctates, the blind eunuch in charge of preserving the chastity of the female servants. Apparently, when he placed his hands upon Helen’s face to take a better look at her, he didn’t comment sufficiently on her beauty. So he had to go! You can’t imagine how trying that was! Blind eunuchs don’t grow on trees.

**CASSANDRA AS PORT SECURITY OFFICER**

And yet you’re so desperate to get her back?

**MENELAUS**

I suppose I’ve grown accustomed to her. I’m that kind of guy. I could fall in love with any woman if I spent enough time with her….The peasant girls have been cooking pancakes for me every morning since Helen left—gourmet pancakes, prepared with whole butter and blueberries—but they just make me more miserable. What I wouldn’t give for one of Helen’s charred, flavorless pancakes! If only I could sit in the banquet hall one more morning, gnawing on ash-flavored pancakes while my beloved slurped her ziti à la zingara, reminiscing about the search to replace poor Eloctates. It was truly a dilemma we faced: Should we castrate a blind man or blind a eunuch?

 *(Menelaus laughs.)*

Helen and I had so much fun debating that one. And once she started laughing about the blind eunuchs, there was no stopping her…..

 *(Menelaus notices that Cassandra is not smiling).*

I suppose you had to be there….

Anyway, we have shared values. A common outlook about the things that matter. We feel the same way about children—we don’t mind having them, but we don’t want to raise them. And about money—we both want to spend as much of it as possible. And we’re both equally religious, in an entirely opportunistic, self-serving way. Tell me: If that’s not love, what it?

**CASSANDRA AS PORT SECURITY OFFICER**

I couldn’t say.

**MENELAUS**

So you understand why I *must* board that ship.

**CASSANDRA AS PORT SECURITY OFFICER**

I’m sorry, Your Majesty. It’s out of my hands.

**MENELAUS**

What’s the exact name on your no-sailing list?

**CASSANDRA AS PORT SECURITY OFFICER**

King Menelaus. M-E-N-*E*-L-A-U-S.

**MENELAUS**

That’s not me. I’m Menalaus, M-E-N-*A*-L-A-U-S.

**CASSANDRA AS PORT SECURITY OFFICER**

Like the anvil salesman from Syracuse.

**MENELAUS**

Exactly. He’s my cousin.

**CASSANDRA AS PORT SECURITY OFFICER**

Nice try….

**MENELAUS**

I swear by Zeus it’s the truth.

**CASSANDRA AS PORT SECURITY OFFICER**

There is no anvil salesman from Syracuse. I made him up. It’s part of the Safety-Through-Small-Talk Campaign. I fabricate stories, hoping you’ll play along—and that’s how we know that you’re a terrorist.

 **MENELAUS**

But I’m *not* a terrorist. I’m the king.

**CASSANDRA AS PORT SECURITY OFFICER**

The two aren’t mutually exclusive.

**MENELAUS**

Have you no heart?

**CASSANDRA AS PORT SECURITY OFFICER**

Not while I’m in uniform.

**MENELAUS**

I’m warning you. You’re driving me toward desperate measures.

**CASSANDRA AS PORT SECURITY OFFICER**

Any luck with the gods?

**MENELAUS**

More than you’d think. It turns out that this isn’t any ordinary corkscrew….It has its own set of special properties….

 *(A long pause.)*

**CASSANDRA AS PORT SECURITY OFFICER**

May I ask what they are?

**MENELAUS**

Okay, I’ll show you—but it’s a secret. Strictly between us.

**CASSANDRA AS PORT SECURITY OFFICER**

I won’t tell a soul.

**MENELAUS**

Very well. Come close.

*(Menelaus rests the corkscrew on Cassandra’s skull and*

 *begins to turn the handle.)*

Now don’t move.

**CASSANDRA AS PORT SECURITY OFFICER**

That hurts….AHHHH!

*(Menelaus races past Cassandra. Cassandra staggers in*

 *circles with the corkscrew protruding from the center of her forehead.)*

Stop! You don’t have a boarding pass.

**MENELAUS**

I knew the corkscrew was a good sign!

**12. Paris and Oenone.**

 *(Oenone is seated on a picnic blanket with a bottle of wine*

 *and a row of wine glasses in front of her; she is drinking*

 *them one at a time. A pile of pears rests nearby.*

*Paris storms onto the stage.)*

 **PARIS**There you are!

**OENONE**

My darling husband. Home in time for a liquid supper.

 **PARIS**

Don’t play games with me, Oenone. I know you’re behind this.

**OENONE**

Behind what?

 **PARIS**

 Please be reasonable. What do you want from me? Whatever you want, take it. It’s yours. Just leave me in peace….

**OENONE**

I don’t want anything from you. Nothing at all….Can I offer you a glass of wine?

 **PARIS**

It’s hard to believe that I loved you once.

 **OENONE**

It is. Isn’t it?

 **PARIS**

What happened?

**OENONE**

I grew bitter and cynical. All women end up like this by twenty-eight….It’s what happens from spending time with men.

 **PARIS**

Look. I’m sorry. I still do care about you, Oenone. You know that, don’t you?

 **OENONE**

You do?

**PARIS**

And you’re a beautiful woman.

 *(As though sincerely struck by Oenone’s beauty.)*

 Honestly, there are days when I think I’ve made a terrible mistake….

 **OENONE**

There are?!

 *(Oenone approaches Paris as though she might kiss him.)*

 ***PARIS***

Of course, there are….You may be cynical and bitter, but you’re still attractive…

 **OENONE**

I am?

 *(They are about to kiss. Paris draws back).*

 **PARIS**

Although the lines around your eyes are deeper.

 **OENONE**

Excuse me?

 **PARIS**

I’m just saying that you didn’t used to have crow’s feet like that….Helen’s skin is as smooth as the hull of a schooner….

 **OENONE**

You bastard!

 **PARIS**

What’s wrong?

 **OENONE**

You’re what’s wrong. You and that zabaglione-slurping harlot of yours. But you just wait your turn, Paris, son of Priam….You’re not the only one who can brainwash young princesses….When I’m through with that girl, you won’t want her back.

**PARIS**

You keep away from my future wife!

 **OENONE**

Two dead brothers and a lost kingdom will be the least of your worries.

 **PARIS**

I’m the prince. You can’t talk to me like that!

 **OENONE**

I’ve had your prick in my mouth. The way I see it, that gives me a right to talk to you any way that I want….

 *(Oenone stands and takes a swing from the wine bottle.)*

Have some leftover pears!

 *(Oenone exits. Paris follows.)*

 **13. The Phylacean Fleet Lands at Troy.**

*(The flagship of the Phylacean fleet approaches the*

*Trojan shore. Protesilaus and Laodamia stand at the*

 *railing of the vessel. Helen waits below them at the*

 *shoreline, holding a zucchini.)*

 **PROTESILAUS**

Who’s that? Down there on the beach.

 **CASSANDRA AS YOUNG OFFICER**

That’s Helen. Queen of the Spartans.

**PROTESILAUS**

So what’s the delay? Why hasn’t anybody rescued her?

 **CASSANDRA AS YOUNG OFFICER**

Nobody wants to be the first warrior to step foot on the beach, Your Majesty.

**PROTESILAUS**

Because of the oracle’s prophesy?

 **CASSANDRA AS YOUNG OFFICER**

Precisely.

**PROTESILAUS**

But there isn’t a Trojan soldier in sight.

 **CASSANDRA AS YOUNG OFFICER**

A prophesy is a prophesy is a prophesy.

**PROTESILAUS**

Enough of this dithering. Give me my sword.

 **CASSANDRA AS YOUNG OFFICER**

*(Cassandra hands Protesilaus his sword)*

Would you like your helmet, sire?

 **PROTESILAUS**

My helmet be damned!

 **LAODAMIA**

Please wear the helmet, darling….And a warm sweater.

 **PROTESILAUS**

Is that how you want history to remember me? Perspiring in a fisherman’s knit pullover with my stoic face concealed by a visor? Damn the helmet *and* the sweater!

 **LAODAMIA**

 *(Taking hold of his arm.)*

Please don’t go. I’m afraid.

**PROTESILAUS**

It’s one hundred percent safe, dear. I’ll be back in a minute.

*(Protesilaus climbs down to the beach bareheaded and*

*approaches Helen.)*

Helen, Queen of Sparta? In the name of Greece, I have come to rescue you.

 **HELEN**

Don’t you dare.

 **PROTESILAUS**Excuse me? I’ve come all the way from Phylacea….

 **HELEN**

And you can go straight back there, as far as I’m concerned….I’m goddam sick and tired of all this rescuing. I didn’t ask for any help—and I’m not going!

 **PROTESILAUS**

I’m afraid you don’t have a choice in the matter….You are the wife of King Menelaus. You have responsibilities…

 **HELEN**

I’m done with Menelaus and Paris and the whole sea-nymph chasing lot of you….You can’t just pass me back and forth like a fruitcake or a bottle of wine….Whatever responsibilities I have, I’m sure they can be attended to from right here….Keep back. I’m warning you!

 *(Protesilaus attempts to carry her off. She hits him over the*

 *head with the zucchini).*

What kind of rescuer are you, anyway? You’re not even wearing a helmet.

  *(She pounds Protesilaus on the head repeatedly. He*

 *collapses. Helen brandishes the zucchini and addresses*

 *both the Phylacean fleet and the audience.)*

Anybody else want to try…? I didn’t think so.

When a princess says she doesn’t want to be rescued, it means she doesn’t want to be rescued.

 *(Cassandra enters, dressed as Death, loads the body of*

*Protesilaus into a wheelbarrow and carts it from the stage.)*

**(END OF ACT ONE)**

**ACT TWO**

**1. The Flagship of the Phylacean Fleet. Cassandra apologizes.**

*(Laodamia is shrouded in black. Cassandra enters.)*

 **CASSANDRA**

I admit it. I was wrong.

 **LAODAMIA**

And you wonder why nobody ever believes you.

**CASSANDRA**

I don’t understand what happened. My curse is always to be right, but never to be believed…. And yet your husband believed me, and I was wrong….

 **LAODAMIA**

The details don’t particularly concern me.

**CASSANDRA**

 *(Calling to the gods.)*

Are you listening, Apollo? Zeus? Anybody up there? I demand an explanation!

 **VOICE OF THE GODS**

Uncertainty is the ultimate punishment.

 *(A shoe falls out of the sky. Cassandra picks up the shoe*

 *and examines it. A long pause follows.)*

 **CASSANDRA**

Okay, one shoe. You’ve made your point….But what of the innocent victims who believed my prophesies? What has Queen Laodamia ever done to deserve this curse?

 **LAODAMIA**

What am I going to do? Poor Protesilaus. Poor, dear Protesilaus I didn’t even have a chance to tell him that I loved him before he died.

**CASSANDRA**

 *(Calling to the gods.)*

Fine. Be that way. You just wait until the Christians come along!

 **LAODAMIA**

I can’t remember the last time I told him….I’m glad that I write these things down in my journal.

 *(Laodamia unrolls a small parchment.)*

Here it is. I told him yesterday afternoon at three o’clock sharp.

**CASSANDRA**

That wasn’t so long ago.

 **LAODAMIA**

I hope he still *remembers* that I love him. My husband has a dreadful memory…. Sometimes he even falls down on one knee and proposes to me, and I have to remind him that we’re already married.

 **CASSANDRA**

I’m sure an eternity in Hades will give him plenty of time to remember.

 **LAODAMIA**

Or to forget.

 **CASSANDRA**

You’re making me feel guilty.

 **LAODAMINA**

If I could only tell him that I love him one last time….

**CASSANDRA**

 *(Calling to the gods.)*

Can you show some mercy, under the circumstances….? Please give her a chance to say good bye.

 **VOICE OF THE GODS**Too late. That’s what corpses are for.

 **CASSANDRA**

This is all a propaganda windfall for the atheists.

 **VOICE OF THE GODS**

Very well. Three hours.

 **LAODAMINA**

Thank you! Oh, that you!

 *(To herself.)*

Dear, dear Protesilaus. So much has happened since you’ve been gone. I don’t know where to begin…..

 **CASSANDRA**

It’s only been two days.

 **LAODAMIA**

Two days is forever when you’re separated from your husband….I don’t know how I can possibly tell him everything in three hours….

 **CASSANDRA**

Maybe you should stick to the highlights.

 **LAODAMINA**

Do you think they’d agree to a couple of weeks….?

 **CASSANDRA**

I doubt it. And that would only make it more difficult in the end….

 **LAODAMIA**

 *(To the gods.)*

How about a full day. Sunrise to sunset?

 **VOICE OF THE GODS**

Three hours. We are gods. We do not haggle.

**2. Troy. Customs & Immigration.**

 *(Cassandra, wearing the uniform of a border control agent,*

*stands behind a checkpoint. A sign nearby reads:*

*“Welcome to Scenic Troy: Where Homeric Myth Meets*

 *Historical Reality.” Menelaus, carrying his sack of*

 *assorted appliances, waits opposite the checkpoint.*

 *He grows increasingly impatient.)*

  **MENELAUS**

Is there a problem?

 **CASSANDRA AS BORDER AGENT**

Why? Are you in a rush?

  **MENELAUS**

My wife has been kidnapped and I’m on my way to rescue her.

 **CASSANDRA AS BORDER AGENT**

You should have applied for a visa two weeks in advance.

 **MENELAUS**

I didn’t know my wife was going to be kidnapped *two weeks in advance*.

 **CASSANDRA AS BORDER AGENT**

Now you know for next time.

  **MENELAUS**

There isn’t going to be next time.

 **CASSANDRA AS BORDER AGENT**

Trust me. If you’re wife is beautiful enough to be kidnapped once, she’s beautiful enough to be kidnapped again….What I suggest is applying for a visa every two weeks—as a precaution. And if your wife *isn’t* kidnapped, you haven’t lost anything.

  **MENELAUS**

I’ll take that under advisement. Now can you please hurry up?

**CASSANDRA AS BORDER AGENT**

I do apologize, but it appears your application for an emergency visa been denied.

 **MENELAUS**

Denied? That impossible.

 **CASSANDRA AS BORDER AGENT**

 *(Unrolling a long scroll.)*

Your answers on the customs and immigration form were deemed unsatisfactory. There was particular concern regarding your response to the question: What is the purpose of your visit? You wrote: “To sack and pillage Troy, and to murder Prince Paris, son of Priam.” That came across as a security threat.

  **MENELAUS**

He kidnapped my wife!

 **CASSANDRA AS BORDER AGENT**

Nevertheless. We have a zero tolerance policy on sacking and pillaging.

  **MENELAUS**

Do I at least get partial credit for honesty?

**CASSANDRA AS BORDER AGENT**

That wasn’t the only problem with your application….There was also some concern regarding the contents of your hand luggage.

  **MENELAUS**

This junk? What danger am I going to pose with a barometer and an egg beater?

 **CASSANDRA AS BORDER AGENT**

An egg beater is a dangerous weapon….My uncle was killed with an egg beater.

  **MENELAUS**

It’s an *electric* egg-beater. We don’t even have electricity.

 **CASSANDRA AS BORDER AGENT**

Poor Uncle Leopodus. He was such a good egg….You also have a tuning fork, a three-hole punch, a pepper shaker….

**MENELAUS**

You figured me out. I’m going to pepper Prince Paris to death.

 **CASSANDRA AS BORDER AGENT**

It’s nothing personal. We live in dangerous times. There is also additional evidence against you, but I’m afraid that it’s classified…..

  **MENELAUS**

And let me guess. If I want to appeal, I have to take it up with the gods.

 **CASSANDRA AS BORDER AGENT**

You *can’t* appeal. We’re fighting a war on terror. Even the gods are powerless when it comes to protecting the homeland.

**3. Girls’ Night Out, or The Battle of Troy.**

*(Helen is standing on the hilltop, brandishing her*

 *zucchini in various poses. Oenone enters with a wine*

 *bottle.)*

 **OENONE**

Zinfandel! Would you like the first swig?

 **HELEN**

It’s only eight in the morning.

**OENONE**

We’re celebrating! It’s not every day that a helpless princess defeats the captain of the Greek flagship in hand-to-hand combat.

 **HELEN**

I didn’t mean to kill him.

 **OENONE**

Don’t belittle your accomplishments.

 **HELEN**

I feel genuinely sorry about the whole business. He caught me at a bad moment….Do you think I should send his wife a condolence card?

 **OENONE**

*She* should send *you* a thank you card.

 **HELEN**

You really don’t like men, do you?

 **OENONE**

The most important thing to remember about men is that they only serve three purposes.

 **HELEN**

 *(A long pause.)*

What are they?

 **OENONE**Nobody knows.

 **HELEN**

Then I’m not going to feel guilty. Anyway, I’m far too beautiful to feel guilty…

 **OENONE**

Let’s drink.

 *(Oenone rummages through her clothing.)*

Dammit. I’ve misplaced my corkscrew….

**HELEN**

That’s alright. We can celebrate without drinking.

 **OENONE**

No, we can’t!

 *(Calling to the gods)*

Dionysus, son of Zeus. I call upon you for your generosity, not as a female to a male, but as an aspiring drunkard to a fellow reveler in need. Please supply us with a corkscrew during this time of desperation and want….

 **VOICE OF THE GODS**

Hold on. We’re searching for one.

 **HELEN**

 *(Pointing over the hillside.)*

Look. We can see the battlefield from here!

 **OENONE**

Boring….Boring.

 **HELEN**

Which side are we rooting for?

 **OENONE**

It doesn’t really matter. War is like an overblown sporting event. A violent counterpart to the Olympic Games. Now if the Corinthians win, what do they get? A garland of olive branches? And if the Thebans win, what do they get? The acclaim of their citizenry? But no matter who triumphs on the playing field, the real winners are the companies that transport the athletes and their entourages, and the javelin manufacturers, and the men who sells baklava in the grandstands. Remember what Demosthenes warned in his farewell address: Beware the sports-industrial complex.

 **HELEN**

I’ve never thought of it that way.

**OENONE**

Of course, you haven’t. Because you’ve been trained to let men do all the thinking for you….and the problem with that is that men just aren’t particularly bright. Don’t get me wrong. You do run across an intelligent man now and again. Archimedes. Euclid. But, on the whole, they’re a rather dimwitted lot.

 **HELEN**

So it doesn’t matter who wins?

 **OENONE**

If the Greeks win, you’ll be forcibly returned to Sparta. If the Trojans win, Paris will return a conquering hero, and princesses from all over the Aegean will be his for the asking. Now how long do you think it will be before he takes up with a fifteen-year-old Macedonian beauty and sends you back to Menelaus of his own accord?

*(Calling to the gods)*

How are you coming along with that corkscrew?

 **VOICE OF THE GODS**

We’re all out of corkscrews. Have a pliers?

 *(A pliers falls from the sky.)*

 **OENONE**

What the hell am I going to do with a pliers?

 **HELEN**

 *(Pointing over the hillside)*

Oh, look. It’s on fire!

 **OENONE**

*(Oenone attempts to open the wine bottle with the pliers,*

 *focusing all of her attention on the task.)*

What’s that, dear?

**HELEN**

The city is on fire. Troy is burning.

**OENONE**

Whatever.

**HELEN**

Look at all those poor refugees.

**OENONE**

I just hope one of them has the foresight to bring along a corkscrew.

**HELEN**

They seem so unhappy. I’m glad *we’re* not refugees.

 **OENONE**Let me look….Do you see those two men charging the Greek front lines? I think those are my nitwit brothers-in-law, Hector and Polydorus.

 *(Oenone winces. Helen turns away.)*

Oh well. Win some, lose some.

**PARIS**

 *(Paris enters, dressed for battle. He is wheeling a barrow*

 *full of silks.)*

Helen. There you are!

 **OENONE**

So you’re still up to your old tricks, are you?
 *(To Helen)*

He’s going to offer you all the silk in the kingdom. Prepared by the royal silk worms of Thrace…..

 **PARIS**

 *(To Oenone)*

You keep out of this….

 *(To Helen)*

Guess what I’ve brought you…..

 **HELEN**

All the silk in the kingdom….? Prepared by the royal silk worms of Thrace….?

 **PARIS**

I wanted to make up for the pears and the zucchini….Please tell me you wear fabrics that begin with the letter S.

 **HELEN**

 *(Helen examines the silks with indifference.)*

Is this all you have to offer? You already know my terms.

 **PARIS**

I can’t do it.

**OENONE**

That’s his favorite expression.

**PARIS**

I do love you, Helen. I’d lay down my own life to defend your honor….And if Troy were mine to give, I’d make it yours in a heartbeat. But I can’t murder my brothers for you. Even true love has its limits.

**OENONE**

It’s a moot point. They’re already dead.

**PARIS**

Hector and Polydorus? But I just saw them on the way to the battlefield.

 **OENONE**Don’t take my word for it. Have a look.

 **PARIS** *(Paris peers through his binoculars)*

**OENONE**

I believe the one with the axe protruding from his neck is Polydorus. And I think the head that Achilles is displaying at the end of that pike belongs to Hector.

**PARIS**

This is terrible! My brothers are slain!

**HELEN**

Which means you’re now the heir to the Trojan throne.

**PARIS**

I suppose I am.

**HELEN**

And if Troy were yours, you’d turn the kingdom over to me in a heartbeat….

 **PARIS**

Did I say that?

 **HELEN**

You did. Troy will be mine!

 **OENONE**

Half of Troy will be yours, if you want to get all technical. Half will be mine….How quickly you’ve forgotten that itch on the end of your nose….

 **HELEN**

Well, *half* of Troy will be mine.

 **PARIS**

If I give you the deed to Troy, then will you fall in love with me?

 **HELEN**

Let’s put it this way. If you give me the deed to Troy, it will tilt the odds in your favor….

 **OENONE**

Not so fast. We don’t want it.

 **PARIS**You don’t?

**HELEN**

We don’t?!

**OENONE**

Not anymore. Not after what the Greek armies have done to it….It’s a charred speck. An archaeological ruin.
 **HELEN**

So what do we want?

**OENONE**

Nothing. Not from him, at least. He has nothing left to offer.

 **PARIS**

I love you, Helen. That should count for *something*.

 **HELEN**

You should have killed your brothers for me when you had the opportunity.

 **PARIS**

Very well. If I can’t win your heart with the title to the kingdom, I’ll have to win it with bravery. I shall defend my homeland on the battlefield. Then you’ll change you tune.

 **OENONE**

 *(To Helen)*

I wouldn’t let him do that, if I were you. Remember what I told you: If he becomes a war hero, he’ll jilt you faster than you can say Macedonian jailbait.

 **OENONE**

 *(Removing several silk scarves from the wheelbarrow).*

Here, tie him up.

 *(Paris attempts to flee. Oenone and Helen capture him and*

 *bind him to a tree with the scarves.)*

 **PARIS**

You’re crazy, both of you. I’m the crown prince. You can’t just go around tying up crown princes on a whim.

 **OENONE**

Have a pear.

  *(She places a pear in Paris’s open mouth,*

 *effectively gagging him.)*

 ***PARIS***

Mmmph! Mmmmmmph!

 **HELEN**

Can I ask you something in private?

 **OENONE**

Sure.

 **HELEN**

If he doesn’t have anything left to offer me, why do I want to keep him?

 **OENONE**

You don’t. Honestly, girl, you’re much better off getting kidnapped by somebody else. I just said all that because I needed your help tying him up.

 **HELEN**

But why do you want him tied up?

 **OENONE**

Revenge…. Or to make him fall in love with me again….One or the other….

 **OENONE**

 *(To Paris, who remains bound.)*

Do you feel that itch on your nose? The one you can’t reach?

 **PARIS**

Mmph! Mmmph!

 *(Oenone removes the pear from his mouth.)*

You’re crazy, Oenone. I don’t have any itch.

 **OENONE**

Not yet, maybe. But you will…soon enough.

**4. LAODAMIA AND PROTESILAUS IN HADES**

*(Protesilaus is seated on a chaise longue, reading a*

*newspaper and possibly smoking a cigar. Laodamia*

 *enters, trailed by a very long scroll.)*

 **LAODAMIA**

Protesilaus!

 **PROTESILAUS**

 *(Looking up from his newspaper.)*

Laodamia?

**LAODAMIA**

It’s freezing down here. I should have brought you your wool sweater.

 **PROTESILAUS**

I don’t mind.

**LAODAMIA**

You’ll mind when you catch pneumonia.

 **PROTESILAUS**

We’re in Hades, honey. They don’t have pneumonia here.

**LAODAMIA**

Well you’re bound to catch something….Who goes into battle without a warm sweater? You’re carelessness will be the death of you one of these days.

 **PROTESILAUS**

That is a distinct possibility.

**LAODAMIA**

Let me get a good look at you.

 *(Holding his face in her hands.)*

You’re so thin. Are they feeding you well?

 **PROTESILAUS**

I can’t really say. I haven’t been hungry yet.

**LAODAMIA**

You haven’t been hungry? Since when does being hungry have anything to do with eating? You need three square meals a day. Promise me you’ll eat three square meals. And plenty of fiber.

 **PROTESILAUS**

It’s not like that down here, honey. This is the afterlife, not a resort.

**LAODAMIA**

All the same. If you have to pay extra, pay extra. We can afford it.

 **PROTESILAUS**

They don’t use money down here either. Funny, isn’t it? After all these years, my stocks are finally up. On account of the war with Troy. I knew investing in catapults and battering rams would pay off eventually.

**LAODAMIA**

I can’t imagine how they expect you to fend for yourself. You’ve only been dead a few days and already you’re wasting away….It’s cruel. Really, it is. As far as I’m concerned, a wife should die alongside her husband so he has someone around to look after him….

**PROTESILAUS**

I don’t have any complaints….Except maybe the silence. I wouldn’t mind a bit of background noise now and then….some wind rustling…an occasional fog horn….

**LAODAMIA**

How can you be so calm at a time like this?

 **PROTESILAUS**

It comes with the territory….What do I have to worry about?

**LAODAMIA**

 *(In a rising panic.)*

Everything! That’s what! Did you even check where the fire exits are?

 **PROTESILAUS**

Calm down, darling. Everything here in Hades is inflammable. Even us….Now tell me: What happened to you? Did the ship sink? Or was our camp overrun by the armies of Troy?

**LAODAMIA**

*I’m* not dead. I’m here on a visitor’s pass.

 **PROTESILAUS**

I didn’t know you could do that.

**LAODAMIA**

I should have brought you warm socks too. I don’t know what I was thinking….

 **PROTESILAUS**

It is so good to see your face….I didn’t realize how much I missed you….

 **LAODAMIA**

I missed you too.

**PROTESILAUS**

How are the children?

 **LAODAMIA**

They miss their father.

**PROTESILAUS**

Maybe they can come along with you next time….

 **LAODAMIA**

I don’t know if there will be a next time.

**PROTESILAUS**

There’s always a next time, darling—but we can discuss that in the morning….Would you like me to show you around? It’s not such a bad place, except for the silence….It’s safe to walk a dog late at night. Only I don’t have a dog….If you bring some tomato seeds on your next visit, we could start a little vegetable patch.

**LAODAMIA**

I can’t stay that long. I only have three hours.

 **PROTESILAUS**

Three hours, this time.

**LAODAMIA**

Three hours. Forever.

**PROTESILAUS**

Oh. I see.

**LAODAMIA**

I’ve made a list of the things that I wanted to tell you. I actually thought I might tie the list to a post in the world of the living and then we could climb back up it together….

 *(She tugs on the scroll. It is not taut.)*

But I’m afraid it must have come loose on the way down.

**PROTESILAUS**

I was never much one for climbing anyway.

 **LAODAMIA**

I did the best I could with the list on short notice. I hope I haven’t forgotten anything.

**PROTESILAUS**

I’ve missed your lists. So much.

**LAODAMIA**

 *(Reading from the scroll.)*

I wanted you to know that I love you, and that there’s an extra twenty doubloons sown into the lining of your good tunic in case of an emergency, and that I keep having a dream in which we make love on a bed of lily petals, and that your brother, Podarces, placed his hand on my bare knee at the Olympic Festival six years ago, when he’d been drinking, but I slapped it away and he hasn’t been fresh with me since, and that I was going to give you a pair of sheepskin gloves for your birthday, and that your white cloak is hand-wash only, and that—

 **PROTESILAUS**

Hush, darling.

 *(He places his finger over her lips.)*

I already know.

**LAODAMIA**

You do?

**PROTESILAUS**

Everything.

 **LAODAMIA**

And you know that I love you more than all the fish in the sea….and that I love you more than all the stars in the sky…and that I love you more than life itself….

**PROTESILAUS**

Of course, I do…..

 *(He takes her hands in his own.)*

Let’s not squander any time saying things we already know….We have so little time as it is. We need to make these three hours last for eternity.

**5. Troy. The same hilltop. Oenone and Paris, bound to a tree.**

 **PARIS**

You win. It itches.

 **OENONE**

I told you so.

 **PARIS**

 *(Squirming)*

You were right and I was wrong, Oenone. Satisfied? Now please untie me so I can scratch my nose….

 **OENONE**

You don’t think it’s going to be that easy, do you?

 **PARIS**

I’m going to be King of Troy someday. I’ll appoint you steward of the royal wine cellars….You know how things work: You scratch my nose and I’ll scratch yours.

 **OENONE**

I’m far too familiar with your empty promises.

 **PARIS**

Please. I’m begging you….

**OENONE**

Very well. I’ll scratch it.

*(Oenone approaches Paris, as though to scratch his nose.*

 *She draws back her hand at the last instant.)*

On second thought, I’d rather see you suffer….

 **PARIS**

Screw you! You’re going to have to release me eventually. You do realize that. And when you do, I’m going to have you thrown into a pit full of lunatics….

 **OENONE**

Before or after you make me royal wine steward?

 **PARIS**

Where’s Helen? What have you done with my beloved?

 **OENONE**

She’s hiding in a cave. She’s afraid the ashes from the burning city might damage her

complexion.

**PARIS**

Please! I’m at your mercy, Oenone. Pretty please! Oh God, it itches!

 **OENONE**

Very well.

*(Oenone approaches Paris again. This time she scratches his*

 *nose.)*

How’s that?

 **PARIS**

Harder….and around the nostrils….

 **OENINE**

Satisfied?

 **PARIS**Thank Zeus!

 **OENONE**

Thank *me*. I’m the one who scratched your itch.

 **PARIS**

You’re the one who tied me up.

 **OENONE**

I’d be more grateful for the help, if I were you. People’s noses have been known to itch more than once….

**PARIS**

I order you to release me. Immediately.

 **OENONE**

After the battle….

 **PARIS**

Why are you doing this?

**OENONE**

I want you to experience what it’s like to watch the fighting from the sidelines….To have your own destiny determined entirely by the actions of others….

 *(Oenone points to the battlefield.)*

Look. Isn’t that your grandmother being carried off by Corinthians. Too bad you can’t help her, isn’t it?

 **PARIS**

You’re trying to make a woman out of me, aren’t you?

 **OENONE**

Your words. Not mine.

 **PARIS**

So you want me to sit here helplessly and watch while Troy burns?

 **OENONE**

Now you’re catching on....Of course, if you happened to fall in love with me at the same time, I wouldn’t complain….

 **PARIS**

We’ve been through this all before, Oenone. I don’t love you anymore….How can you expect the future king to love a woman with crow’s feet?

 **OENONE**

You can’t blame a girl for trying, can you?

 *(She retrieves a pear from a nearby barrow.)*

Now eat.

 **PARIS**Excuse me?

 **OENONE**

You’re going to eat the pears. All of them. Just like I did.

 **PARIS**I’m not hungry.

 **OENONE**

 *(Oenone grabs Paris by the groin.)*

You’ll eat every last pear in the kingdom.

 **PARIS**

 *(In a high-pitched voice.)*

Okay, I’ll eat the pears.

 *(Oenone stuffs a pear in Paris’ mouth)*

Hold onto that for a moment. And don’t wander off anywhere. I have to retrieve theForelles and the Red Anjous from the bottom of the hill before the refugees get to them.

 *(Oenone exits.)*

**6. Troy. The Changing of the Guard.**

*(Cassandra, wearing the uniform of a border control agent,*

*stands behind a checkpoint. Menelaus still waits opposite*

 *the checkpoint.)*

 **MENELAUS**

 *(Calling to the gods.)*

I need another corkscrew.

 **VOICE OF THE GODS**

We’re all out….Have a pair of sunglasses.

 **MENELAUS**

I hate being a mere mortal.

**VOICE OF THE GODS**

Would you rather be a stone pillar or a wild boar?

**MENELAUS**

 *(Alarmed.)*

No. What I meant to say was: I *love* being a mere mortal. I’m very grateful for my mere mortal-ness…..I’m just not sure what am I supposed to do with a pair of sunglasses…..

 *(Menelaus puts on the sunglasses.)*

They make me look like a plebian…..

 *(A realization dawns upon Menelaus.)*

They don’t make me look anything like Menelaus, king of Sparta.

 *(Menelaus removes his crown—if he is wearing one—*

*and approach the checkpoint.)*

**CASSANDRA AS BORDER AGENT**

Welcome to Troy. Present your passport and visa.

**MENELAUS**

You don’t recognize me, do you?

**CASSANDRA AS BORDER AGENT**

You do look familiar. Passport and visa please.

**MENELAUS**

I don’t need a passport and visa. I’m the night guard. I’m here to relieve you.

**CASSANDRA AS BORDER AGENT**

It’s only noon.

**MENELAUS**

I’m early. I couldn’t sleep.

**CASSANDRA AS BORDER AGENT**

Where’s your uniform? And your ID card?

**MENELAUS**

You didn’t hear? Border control is phasing out uniforms and ID cards as of today. The king fears that they might fall into the hands of terrorists—or Greeks…

**CASSANDRA AS BORDER AGENT**

Why wasn’t I informed of this change?

**MENELAUS**

The memo came out this morning. You were probably already on duty….

**CASSANDRA AS BORDER AGENT**

How can I be sure you’re not a Greek warrior in disguise?

**MENELAUS**

 You’re starting to sound as paranoid as Princess Cassandra.

**CASSANDRA AS BORDER AGENT**

I’ll have to check with the department.

**MENELAUS**

Don’t be a fool. If you contact the department, they’ll know you didn’t read the memo….

**CASSANDRA AS BORDER AGENT**

But I was on duty!

**MENELAUS**

Have it your way. It’s your job on the block, not mine….But if I were you, I’d take the afternoon off and relax. Go bring the family to see the giant wooden horse….

 **CASSANDRA AS BORDER AGENT**

I suppose you’re right. It’s not my fault if they changed the policy while I was on duty….Okay, I’m going….Have a good watch. Don’t get tricked by any Greeks.

 **MENELAUS**I’ll try not to….

 *(Cassandra as Border Agent exits)*

That was easy enough….Now onward to the sacking and pillaging!

**7. Troy. Paris and Cassanda. Paris has eaten seven hundred forty-two pears.**

*(Paris is still tied to the tree. He looks sated and*

 *nauseous. Cassandra enters.)*

 **CASSANDRA**

So the silk didn’t work.

 **PARIS**

Cassandra. Thank God! Hurry up and untie me.

 **CASSANDRA**

Are you all right? You look green.

 **PARIS**

I’ve eaten seven hundred forty-two pears.

 **CASSANDRA**

Did you fall in love with yourself?

 **PARIS**It wasn’t by choice. Oenone forced me….

 *(Angrily)*

If I ever get my hands on that bitch, I swear I’ll have her pickled in goat dung.

 *(To Cassandra)*

Untie me already. What are you waiting for?

 **CASSANDRA**

I’m just thinking….

 **PARIS**

We don’t have time for you to be thinking….I need to get to the battlefield before the war ends so I can win over Helen’s love with my heroism.

**CASSANDRA**

Okay, I’ll untie you. But I want something in return.

 **PARIS**

You too?

**CASSANDRA**

Why shouldn’t I want something? I got you the pears and the silk, didn’t I? If you want me to untie you, I want something in return….

 **PARIS**

What can I possibly give you? Between Oenone and the Greeks, I’m more or less out of resources….All I have is a wheelbarrow full of silk and the armor on my back.

**CASSANDRA**

I want you to trust me.

 **PARIS**

That’s all?

**CASSANDRA**

Nobody believes my prophesies. Well, I want you to believe me…

 **PARIS**

Sure, I’ll believe you.

**CASSANDRA**

You’ll forgive me for not believing you when you say that you’ll believe me. I want proof.

 **PARIS**

I’ll swear on the graves of our brothers.

**CASSANDRA**

I want your armor….If you trust me, you’ll go into battle without any armor.

 **PARIS**

Are you crazy?

 **CASSANDRA**

I thought you said you’d trust me.

 **PARIS**

Well I do, but….

**CASSANDRA**

I’ll untie one hand. Then you take the armor off. And then I’ll untie the other hand.

 **PARIS**

But the Greek archers will skewer me with arrows.

**CASSANDRA**

Have some faith in me.

 **PARIS**

Goddamit it, my nose itches again….Okay, I’ll do it. Now untie my hand before Oenone gets back with more fruit.

 *(Cassandra attempts to until one of Paris’ hands.)*

 **CASSANDRA**These are tight knots. I need a knife.

 **PARIS**

Oenone took mine with her.

 **CASSANDRA**

 *(Calling to the gods.)*

Anybody up there have an extra knife?

 *(A knife falls from the sky. Cassandra retrieves it.)*

Thank you.

 **VOICE OF THE GODS**

You’re welcome.

 *(Cassandra cuts free one of Paris’ arms. He removes his*

 *armor and she frees his other arm.)*

 **PARIS**

Do you think things will still fall from the sky in three thousand years?

 **CASSANDRA**

Probably. But I suspect people won’t appreciate it as much.

 **PARIS**

Are you sure I’ll be okay without my armor?

 **CASSANDRA**

Have some faith, big brother. It will all turn out just fine.

 *(Paris charges off toward the battlefield.)*

I hope….

**8. Hades. The End of Visiting Hours.**

*(Protesilaus and Laodamia are standing face to face,*

 *holding hands, in silence. Cassandra enters.)*

 **CASSANDRA**

It’s time.

 **LAODAMIA**

It can’t be time. I just arrived.

 **CASSANDRA**

I’m sorry.

 **PROTESILAUS**

I wrote down some wisdom to share with the children.

*(Protesilaus removes a parchment from his pocket, clears*

 *his throat as though preparing to deliver a long speech,*

 *and reads.)*

“Don’t die young.”

Can you remember to tell them that?

 **LAODAMIA**“Don’t die young.” I’ll remember every word.

 **PROTESILAUS**It’s sound advice.

 **LAODAMIA**Anything else?

 **PROTESILAUS**Tell them to worry about death, and the taxes will take care of themselves.

 **CASSANDRA**

It’s really time. They’re going to close the gates.

 **LAODAMIA**

What if I won’t go?

 **CASSANDRA**

You will. In the end. Nobody stays unless they have to.

 **PROTESILAUS**

Please, Laodamia. Think of the children.

 **LAODAMIA**Yes. The children.

 **PROTESILAUS**

And Laodamia, if you get remarried….

 **LAODAMIA**

Yes?

 *(A long pause.)*

**PROTESILAUS**

Don’t get remarried.

 **LAODAMIA**

But what if I fall in love again?

 **PROTESILAUS**

Don’t fall in love again.

 **CASSANDRA**

They’ll have to pay the guards overtime. The gods won’t like that.

 *(Cassandra takes Laodamia by the hand.)*

 **LAOAMIA**

Don’t forget to eat a full breakfast every morning….and make sure you chew your food before you swallow it…and wear plenty of sun screen….lather it on if you have to.…you can never put on too much sun screen….and don’t read in dim light…or moving vehicles ….and make sure that you renew your passport every fourteen years….and loop your socks together before you place them in the hamper so they don’t get lost…..

 *(Cassandra leads Laodamia off the stage.)*

….and remember that I love you….I love you….Always….

 **PROTESILAUS**

What? I couldn’t hear you!

 *(To himself, frustrated.)*

Damn lousy acoustics.

**9. Troy. A hilltop. Helen and Menelaus.**

*(Helen is eating a pear. Menelaus enters, his sword*

 *drawn, lugging his sack of appliances.)*

 **MENELAUS**

Helen! Thank heavens you’re all right.

 *(Menelaus lowers his sword and drops his satchel. He runs*

 *forward to embrace Helen, but she wants no part of it.)*

What’s wrong?

 **HELEN**

 Can’t you see I’m eating?

**MENELAUS**

Is that a pear?

 **HELEN**

A Red Anjou. They’re good. Try one.

 *(She offers him a pear from a nearby barrow.)*

**MENELAUS**

No, thanks.

 **HELEN**

TRY ONE!

 *(Menelaus tastes the pear.)*

**MENELAUS**

They are good….But they don’t being with Z.

 **HELEN**

I’m branching out.

*(Helen tosses away the core of her pear. Menelaus attempts to*

*embrace Helen again, but she steps away.)*

**MENELAUS**

Aren’t you going to hug me? I’ve come to rescue you.

 **HELEN**

It’s a bit late in the day for that, don’t you think? What kind of man shows up to rescue his wife after the enemy has already been defeated and their capital burned to the ground?

**MENELAUS**

I had trouble with my visa. It’s a long story…..

 **HELEN**

 *(Holding up her palm.)*

Tell it to the hand.

**MENELAUS**

The bottom line is that I’m here now, and I’m ready to bring you back to Sparta.

 **HELEN**

What if I don’t want to go?

**MENELAUS**

How can you not want to go?

 **HELEN**

Maybe I have other offers.

**MENELAUS**

This is crazy talk. You’re the queen!

 **HELEN**

If you want me to come back to Sparta, it will cost you….

**MENELAUS**

Sure. Whatever you want.

**HELEN**

I want Sparta.

**MENELAUS**

Sparta?

 **HELEN**

All of it.

**MENELAUS**

What’s gotten into you?

 **HELEN**

I’ve gotten smart. That’s what. I’m tired of being just another pretty face that launches a thousand ships. I want to control my own destiny from now on.

**MENELAUS**

I see. Why don’t we get a good night sleep and then we can talk this over in the morning….? I’ve been dreaming about your ash-flavored pancakes for months….

**HELEN**

That’s another thing. From now on, you’re cooking your own pancakes.

 **MENELAUS**

I am?

 **HELEN**

And if I so much as see a sea nymph within a hundred miles of the Spartan coast, you’re going to be guarding the chastity of the female servants personally from now on, if you understand my meaning. Am I making myself clear?

**MENELAUS**

Wow. You’ve changed.

 **HELEN**

So what will it be? Are you willing to hand over the kingdom?

**MENELAUS**

Will you burn me pancakes every once in a while? For special occasions?

**HELEN**

Maybe for special occasions.

**MENELAUS**

Then I give in. Sparta is yours.

**HELEN**

Thank you….Now you may hug me.

 *(Helen and Menelaus embrace.)*

 **MENELAUS**

You still love me, don’t you?

 **HELEN**

I think so. I’ll tell you for sure in another sixty years.

 *(Helen and Menelaus exit hand in hand.)*

**10. The outskirts of Troy. Oenone and Paris.**

 *(Oenone is drinking heavily. Paris staggers onto the stage*

 *with an arrow protruding from this chest.)*

 **OENONE**

Did you win the war?

**PARIS**

 *(Tugging on the arrow.)*

I think it’s pierced my heart.

 **OENONE**

Wear armor next time.

 **PARIS**

It’s hard to engage in hand-to-hand combat when just you’ve been force fed seven hundred forty-two pears.

 **OENONE**

Then stay tied to the tree next time.

**PARIS**

Look, I can’t argue with you right now. I have to focus my energies on bleeding to death.

 **OENONE**

You’re not going to bleed to death. Let me take a look at that.

 *(Oenone inspects Paris’ wound.)*

You’re lucky I have a pliers on me.

**PARIS**

Where’s Helen? I need to show her how brave I was.

 **OENONE**

Don’t be an idiot. Helen went back to Sparta with her husband.

**PARIS**

You’re lying. It isn’t possible.

 **OENONE**

Hold still.

 *(Oenone attempts to remove the arrow with the pliers.)*

**PARIS**

Owwww!

 *(Oenone successfully removes the arrow.)*

 **OENONE**

All done. Feel free to thank me.

**PARIS**

Did Helen really abandon me?

 **OENONE**

I doubt Helen carries a pliers on her.

**PARIS**

So all is lost. My kingdom. My brothers. My beloved.

 **OENONE**I’m still here.

 **PARIS**

I can’t imagine why. You should escape before the Greeks arrive and start plundering.

 **OENONE**

And who’ll stay to tend to your wound?

**PARIS**

It’s not worth it. Even you must see that now. I’m heir to nothing. Nothing! What can you possibly want with the crown-prince of a conquered empire?

 **OENONE**

You still have your Adonis-like looks and captivating charisma.

**PARIS**

Do you mean that? You’re not mocking me?

 **OENONE**

That wound is going to require a lot of tending too. It could take years to heal….

**PARIS**

Helen doesn’t carry a pliers with her, does she?

 **OENONE**

Helen is highly overrated.

 **PARIS**

That thought has crossed my mind lately….You’ll really love me, even if I end up permanently crippled…..?

 **OENONE**I never stopped loving you. I just started hating you too.

 **PARIS**

I’ve been a fool, haven’t I?

 **OENONE**

I wouldn’t say a fool. More like an imbecile….Now give me a kiss, and then let’s find some gauze for that wound. I’m not ready to be a war widow .

 *(They are about to kiss. A corkscrew falls from the sky.)*

 **PARIS**

What was that?

 *(Oenone retrieves the corkscrew.)*

 **VOICE OF THE GODS**

We found an extra corkscrew.

 **OENONE**

Too late.

 *(She smiles lovingly at Paris.)*

I’m on the wagon now…..

 *(Oenone and Paris embrace. A shoe falls unexpectedly*

 *from the sky and startles them. The stare at the shoe,*

 *perplexed. Cassandra enters, wearing the shoe that*

 *has fallen earlier. Her other foot is bare. She picks up the*

 *second shoe, examines it, and places it on her bare foot.*

 *Then she strolls offstage, leaving Paris and Oenone to*

 *their private pleasures.)*

**(END OF ACT TWO)**