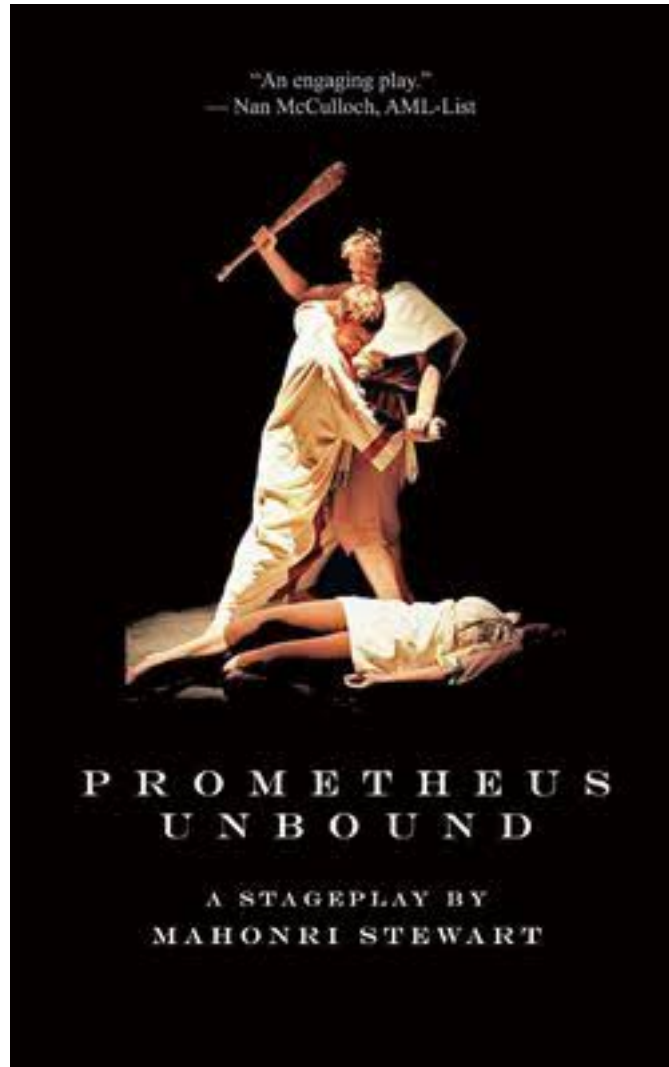


PERUSAL SCRIPT



Newport, Maine

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PROMETHEUS UNBOUND

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LBT ORDER # 3309

*Dedicated to my wife Anne,
my Somebody, my Everybody, my Onebody.*

*Dedicated to Katie Farmer, whose theatre history class
spurred the desire to write this play.*

*Dedicated to Louise Durham, whose 9th grade honors English course
first introduced me to the myth of Prometheus.*

Which even in torture can descry Its own concenter'd recompense,
Triumphant where it dares defy, And making Death a Victory.

■ Lord Byron, "Prometheus"

Behold Prometheus! on him alone What acts of unrighteousness are done.

■ Aeschylus, Prometheus Bound

Prometheus Unbound

by Mahonri Stewart

Prometheus Unbound was first produced by the BYU Experimental Theatre Company and premiered at Brigham Young University's Nelke Theatre on July 31, 2008.

Phoebe	Chantel Kaiser
Erysichton	Amos Omer
Prometheus	David Dixon
Heracles	Nathaniel Drew
Zeus/Thief 1/Minotaur	Matthew Christensen
Artemis	Bryn Dalton
Callisto	Bekah Wilbur
Iphigeneia/Harpie	Anne Shakespeare
Jason/Hermes/Epimetheus	Jeffrey Bond
Ajax	Matthew Price Davis
Pandora/Harpie/Dark Spirit	Bethany Tally
Aphrodite/Harpie/Dark Spirit	Katy Baxter
Pythia/Minotaur	Alauna Bates
Prophetes/Thief 2	Joshua Drew

Director — Penny Pendleton

Producers — David Mortensen, Mahonri Stewart, David Thorpe, Rodger Sorenson

Stage Manager — Scott Ludlow

Costume Design/Construction — Catherine Barker, Anne Stewart

Creature Work/Prosthetics — Chris Hanson

Original Music and Sound Design — Nathaniel Drew

Fight Choreography — Amos Omer

Dance Choreography — Anne Shakespeare

Vocal Training — John Graham

Poster Design — Patrick Bates

Resident Stage Manager — Richie Ominski

Make-up — Bekah Wilbur

Hair — Edi Hayward, Jamie Denison, Austin Hair

Light Board Operators — Graham Whipple, Richie Ominski

Sound Board Operator — Eric “C” Heaps

PROMETHEUS UNBOUND by Mahonri Stewart. RUN TIME: 2 hours. CAST SIZE: 14 with performers playing multiple roles (7 women, 7 men). Phoebe faithfully serves at the temple of Delphi. There, she has a vision of the Titan Prometheus, the advocate of humankind who gave us fire. As punishment for helping the humans, Zeus chained Prometheus to a rock and it is there that Prometheus is tortured daily. Prometheus calls Phoebe to free him, so she must gather a group of heroes for the task. Yet, doubt and opposition plague

her from the start as she wonders whether she is now afflicted with madness, or whether she truly did receive a vision from a tortured, but loving god. Mythology, Fantasy, Spiritual, Drama, Comedy. **ORDER #3309**

MAHONRI STEWART is an award winning writer and educator. He has written over two dozen plays, most of which have been produced throughout the U.S. and Europe, including productions in Los Angeles, Scotland, and Switzerland. In 2004, his premiere play *Farewell to Eden* won the Kennedy Center's American College Theater Festival's National Playwriting Award (Second Place) and their National Selection Team Fellowship Award. Since then he has received numerous other awards and honors and continues to expand his writing into various mediums, including screenplays, comics, poetry, and novels. He received his MFA degree in Dramatic Writing from Arizona State University. He received his bachelors degree in Theatre Arts from Utah Valley University. He's a former Playwright in Residence at the Noorda Regional Theater for Children and Youth.

“Stewart has written an engaging play and made it more accessible than the Greek plays of my childhood.”

— Nan McCulloch, *AML-List*

“I particularly enjoyed the feminist aspects of the story, both implicit (four of six characters who go on a quest to rescue Prometheus are female) and explicit (the goddess Artemis explains that Pandora being duped into releasing evil into the world had nothing to do with her gender [which is, of course, a metaphorical defense of Eve]).”

— Ben Christensen, *Front Row Reviewers*

“Stewart has done an excellent job weaving together Greek myths into an absorbing Hero's Quest... each character is given Stewart's full attention... The dialogue is a perfect tone... It is also wonderfully witty, with tasteful comic relief to counterbalance the numerous serious themes.”

— Sarah-Lucy Hill, *My Brave New World*

Prometheus Unbound

Act One

SCENE ONE

(The CHORUS appears, made up of seven men and seven women, who play all the various roles. When they act as the chorus they wear masks, when they play individual roles, they take off the masks. During the chorus' speeches, they can either speak in unison, split the lines individually amongst the actors, or a combination thereof.)

CHORUS. The Oracle of Delphi. Famed as the greatest source of prophecy in Ancient Greece. Its origins are recorded thus: A chasm was once discovered; fumes issued forth from underneath the great mother earth Gaia. When inhaled it caused those who partook to be able to see the future. Soon many came to partake of its holy fumes, but eventually someone died from its effects. From that time forward it was regulated by priests and priestesses. Only women in the high office of the Pythia could approach the chasm and speak for the gods. Each Pythia was chosen in succession on the death of the other. The Pythia was the crown jewel of Delphi.

(From amongst the CHORUS, one steps out, takes off her mask and assumes the role of the PYTHIA. She sits upon a ceremonial tripod, which is connected to a cauldron. She falls into an entranced state, as she represents inhaling the fumes.)

With the Pythia are other priests and priestesses operating the temple. The prophetes and five hoisoi. The prophetes writes and translates the utterances of the Pythia.

(From amongst the CHORUS, one steps out, takes off his mask and assumes the role of a PROPHETES. He sits next to the PYTHIA, at a sort of ancient writing desk.)

But the one who most concerns our tale is among the hoisoi. She is called Phoebe, named after a Titan who had been one of the first oracles.

(From amongst the CHORUS, one steps out, takes off her mask and assumes the role of PHOEBE, who holds a bowl filled with water. She also carries laurel leaves.)

Phoebe, channeler of gods, liberator of Titans! How blissfully unaware you are of what the Fates have weaved for you!

(The CHORUS disperses and exits. PHOEBE approaches the PROPHETES with the bowl of water. The PROPHETES nods without even looking at her, so PHOEBE proceeds to the PYTHIA and places the bowl in the PYTHIA's hands, as well as the laurel leaves.)

PROPHETES. Is our last patron outside?

PHOEBE. He's making his sacrifice.

PROPHETES. Did the goat shiver upwards from the hooves?

PHOEBE. Yes. The sacrifice is acceptable.

PROPHETES. Has he offered his coins?

PHOEBE. Yes.

PROPHETES. Good. He can come in when he's ready.

PHOEBE. I'll tell him.

PYTHIA. Wait. Phoebe, when you bring him, please stay for the prophecy.

PROPHETES. But there aren't supposed to be other—

PYTHIA. I know the protocol.

PROPHETES. Then, honored Pythia, you know that—

PYTHIA. The gods will it.

PROPHETES. But—

PYTHIA. The gods will it.

PROPHETES. As the gods will then.

(Exit PHOEBE.)

PROPHETES. I don't understand.

PYTHIA. The gods rarely give their reasons. Those are only revealed long afterwards

PROPHETES. You favor the girl.

PYTHIA. If she is marked by anyone, it is by the gods, not me.

PROPHETES. You're telling me that little whelp of a girl is favored by the gods?

PYTHIA. I said marked, not favored.

PROPHETES. But you think she's special?

PYTHIA. To be marked by the gods is no pleasant business.

(Re-enter PHOEBE, followed by ERYSICHTON, a young man.)

PROPHETES. Who does the Pythia speak to?

ERYSICHTON. What, she can prophesy the future, but she doesn't know my name?

PROPHETES. Do you show insolence at the Oracle of Delphi?

ERYSICHTON. *(Mockingly reciting instructions his father gave him)* I am Erysichton, son of Mentheon. I come here not of myself, but in behalf of my father, who is a pious man who gives honor to the gods...”
So on and so forth.

PROPHETES. And the son is not so pious?

ERYSICHTON. The son is what he is.

(Pause.)

My father has sacrificed a fine goat and good coins for this errand. I would hate to come back to him empty handed.

PROPHETES. So be it. The Pythia speaks the words of the gods! Be attentive and reverence the Oracle of

Apollo. A prophecy for your father:

(The PYTHIA looks into the bowl and begins her prophecy. As she delivers the prophecy, PROPHETES writes it down.)

PYTHIA. Seed in the ground,

Seed in thy wife's pure womb divine,

Rain feeds the ground, Apollo's sun prospers thy vines,

If thou art constant in pleasing immortal eyes,

Then this prophetic verse shall surely verify.

(The PROPHETES hands the copy of the prophecy to ERYSICHTON.)

ERYSICHTON. Well, it's short and rather vague in its promises, but it's pleasant enough. My father will be pleased.

(ERYSICHTON turns to exit when the PYTHIA stands.)

PYTHIA. Erysichton! Apollo has not given you your own prophecy.

ERYSICHTON. Well, that's because I haven't asked for one. I didn't have any spare goats.

PROPHETES. Again with your insolence! Get out of here, before I—

PYHTIA. No. First this brave, disrespectful man will hear his future. The Fates shall have you for a hero in a cause that will taste bitter and false to you. They weave complicated threads, from which the end cannot be separated from the beginning. Your final thread shall be cut before you are ever able to see your father again. He shall gain grain and grow fat in richness, but he shall lose a son. There is hope for his line, how ever, for that son shall be replaced with a daughter.

ERYSICHTON. I don't get mine in verse?

PROPHETES. The Pythia has given you a dire prophecy. Do you not fear the shears of the Fates?

ERYSICHTON. There are many things I fear in this world, but I shall make my own fate, thank you.

(Exit ERYSICHTON.)

PROPHETES. He's a dirty fool to tempt the gods.

PYTHIA. Perhaps. But he'll prove worthy in his heart, where he is weak in his spirit. Now to other matters. Will you leave me alone with Phoebe?

PROPHETES. As you wish.

(Exit PROPHETES.)

PYTHIA. Phoebe, my dear—

PHOEBE. Yes, honored Pythia?

PYTHIA. I've heard a good many stories about you lately.

PHOEBE. Have I done something wrong?

PYTHIA. Not at all. I hear that you have dreams. Vivid dreams.

PHOEBE. I didn't give anyone leave to talk about them, if I have.

PYTHIA. Well, you know the temple girls, how they talk—

PHOEBE. I'll have to give a stern talk to a couple of gossips then.

PYTHIA. I've also heard that some of those dreams have come true. Some are saying that you've been touched with the power of prophecy. Some are overawed, some are jealous—

PHOEBE. It could be coincidence, honored Pythia. The dreams were highly symbolic and could be interpreted any number of ways.

PYTHIA. I believe that you have a gift.

PHOEBE. I didn't ask for it.

PYTHIA. All the more reason for the gods to mark you. Would you like someday to be a Pythia? Perhaps take my place when I'm done?

PHOEBE. Not particularly. Don't mistake me, honored Pythia, I wish to serve the gods, but I am content being a hoisoi. I don't need the eyes of Greece on me, no thank you. That would make me—nervous.

PYTHIA. You lack the ambition?

PHOEBE. I lack the stomach.

PYTHIA. Phoebe, there's something ahead of you. I can only see shadows and outlines of it, but the gods have plans.

PHOEBE. I don't want to be part of their plans—at least nothing dramatic. I want to serve them quietly. I don't particularly like noise.

PYTHIA. Pay attention to what the gods whisper to you.

PHOEBE. Honored Pythia—

PYTHIA. Sleep in here tonight, Phoebe.

PHOEBE. What?

PYTHIA. It's late.

PHOEBE. But that is against the—

PYTHIA. Sleep—

PHOEBE. You know, I *am* feeling suddenly tired.

PYTHIA. Sleep—

PHOEBE. What is this? Why am I—?

PYTHIA. Sleep.

PHOEBE. Yes—but—yes.

(PHOEBE has lain upon the ground and fallen asleep. Exit PYTHIA. Enter CHORUS.)

CHORUS. You cannot run away from the gods, Phoebe, for all must sleep, and in such sleep the gods have access. Dreams come upon you. Are they but murmurings and mutterings of a wandering mind? Or is there more? Archetypes; shadows of eternity remembered; images from a life before this earth; ancient rhythms and deep vibrations; and, ultimately, whispers of spirits and messages from the gods. For often dreams morph into visions.

(The lights rise on PROMETHEUS, chained to a rock upon a desolate hill. The sound of a circling eagle is heard overhead. ZEUS enters, from amongst the Chorus. He squints into the sky, shadows his eyes, then speaks grimly to Prometheus.)

ZEUS. It's not what I wanted. You know that.

(PROMETHEUS doesn't respond.)

Out of all the Titans, you and your brother Epimetheus were the only ones who stood by me—and between the two of you, *you* were the only one I actually trusted. My first mistake. If it was to end like this, why did you even support me in the overthrow of your race to begin with, Prometheus?

PROMETHEUS. I am called Forethought for a reason. I saw how you were to defeat the Titans, supplanting the authority of your father Kronos, just as I knew the punishments you would put upon my brothers and sisters.

ZEUS. And yet here you are anyway.

PROMETHEUS. Here I am.

(ZEUS again looks up at the eagle.)

ZEUS. Did you see that eagle in your prophecies?

PROMETHEUS. I saw the possibility, yes.

ZEUS. So, despite the fact that my eagle's beak and talons dig into your skin every night, slashing through your flesh—despite the fact that he tears out your liver to eat it in front of your eyes—yet you still went

ahead and defied me.

PROMETHEUS. I did.

ZEUS. I like to reward talent, Prometheus, but you didn't let me.

PROMETHEUS. I saw how my liver would re-grow and heal every day, only to feed this perpetual torture. I saw myself chained and lonely and freezing and burning and windswept. I saw your bird hover above me with blood in its eyes. And yet I chose as I did. Ask yourself why.

ZEUS. Believe me, I do.

PROMETHEUS. I also saw this conversation and I see beyond this day to the day that I—

ZEUS. You know your pranks were a little funny at first. Sure, I was mad, like when you switched the sacrifices so that the humans got the best bits and I got the bones—but I was starting to enjoy it as a little game. What was the crafty Prometheus going to do next?

PROMETHEUS. What I was always going to do.

ZEUS. Yes, eventually your pesky subversions started feeling less playful and more—serious. Didn't you know how I would react? What did you honestly expect me to do?

PROMETHEUS. Just as you're doing.

ZEUS. And thus the puzzle. Why are you doing this? What does it mean?

PROMETHEUS. It's not too late, Zeus.

ZEUS. You are no longer in a position for warning and demands.

PROMETHEUS. You put me into that position.

ZEUS. You may think that you're doing some kind of good for your humans on this rock, but let me make something clear to you—they are not what you meant them to be. They are selfish and hard and brutish and lustful and violent.

PROMETHEUS. Like you then.

ZEUS. I know they're your pet project, but they're not worth this. Please, let's put this behind us.

PROMETHEUS. I made them. If I don't stand up for them, who will?

ZEUS. Even your brother knew they were worthless! After giving good traits to all the animals, Epimetheus knew there was nothing left to give that could benefit such rough lumps of clay.

PROMETHEUS. I love my brother, but there is a reason he is called "Afterthought." He can only see clearly after the moment has happened. He has always lacked vision.

ZEUS. You're naive.

PROMETHEUS. You're blind.

ZEUS. I'm right. You know I'm right. You thought that by defying me and giving them fire that they would use it to light and warm the world. No. They've made forges to create weapons. They use arson to burn down the villages of their enemies. They burn the women and men and children who defy their doctrines and governments.

PROMETHEUS. And I feel what have you do to those who defy *you*.

ZEUS. We are gods, Prometheus, it is part of our power and privilege. We have a perspective they do not. Great and unmatched wisdom! We know when to push, and when to pull back.

PROMETHEUS. And when to tear away.

ZEUS. I don't want to do this to you, you are forcing me.

PROMETHEUS. I force no one. You are the one who brings the might of your forge against them when you are displeased.

ZEUS. Just tell me this. What they have done already with your gift, your curse, is that what you imagined they would do with your great boon?

PROMETHEUS. Yes, all of it and more. But I know *everything* they will do with my gift, not just the horrors. They will amaze even you. They will touch the very moon above us.

ZEUS. Poetry and nonsense!

PROMETHEUS. Is it?

ZEUS. Why do you fawn upon these creatures?

PROMETHEUS. I've invested a good deal into them.

ZEUS. What you can create, I can destroy.

PROMETHEUS. You already tried to destroy them once with your flood. They're survivors.

ZEUS. They had you to protect them then.

PROMETHEUS. And I will protect them still.

ZEUS. Upon this rock, will you?

PROMETHEUS. Upon this rock.

ZEUS. *(Pause.)* I don't need to destroy them. They're destroying themselves. Tell me, Forethought, what is the future you see for this race you have created?

PROMETHEUS. In the days of Kronos man was expected to rise and become like us.

ZEUS. These are not the days of Kronos.

PROMETHEUS. I made them to inherit.

ZEUS. They've fallen so far.

PROMETHEUS. That's part of the process.

ZEUS. When I killed my Father and made Atlas hold up the world and forced your brothers and sisters to labor and groan, you were still free. You owed me your freedom.

PROMETHEUS. You are but a babe on its mother's lap compared to me and my race. You exalt yourself as the prince of the world, but we are the older gods. We are the deeper power.

ZEUS. You know very well that I have ruled much better than my cannibal father.

PROMETHEUS. There was once hope that you may have been different, but you have fallen back to your father's patterns. Nothing has changed. It is ever before my eyes, burning in the glass. I can see the consequences, I reach far into the future possibilities, until—

ZEUS. Until what?

PROMETHEUS. Until all things need to become new, or destruction will come.

(There is the sound of an eagle, as ZEUS looks up and looks back down at Prometheus with an unreadable expression. Exit ZEUS. PROMETHEUS cries out loudly at the oncoming of the eagle. PHOEBE awakes, suddenly becomes alert and frightened, but PROMETHEUS hasn't disappeared.)

PHOEBE. Prometheus!

PROMETHEUS. I'm here.

PHOEBE. Am—am I awake or asleep?

PROMETHEUS. Neither.

PHOEBE. Are you to be trapped forever?

PROMETHEUS. I now share the burden of the other Titans, to suffer perpetually.

PHOEBE. Don't any of the gods have pity on you?

PROMETHEUS. If they do, their fear of Zeus is stronger than their pity.

PHOEBE. I have pity.

PROMETHEUS. But you also have fear.

PHOEBE. Why am I having this vision?

PROMETHEUS. Listen and humankind can have that last parcel of hope at the bottom of Zeus's box. You are the first. There is one you recently have seen, but who never saw you. He is the second. There is a man who is my son, but also the son of Zeus. He is the third. There is an immortal woman, but her womb shall never pass down her immortality. Her and her attendants are the last. Once six are gathered, and six seem to be lost, then will I be free to save humankind once again.

(PROMETHEUS disappears. PHOEBE stands and gazes around her in bewilderment. Enter PROPHETES and two temple GUARDS.)

PROPHETES. Grab her!

(The temple GUARDS seize phoebe.)

PHOEBE. What are you doing? Let go of me!

PROPHETES. Did you think that Apollo would stand for this? For a mere hoisoi to take residence in his most holy place, for her to desecrate the adyton as if it were her own bedchamber. I thought last night was bad enough, but this!

(Enter PYTHIA.)

PYTHIA. What's going on here?

PHOEBE. Honored Pythia, please, please, tell the prophetes that you're the one who told me to sleep here!

PYTHIA. I—I don't remember that.

PHOEBE. What? No!

PYTHIA. I rarely remember anything after the prophecies. You know that.

PROPHETES. Aye, she does. Clever, deceptive, little girl.

PHOEBE. No, no—

PYTHIA. Prophetes, retrieve for me the waters of the Kassotis and the laurel leaves. We'll ask Apollo.

(Exit PROPHETES.)

PHOEBE. But—but you're the one who—!

PYTHIA. Be calm. What you say may be true.

(Enter PROPHETES with the bowl of water and the laurel leaves. She sits upon the tripod seat and stares into the water.)

PHOEBE. Honored Pythia, please, believe me—

PYTHIA. Quiet. I need to concentrate.

(Pause.)

She is to be released from temple service.

PHOEBE. What? I don't deserve such dishonor. I'm innocent!

PYTHIA. The temple guards shouldn't be in here. We must have a cleansing ritual and a re-dedication. You should have consulted with me!

PROPHETES. I did what I thought necessary. She was defiling the Oracle.

PYTHIA. And thus you defiled it further by bringing the temple guards here. Take them out. I wish to speak to Phoebe alone. But you and I will need to talk about this later.

PROPHETES. Yes, honored Pythia.

(Exit PROPHETES and the temple GUARDS. PYTHIA kneels beside Phoebe.)

PHOEBE. Why don't you believe me?

PYTHIA. But I do believe you.

PHOEBE. Then why am I being expelled?

PYTHIA. I did not say expelled. I said released.

PHOEBE. I—I don't understand.

PYTHIA. Neither do I. Something powerful happened here last night, Phoebe—I can still feel its presence.

PHOEBE. I don't know what happened here. I don't know what to make of it. I had a dream or a vision or a fancy of imagination. I don't know whether I was asleep or awake. In it I was shown—

PYTHIA. Don't tell me. The full vision should only be shared with those who are involved with it.

PHOEBE. How did you know there were others involved?

PYTHIA. Find them, Phoebe. I'm releasing you from the service of the Oracle. You need to be unfettered to accomplish this. That's why I'm letting you go.

PHOEBE. But I don't know where to go, what to do—

PYTHIA. The gods will guide you.

PHOEBE. I'm afraid.

PYTHIA. I would be, too. Here, take this.

(PYTHIA takes a small stone attached to a necklace from off her neck and puts it around Phoebe's neck.)

PHOEBE. What is it?

PYTHIA. This stone fell from the sky. A gift from the gods. It has done some—remarkable things for me. I truly thought you would take my place. Your abilities would have been known all over, Greece.

PHOEBE. Well, at least I have been delivered from that frightening possibility.

PYTHIA. Don't be afraid of whatever the Fates have weaved for you, Phoebe. If it had been good for you to lead the Oracle as a Pythia, then you shouldn't have been afraid of that good. And as the Fates now have some other path for you, you shouldn't be afraid of that good either.

PHOEBE. But I'm nothing special. I just wanted to work unnoticed in the temple, giving my humble offering.

PYTHIA. The gods have marked you. You may never have the honor of men, nor the glory of public recognition, but you are already a Pythia. May the gods bless your path.

PHOEBE. I—I shall miss my service here.

(PYTHIA and PHOEBE embrace.)

PYTHIA. The gods have other desires for you.

(Exit PHOEBE. PYTHIA sits upon the tripod and gazes into the bowl of water once again. The power of prophecy falls upon her.)

PYTHIA. She is the first. There is one she recently has seen, but who never saw her. He is the second.

There is a man who is my son, but also the son of Zeus. He is the third. There is an immortal woman,

but her womb shall never pass down her immortality. Her and her attendants are the last. Once six are gathered, and six seem to be lost, then will I be free to save humankind once again.

(Blackout.)

SCENE TWO

(Enter ETYSICHTON followed by PHOEBE.)

PHOEBE. Erysichton!

ERYSICHTON. Who are you?

PHOEBE. Exactly!

ERYSICHTON. What?

PHOEBE. Don't you know me?

ERYSICHTON. Not in the slightest.

PHOEBE. Wonderful!

ERYSICHTON. I'm afraid you may have been reveling a little too ecstatically at Dionysus' festivals, my dear.

PHOEBE. No, no, I'm very sober, I assure you. Now, you see, I am—I was one of the hoisoi—the Oracle workers. I brought you into the adyton. I saw you, but you never saw my face, never seemed to even notice me.

ERYSICHTON. Well, if I offended you, I'm sorry...

PHOEBE. No, you don't see, it's perfect!

ERYSICHTON. Quite sober, you say?

PHOEBE. I've had a vision.

ERYSICHTON. Oh?

PHOEBE. This morning. The Titan Prometheus told me that I need to gather several individuals for a quest, including a man whom I have seen, but who has not seen me!

ERYSICHTON. *(Pause.)* Yes, I can see that you're perfectly within your wits.

PHOEBE. I'm being completely serious.

ERYSICHTON. I know, and that's what makes you creepy.

PHOEBE. No, no, listen. Prometheus told me that to save him...

ERYSICHTON. Save him? Save who?

PHOEBE. Prometheus.

ERYSICHTON. Yes, I should have seen that. Go on.

PHOEBE. So Prometheus told me that to save him, I must seek several individuals: A man who I have seen, but who has not seen me. That's you.

ERYSICHTON. Yes, of course.

PHOEBE. And then a man who is a son of Prometheus, but also a son of Zeus.

ERYSICHTON. I would love to see how they work that family complication out.

PHOEBE. And then an immortal woman whose womb is never to pass on her immortality. She and two of her attendants are the last to accompany us.

ERYSICHTON. Us?

PHOEBE. Are you slow in the head?

ERYSICHTON. Am *I* slow in the head?

PHOEBE. I made it explicitly clear that you're supposed to come with me.

ERYSICHTON. Being the attractive woman that you are, I'm sure that you could persuade me to come to many places with you—except for the small fact that you're crazy. But I may even be able to look past that, if the location is exotic enough.

PHOEBE. You don't believe me.

ERYSICHTON. Now you're catching on.

PHOEBE. But I need you.

ERYSICHTON. As flattering as that is, I'm afraid I can't help you.

(ERYSICHTON turns to leave, but PHOEBE stops him.)

PHOEBE. No, wait, this is a call from a god!

ERYSICHTON. A god! Well, a Titan really, and they're not actually in power these days.

PHOEBE. The immortals must be heeded!

ERYSICHTON. The immortals! Yes, there's quite a few of those, you know. The pesky things breed faster than rabbits, if you believe the stories. But you see, I don't.

PHOEBE. You don't what?

ERYSICHTON. I don't believe the stories.

PHOEBE. I don't think I understand.

ERYSICHTON. Well, I know it's a difficult concept for most people to grasp, engrained as it is within our culture, but, you see, I don't believe in the gods.

PHOEBE. You don't believe that they can do what they say they do?

ERYSICHTON. I don't believe they exist.

PHOEBE. What?

ERYSICHTON. They're made up. There are no gods.

PHOEBE. That's ridiculous.

ERYSICHTON. Ridiculous? Well, let's talk about ridiculous. What's ridiculous is that people think the sun is some man in a flying chariot. What's ridiculous is that people think that lightning is caused by a man hurling bolts made from a forge. What's ridiculous is that otherwise rational people believe there's some woman who is the source of universal wisdom, clanking around in a bunch of armor and an ugly helmet.

PHOEBE. So you're telling me that you believe that all of these gods which everyone else believes in—are—are what? Dreams? Fancies? Lies? That the rest of the world is wrong and that you, insignificant you, are right?

ERYSICHTON. That's exactly what I'm telling you.

PHOEBE. Then you better not get caught in a thunder storm, because you'll be Zeus' prime target.

ERYSICHTON. And what about you? Are you not going against him with this little quest of yours?

PHOEBE. Why of course I wouldn't be so—oh.

ERYSICHTON. You against the Mighty Twelve of the Pantheon! I think I'm a small worry, compared to your heresies. I don't believe in the gods, but I am leaving them alone. You do believe in the gods, but are seeking to thwart their will and save their enemies. I don't think Zeus' prime target is me. It's you, my dear.

PHOEBE. But there's more to it. In the vision, I saw Zeus as well—he was so cruel to Prometheus—

ERYSICHTON. And you think he'll be any gentler with you? No, even if I did believe in the gods, I would still consider this to be the ultimate stupid idea.

PHOEBE. But—but I had a vision.

ERYSICHTON. You had a dream. Or an overactive imagination. A flutter of the mind.

PHOEBE. That—that couldn't be possible.

ERYSICHTON. Much more possible than a Titan bestowing upon you a quest.

PHOEBE. So you think I am a ranting, mad woman?

ERYSICHTON. No, just a Greek. With all of our supposed wisdom, we're as superstitious as the most barbaric cultures.

PHOEBE. So you think I have been deceived?

ERYSICHTON. You could be a whole myriad of things. Just not inspired by a Titan.

PHOEBE. All of my life I had supposed myself to be nothing. I mustn't reach too far, I mustn't expect too much—

ERYSICHTON. Yes, we're told that they are jealous gods.

PHOEBE. Except for Prometheus. He gave to mankind where the other gods only take. I thought—now I don't even have my position at the Oracle anymore. I can't even give the gods that humble offering.

ERYSICHTON. Now what was your name?

PHOEBE. I am nothing. My name is nobody.

(PHOEBE turns to exit.)

ERYSICHTON. No. Stop. Please, stop. You lost your position at the Oracle?

PHOEBE. It's complicated.

ERYSICHTON. What's your name?

PHOEBE. Phoebe.

ERYSICHTON. Phoebe, perhaps I'm wrong. Perhaps there are gods and perhaps the Titan Prometheus gave you a vision.

PHOEBE. If you're trying to comfort me, you're terrible at it.

ERYSICHTON. Don't take me as your guide! What do I know? I am some farmer's son from some country province. If you truly think you have had a vision, then follow your own experiences.

PHOEBE. But you don't believe me.

ERYSICHTON. And why does it matter whether I believe you?

PHOEBE. But if my vision was real, you're part of the quest.

ERYSICHTON. Or perhaps you have the wrong man.

PHOEBE. You were the only part that made sense to me.

ERYSICHTON. The man who is a son of Prometheus, yet a son of Zeus. Well, to be a son of Prometheus, one only has to have mortal blood, for Prometheus created humankind. We are all sons and daughters of Prometheus. To be a son of Zeus—well, that's more rare, despite his philandering. Yet the riddle is plain. Who is the most famous son of Zeus?

PHOEBE. Heracles?

ERYSICHTON. His exploits have reached even my part of the country, however stretched and distorted his adventures may have become.

PHOEBE. But the immortal woman whose womb is never to pass on her immortality—do you know who her and her attendants are?

ERYSICHTON. Being a religious woman, I thought that one would have been easy for you. For her to be

an immortal, she's probably a goddess.

PHOEBE. A goddess? I have to recruit a goddess?

ERYSICHTON. To free a Titan, did you expect any thing less? A goddess whose womb never passes on her immortality? Why, that would have to be a virgin goddess.

PHOEBE. But there are a number of virgin goddesses.

ERYSICHTON. Well, at least you know it's not Aphrodite.

PHOEBE. Prometheus said that she had attendants. That's Artemis!

ERYSICHTON. Exactly. The goddess of the moon, the goddess of the hunt, surrounded by her female nymphs, but who has sworn to remain a perpetual virgin.

PHOEBE. You're better than Oedipus! But wait—if you think it was just a dream, then why would it have any meaning at all? How could there be answers to the riddles?

ERYSICHTON. The mind is a shadowy thing, full of meaning and chaos both. There are many wise things beneath the waters that we can glean. Maybe the mind attempts to tell us things through dreams.

PHOEBE. Or perhaps it's the conduit for the gods.

ERYSICHTON. You have your explanations, I have mine. But as it is, I have to leave with our conflict unresolved. I have to return to my father and deliver him his flimsy peace of mind.

PHOEBE. You're leaving me?

ERYSICHTON. I already told you, I don't believe in the gods.

PHOEBE. Then believe in me. Come with me and we'll see whether we can prove this vision true or false.

ERYSICHTON. Phoebe—you tempt me, you truly do, if only to spend more time with you—superstitious as you are, you seem—nice.

PHOEBE. Then come.

ERYSICHTON. That would be disastrous. Put a rebel and a heretic together, we'd have lightning dancing all around us.

PHOEBE. Maybe we can get Hera on our side. She seems to like to provoke her husband.

ERYSICHTON. I don't know, she's pretty moody.

PHOEBE. Maybe Hades.

ERYSICHTON. But once we face anything life threatening, he'd turn on us just to get us in his kingdom.

PHOEBE. Eros is the only one we can trust then. With him at least, there will be romance.

ERYSICHTON. I like you, Phoebe.

PHOEBE. Then come, just so I can keep you company.

ERYSICHTON. I may be many kinds of scoundrels, but one thing I'm not is a liar. I at least try to be honest in my weakness.

PHOEBE. Then let me convince you and make you honest. The Immortals have been the foundation of my life. When I was born, my mother, with her last gasping breaths, told the physician that if my father could not be found to claim me, then it was the gods will that I be raised by the Oracle of Delphi. There I have been ever since.

ERYSICHTON. It doesn't surprise me that you didn't get out much.

PHOEBE. Erysichton, for a moment try not to be clever and listen to me. Ever since I was a child, I—I have had these yearnings, these feelings that I am—that I don't belong here; that when we were created, we were meant for something else. In my life I've had these conflicting feelings of self loathing and...

and...

ERYSICHTON. Self worship?

PHOEBE. We are the children of a Titan.

ERYSICHTON. I'm afraid I remain unconvinced, dear Phoebe.

PHOEBE. Promise me this, then. If we cross paths again, let us at least share a meal together.

ERYSICHTON. That is an oath I can give, my little oracle.

PHOEBE. Oracle?

ERYSICHTON. Well, if you're selling their wares, you ought to at least retain their title. Goodbye.

PHOEBE. But what am I to do?

ERYSICHTON. Find Heracles, of course.

(Exit ERYSUCHTON. Exit PHOEBE.)

SCENE THREE

(Enter CHORUS.)

CHORUS. Confused, unsure, Phoebe begins her journey. Many miles she travels over many days, asking locals for the whereabouts of the great Heracles. At first she meets no success. But then, a trail of stories begins to develop. A great deed in this town, an impossible battle accomplished in another village. Holy Phoebe follows these stories, as a wolf follows blood.

(Two thieves emerge from the chorus, removing their masks.)

THIEF 1. She'll be easy pickings—no companions, no one to look for her. After we have had use of her, I think she will fetch a good price as a slave.

THIEF 2. Alone in the world, you think?

THIEF 1. Alone enough.

THIEF 2. I don't know--

THIEF 1. What's there not to know?

THIEF 2. I've never seen myself doing—doing those sort of things.

THIEF 1. What, you think you'll be punished by the gods? We do nothing worse than the things they do. She was just down the hill. She'll be here soon.

THIEF 2. You can't do it alone?

THIEF 1. It will take two.

THIEF 2. All right.

THIEF 1. I hear her. Hide.

(The THIEVES hide. Enter PHOEBE. Tired, she rests.)

Now!

PHOEBE. No! No, no, stop, don't come any closer! Gods protect me!

(The THIEVES grab her, as PHOEBE struggles and screams.)

THIEF 2. Shut her up!

(THIEF 1 hits Phoebe on the back of her head with the handle of his knife. PHOEBE crumples to the floor unconscious.)

THIEF 1. There.

THIEF 2. We need to run.

THIEF 1. Nobody heard her.

THIEF 2. Are you serious? Those screams could be heard a mile off.

THIEF 1. There's nobody around. We're safe. Look at this stone around her neck. It looks valuable. Do you think it will fetch a good price?

THIEF 2. I shouldn't have agreed to this. Let's go.

THIEF 1. We haven't received our prize yet.

THIEF 2. I have a bad feeling.

THIEF 1. I'm at least taking the stone.

THIEF 2. All right. Be quick and then we'll sell it.

(THIEF 1 stoops over Phoebe to take the stone. When he touches it, both THIEVES are knocked back. The STONE PROTECTOR, a stately looking, supernatural woman—possibly a nymph, an oread—appears.)

STONE PROTECTOR. Cursed are you, mortals, trespassing against that which is holy!

THIEF 2. Run! The gods are after us!

THIEF 1. It was just a shock—something about that stone—

THIEF 2. What? Don't you see it?

THIEF 1. See what?

THIEF 2. The woman!

THIEF 1. Yes, the woman—we can get the stone off her later. Help me carry her.

THIEF 2. No, not her, you fool.

(Pointing to the Stone Protector)

Her!

THIEF 1. I don't understand...

THIEF 2. A goddess—or a nymph—an oread—a woman, something is standing right there in front of us!

THIEF 1. Are you all right?

THIEF 2. Then you really don't see her?

STONE PROTECTOR. Justice comes for everyone, sooner or later. For you both, it shall be sooner.

THIEF 2. Run! We must run! She'll destroy us!

THIEF 1. You've gone mad!

STONE PROTECTOR. Behold the instrument of the immortals!

(HERACLES, a mighty hero, enters wearing a lion's skin over his other clothing and a club in his hand.)

HERACLES. Step away from her!

THIEF 1. *(Pulling out a sword.)* Careful, or I'll stick you.

HERACLES. You think a rusty sword will be enough to slay Heracles, son of Zeus?

THIEF 2. Heracles! Look what you've led us into, you idiot!

THIEF 1. Draw your sword! I can't take him alone!

THIEF 2. We need to run.

THIEF 1. He'll catch us, for sure. We have to stand our ground—draw your sword!

THIEF 2. All right. Hades, I'll greet you tonight!

(THIEF2 draws his sword. HERACLES attacks the two THIEVES and, after an initial struggle, he efficiently kills them both. After slaying them, HERACLES kneels beside PHOEBE.)

HERACLES. Wake up—woman, wake up—

PHOEBE. *(Regaining consciousness.)* Hm—uh—

HERACLES. Are you all right?

(PHOEBE starts awake and leaps to her feet.)

PHOEBE. The thieves!

(She sees their dead bodies.)

Oh—are they—?

HERACLES. Dead? Yes. I had to kill them to protect you.

PHOEBE. Pardon me—I have never seen a dead body before.

HERACLES. You are a fortunate woman then.

PHOEBE. Thank you stranger. I—oh, oh, that was close, wasn't it?

HERACLES. It's not smart to travel unaccompanied. It's a lucky thing that I chanced by.

PHOEBE. Chance? No, some god or Titan was at the bottom of it, I think. Someone is protecting my quest.

HERACLES. Your quest?

PHOEBE. Never mind. I owe you my life. What's your name?

HERACLES. Heracles.

PHOEBE. Funny. Now really, what's your name?

HERACLES. That is my real name.

PHOEBE. You were named after the hero?

HERACLES. Well, I suppose, I am the hero.

PHOEBE. Heracles? The son of Zeus, who aided the gods in defeating Gaia's giants? Fellow of the Argonauts, killer of monsters, doer of great deeds?

HERACLES. That nicely sums it up.

PHOEBE. Well, then *someone* is smiling down upon me, for I was in search of you!

(PHOEBE embraces HERACLES.)

HERACLES. Whoa.

PHOEBE. I have been called upon by Prometheus to gather a group of heroes to deliver him! You were among the names he gave me!

HERACLES. I'm sure he did.

PHOEBE. Oh. So you don't believe me either then?

HERACLES. Of course I believe you. I've been mingling with the gods since my birth. However, Prometheus is being punished by my father. I don't think it would be wise to cross Zeus.

PHOEBE. But—but doesn't Prometheus know the future? If that's the case, if Prometheus says that you help save him, then you must save him!

HERACLES. I am Heracles. I've met Prometheus's brother Atlas, who holds up the sky, and I outwitted

him. Although Prometheus may be a Titan, it certainly doesn't make him my master. I can make my own decisions.

PHOEBE. But Prometheus said for me to find you— and, as impossible as it seemed to me, I found you easily. Doesn't that mean something?

HERACLES. *(Pause.)* It's growing very dark. We can talk about this in the morning.

PHOEBE. All right.

HERACLES. As it is, you're alone, and we've seen that this isn't safe country. You will need my protection. We can sleep here tonight. We'll be safe, guarded by these trees.

PHOEBE. The trees. Some say there are spirits in the trees—

HERACLES. Yes, I feel the dryads strongly here. And they are friendly to us. It'll be safer if we sleep close together. Do you trust me?

PHOEBE. After all that, yes, I trust you. And I am very tired.

HERACLES. You don't have traveling supplies. Use my lion's skin as a blanket.

PHOEBE. But then you'll be cold.

HERACLES. The elements invigorate me.

(PHOEBE and HERACLES lay on the ground and prepare to sleep.)

Prometheus. What is he like? I've never met him.

PHOEBE. He is—compassionate. Wise. Good. The advocate of man.

HERACLES. Some call him a trickster. A demon.

PHOEBE. Don't believe that. I never saw kinder eyes. Good night.

HERACLES. Good night.

PHOEBE. Now you're sure you won't get cold in the—

(HERACLES is already snoring.)

Hm. I guess not. Whatever gods have protected me this night, touch his eyes. If this quest I'm engaging is truly the will of the Fates, then convince him.

(PHOEBE goes to sleep. ATHENA appears. She walks to HERACLES.)

ATHENA. Heracles. Heracles.

HERACLES. Who is it?

ATHENA. Do you know me?

HERACLES. Yes, Lady Athena.

ATHENA. This woman beside you is holy. A pythia.

HERACLES. She's a pythia?

ATHENA. Heracles, help her.

HERACLES. To free my father's enemy?

ATHENA. Accompany her and your course shall be made evident.

HERACLES. Does my father approve of this?

ATHENA. Your father is free, but bound.

HERACLES. What do you mean?

ATHENA. We Olympians are about to reap what we've sown. Our pride will come at a cost.

HERACLES. How can I fight against my own father?

ATHENA. It is the right thing.

(ATHENA disappears. HERACLES awakes and starts up.)

HERACLES. Ah!

PHOEBE. *(Awakening.)* What is it?! What's wrong?

HERACLES. Phoebe, I'm joining your quest.

(Blackout.)

SCENE FOUR

(Enter the CHORUS.)

CHORUS. Erysichton. Erysichton was on his way back to his father's farm. Erysichton who thought he had rid himself of oracles and prophecies and visions—he thought such things were far behind him. The gods were far behind him. But, Erysichton, you cannot be rid of the gods, whether you believe in them or not. Once the gods have marked you, they are tenacious and will get their way. Run, run, run as you might, into the belly of a monster or into the center of the earth, your running will not be enough. Erysichton was on his way back to his father's farm, not knowing that his path nearly coincided with that of Phoebe and Heracles. Erysichton was on his way back to his father's farm. Erysichton.

(Out of the CHORUS emerge four HARPIES. Enter ERYSICHTON, attacked by the HARPIES. ERYSICHTON has a sword, trying to fend off the HARPIES.)

ERYSICHTON. Get away! If you understand the tongue of men, get away!

(The HARPIES scream, scratch, attack, defend, etc. Enter HERMES.)

HERMES. Call upon the gods to give you aid. They will assist you.

ERYSICHTON. I don't believe in you or any sort of gods, Hermes!

HERMES. Do you often have conversations with those you don't believe in then?

ERYSICHTON. I'm having conversations with a dream, a delusion, a fancy of the mind created by a stressful situation! And, as you can clearly see, my situation is stressful enough!

HERMES. Your father's slaves are dead, your provisions ruined...

ERYSICHTON. Thank you, that's very comforting!

HERMES. You're on your own, against beings that you cannot hope to defeat...

ERYSICHTON. Again, you're being very helpful!

HERMES. I can help. If you'll only learn to ask for it.

ERYSICHTON. Ask for what? For my imagination to defeat these monsters? For my fancy to come off victorious? Well, fine then! Run, run, run to your imaginary gods and tell them that I need help! If the clouds above Olympus have any real substance then, sure, I'm asking for their help!

HERMES. That's good enough for me.

(HERMES runs off, exits. Enter HERACLES and PHOEBE, who runs to ERYSICHTON fending off a HARPY with a sword which she has acquired from one of the Thieves.)

ERYSICHTON. Phoebe!

PHOEBE. Here, here, we must get cover!

ERYSICHTON. What about him?

PHOEBE. Believe me, he can take care of himself.

(HERACLES kills or drives off the HARPIES. ERYSICHTON looks on stunned. The battle ends.)

ERYSICHTON. Thank you. Both of you.

HERACLES. Are you the Erysichton that Phoebe told me about?

ERYSICHTON. Er, yes...

HERACLES. You can repay your debt to us by joining our quest.

ERYSICHTON. Still on that quest idea, are we, my little Oracle?

PHOEBE. Did you doubt it?

ERYSICHTON. I've learned to doubt everything. But it's reassuring to see that some things stay constant.

HERACLES. You'll join us?

ERYSICHTON. What was your name?

HERACLES. Heracles.

ERYSICHTON. Funny. What is it really?

PHOEBE. Don't you see the lion's skin?

ERYSICHTON. Could you really be the man who has so many big stories told about him?

HERACLES. Do you doubt those stories?

ERYSICHTON. Well, Phoebe, it seems that you have happened upon a lucky twist—you found your hero after all.

PHOEBE. Now doesn't this prove that Prometheus truly did come to me?

ERYSICHTON. It proves you have unusual tenacity.

PHOEBE. Still the doubter, I see.

ERYSICHTON. Still the zealot, I see.

PHOEBE. Even after fighting with harpies straight from the stories?

ERYSICHTON. That just proves the existence of harpies. Your gods have yet to manifest.

PHOEBE. Haven't they?

ERYSICHTON. Of course not.

PHOEBE. Well, what of meeting the great Heracles?

ERYSICHTON. He looks no more a god than any other man. Well, besides a well-built body, but I have seen men just as strong.

HERACLES. If you're intending to make me angry—

ERYSICHTON. We too easily interpret coincidences as some sort of mysterious gift from the gods.

HERACLES. Idiot. Athena herself told me to join the quest.

ERYSICHTON. And I have seen Hermes, and Phoebe has seen Prometheus! Delusions seem to be all too common around here.

HERACLES. Hermes came to you?

ERYSICHTON. Well, what my mind was trying to convince me was Hermes. But I knew better. Oh, and what did this figment of the mind tell me? That the gods were going to come to my aid! And you saw for yourself that such a promise was not kept.

PHOEBE. Erysichton, what are you talking about? *We* came.

ERYSICHTON. The only thing that is goddess-like about you, Phoebe, is your name sake.

PHOEBE. How do you know that the gods didn't send us? Perhaps we were the promised help.

ERYSICHTON. If the gods wanted to prove themselves, they would have done something more dazzling.

PHOEBE. Oh, you would have just explained a thunderbolt away as well!

ERYSICHTON. You're probably right. Even if one of them appeared to me...

PHOEBE. One of them has!

ERYSICHTON. ...then I would sooner think I was insane than assume that they were real. I will not be taken in, I will not be deceived!

HERACLES. Whether you believe us or not, you're going to come with us.

ERYSICHTON. And why is that, muscle man?

HERACLES. Because you owe us a debt of honor. We have saved your life.

ERYSICHTON. I'm sorry, but I need to get back to my father's—

HERACLES. The gods will hold you responsible for your debt.

ERYSICHTON. Let this sink into whatever mass you pass off as a mind: I will not let the names of imaginary deities or the tales passed on by storytellers and gossips be used to manipulate me!

HERACLES. If I didn't know that the gods said that we need you, I would create such a pain within your frame that you would not soon forget.

ERYSICHTON. I don't care whether you're the real Heracles or not. I wouldn't be intimidated whether you were Achilles, Perseus or Jason and all of the Argonauts put together!

HERACLES. I'll crush you like a beetle!

(HERACLES is about to attack ERYSICHTON, but PHOEBE stops him.)

PHOEBE. Heracles, stop! We can't force him.

HERACLES. I certainly can.

PHOEBE. No. It is not a true gift to the gods, if it's not given willingly. Let's go.

(Exit HERACLES and PHOEBE. Enter HERMES.)

HERMES. Phoebe was right. We did send them to help you.

ERYSICHTON. Typical. Trying to take credit for humanity's efforts.

HERMES. Or is it you who doesn't recognize your dependence on a complex universe.

ERYSICHTON. I can't hear you. I can't see you. You don't exist.

HERMES. Maybe I don't. Maybe I do. How can you truly know, if you don't at least try an experiment and see if we're real?

ERYSICHTON. I will not be manipulated. Not by Phoebe's guilt, not by Heracles threats, not by your—my fancies. I am my own agent.

HERMES. And they were their own agents when they saved you.

ERYSICHTON. I thought you said you sent them?

HERMES. It gets complicated. But I'm not here to discuss the tensions between free will and the Fates.

ERYSICHTON. Good. Let us not discuss anything at all. I would like my sanity back.

HERMES. Whether you believe in the Immortals, the question still remains: do you believe in honoring a debt? Do you have a moral code?

ERYSICHTON. Perhaps I don't. Perhaps man's morality is just pretense to set up another way for them to control each other.

HERMES. Do you truly believe that?

ERYSICHTON. What is right and wrong, except that man has made it so?

(Exit HERMES. Looking around, relieved that HERMES is gone, ERYSICHTON, too, exits. The LIGHTS dim and then rise again to reveal PHOEBE and HERACLES, once again asleep. DARK SPIRITS, or the CHORUS, draw near and then start dancing around HERACLES, taunting him. HERACLES speaks in his sleep, lashing out.)

HERACLES. The giants—destroy the giants— Olympus must be maintained!

(PHOEBE wakes. HERACLES becomes very agitated and afraid in his sleep. The DARK SPIRITS' dance becomes more frenzied. PHOEBE does not see the Dark Spirits, but is very

concerned.)

Die, monsters! No—No—Megara, the children—are these our children? Ach, agh, ah, ah—the gods have forsaken us!

PHOEBE. Heracles! Heracles! Wake up!

(HERACLES awakes, still frightened, unaware that he has changed from the dream to current life. He is weeping now.)

HERACLES. Megara, I'm so sorry. I'm so very sorry—

PHOEBE. Heracles, you're awake, you're awake—it was a dream.

(HERACLES looks around himself stunned. The DARK SPIRITS slink off and exit.)

It was a dream. A horrible dream, from the sounds of it.

HERACLES. If only it had been a dream—how I wish—I can't stand it, I want the gods to kill me!

(HERACLES collapses, the tears returning.)

PHOEBE. Heracles?

HERACLES. I know what you're thinking. The great Heracles, weeping like an infant!

PHOEBE. No, no, I wasn't—Heracles, you're trembling—can it be that you're afraid like the rest of us?

HERACLES. Myself—I'm afraid of my wretched self.

PHOEBE. I don't understand.

HERACLES. You don't want me with you on this quest.

PHOEBE. Of course I do. Who could be more useful than Heracles?

HERACLES. I bring tragedy in my wake.

PHOEBE. Tell me. Tell me what this is.

HERACLES. Hera hates me. I am the son of Zeus, yes, but also the son of Alcmene, a mortal princess who he slept with. Hera has never forgiven me of being the illegitimate son of her husband. She—she curses me with madness—there are times when—when I am not in control.

PHOEBE. But—but then that's not your fault.

HERACLES. I should be confined! I'm not safe! I should be chained and locked away!

PHOEBE. There is no chain that can hold you.

HERACLES. You're right, of course. Not even the chains of reason. Not even the chains of sanity. I'm completely unfettered. And that is what I am, you see. I—I did a most horrible thing.

PHOEBE. You're a good man. You couldn't—

HERACLES. I killed my own children.

PHOEBE. What?

HERACLES. My wife Megara—she bore me beautiful children. But in a time of great stress in my life, Hera took advantage of my melancholy and madness descended upon me. In my mind I thought I was reliving the events when I was helping the gods defend Olympus from Gaia's Giants. I thought I was slaughtering monsters with my bow and arrow—but when this dark veil was ripped from me—my children were dead at my feet.

PHOEBE. Oh—

HERACLES. I locked myself up! But the gods called me—I should be hidden away, where I can't hurt anyone! But the gods called—

PHOEBE. And Megara?

HERACLES. I released her from our marriage. I have stayed away from her. She loves me still, wanted to help me, but I wouldn't put her in danger as well. I hate myself.

PHOEBE. Well, I don't hate you. You have done great good for humanity. You've vanquished many evils.

HERACLES. Humanity! Oh, yes, they benefit from my labors, but at what cost? Anything I personally come to care for, anyone I come to love—others benefit, but my own life is cursed. I have given up my own humanity for humanity.

PHOEBE. Heracles, you must stay. The gods have willed it.

HERACLES. Curse the gods for what they have done to me! They wreak their petty wills and private vengeance upon the innocent! How am I or Megara or my children responsible for my father's adulteries? Why does Hera bring her jealousy upon our heads? Why does my father plague humankind with his lusts? We had no choice in the matter!

PHOEBE. And that is why you must come with me. There is one immortal who has proven that it's not his own comfort and pleasure he seeks. The immortal who preferred to be punished, than to have us be punished. He is Prometheus.

HERACLES. Prometheus—

PHOEBE. Please, I can't do this without you.

HERACLES. Why aren't you afraid of me?

PHOEBE. I'm afraid—but not of you.

HERACLES. Of what then?

PHOEBE. You've been honest with me. I will be honest with you. I am afraid of myself, too. I'm hardly of the stature to threaten anyone physically but—but this quest. This quest—what if I've convinced you and any others we are able to persuade to join us—what if we're drawn into danger because of it? Into death?

HERACLES. I'm afraid of neither, my lady.

PHOEBE. Nor I. But what if—what if it's a—a fancy on my part? A delusion like when you thought you were fighting giants. What if this fire behind my eyes, this supposed vision is nothing but a vain trick of the mind. What if I've created this whole story, a myth of madness, out of the darkness of sleeping thoughts and the vapors of a steaming imagination?

HERACLES. You had a vision from the gods.

PHOEBE. And you thought you were fighting giants. Heracles, if we abandon this quest, it would be because of my madness, not yours.

HERACLES. No.

PHOEBE. Erysichton has placed even deeper fears within me. What if—what if the gods are just the universal madness? All of our frenzied make believes combined into some semblance of a story? Disorganization trying to become organized.

HERACLES. Do you believe that?

PHOEBE (*Pause.*) The fear comes upon me at times.

HERACLES. Does this—this thought give you peace?

PHOEBE. No. But what does peace have to do with it? Is that just another illusion as well?

HERACLES. Yes, there are times when I feel the gods inflict my madness, and then I become deluded. It is then, as you say, hard to tell what is coming from me and what is reality itself. But I have also received

great peace at unlikely times.

PHOEBE. What kind of peace?

HERACLES. When I feel something grab my mind and say, “Oh, you don’t have it right yet, but you’re close. Seek understanding and you shall find me.” That fire behind my eyes, as you call it, then burns in my chest and then throughout my whole body and—and, for a moment, I almost understand the gods. I am almost one of them.

(Blackout.)

SCENE FIVE

(Enter the CHORUS.)

CHORUS. There are tales. Tales of a woman in the woods. Light of foot, she hunts like a man with her other female companions. She is so skilled with her arrows that she can outmatch any hero in an archery match. She can kill a fleeing deer with a single shot hundreds of feet away. She protects her chastity and that of her companions—virgins, all of them. Once a man named Actaeon gazed upon them wickedly and she turned him into a stag and his own hunting dogs killed him. She will not endure the filthy gaze of mankind. There are whispers that she is the twin sister of Apollo, an Olympian, a goddess. Goddess of the moon. Goddess of the hunt. Goddess of animals. Ironically, goddess of women in childbirth. She is called Artemis. She is called Diana. She is called Luna. She is called a goddess.

(ERYSICHTON enters screaming, ARTEMIS and two of her COMPANIONS, CALLISTO and IPHIGENIA, all of whom carry bows and arrows, emerge from the Chorus, while the rest of the CHORUS exit. The WOMEN taunt and heckle ERYSICHTON as they surround him. They draw their bows and arrows, about to shoot him when HERACLES and PHOEBE enter.)

PHOEBE. Erysichton!

ERYSICHTON. Phoebe!

HERACLES. Artemis, stop!

ARTEMIS. Good morning, Heracles. Wish to join my hunt?

HERACLES. That man is not to be harmed!

ARTEMIS. Mortal man cannot see my company and live, Heracles. You know that.

HERACLES. We need him.

ARTEMIS. Why?

HERACLES. Prometheus has come to this woman and told her that he is one of those needed to free him.

And so are you. That is why I have led this woman here, so that we could find you and that you may join our quest. It is the will of the gods.

ERYSICHTON. While we’re having this little conversation, is there any possible way that these very charming women can stop pointing their arrows at my head?

CALLISTO. Silence, man!

ERYSICHTON. Silent as a clam, that’s me.

ARTEMIS. I’m not beholden to any Titan, brother. He can rot on his rock for all I care. My women and I

have game tonight!

(ARTEMIS, CALLISTO and IPHIGENEA yell with a bloodlust.)

HERACLES. Athena has confirmed the quest!

ARTEMIS. And I deny it. If Athena wants to discuss the matter with me, she can come and talk!

PHOEBE. Heracles, can an immortal deny a challenge?

HERACLES. That's clever, Phoebe! No, they can't.

ARTEMIS. *(Redrawing her arrow.)* He's mine!

HERACLES. Artemis, I challenge you to a contest and, as ransom, the winner will receive Erysichton to do with as he pleases.

ARTEMIS. *(Thoughtful pause. Then)* Or as *she* pleases.

HERACLES. Also, if you lose then you have to join our quest.

ARTEMIS. And if I win then I can claim that woman with you as part of my company.

HERACLES. Phoebe?

ERYSICHTON. Phoebe, don't—

PHOEBE. For Erysichton and the quest, I accept the terms.

HERACLES. But before I ransom this man's life, if I succeed, he must swear that he, too, will join us on our quest.

ERYSICHTON. What? No!

HERACLES. Then you may kill him when you please, Artemis.

ERYSICHTON. No, wait! This isn't fair!

HERACLES. Fair? This will be the second time we have saved your life and yet you still refuse to return the debt of honor. You dare talk about fair?

ERYSICHTON. I—accidentally—stumbled upon them dancing, I didn't do anything wrong.

PHOEBE. Erysichton, this isn't about what you've done wrong. It's about your refusal to do what's right. Heracles has offered to champion for you, I have offered my freedom if he loses— can't you sacrifice for those who have sacrificed for you?

ERYSICHTON. Phoebe—

PHOEBE. I know that you're a better man than you are pretending to be.

ERYSICHTON. All right, all right! I don't have much of a choice, do I? If Heracles wins then I'll join the blasted quest!

HERACLES. We're all agreed then.

ARTEMIS. An archery match?

HERACLES. No. Shall we wrestle?

ARTEMIS. No. But some sort of battle? You with your club, me with my arrows.

PHOEBE. What about something else entirely? A riddle. I will whisper the answer into one of your attendants ears and then we'll know that I am being honest.

ERYSICHTON. Phoebe, are you mad? This is Heracles we're talking about! You know his reputation for intellect.

HERACLES. A reputation I don't deserve. You're talking to the man who outwitted Atlas and discovered the secret of the Hydra. I accept.

ARTEMIS. As do I. Tell Iphigeneia the answer.

(PHOEBE walks over to IPHIGENEIA and whispers the answer in her ear.)

PHOEBE. It has a single womb, but capable of birthing hundreds. Its kiss leaves blood on the lips, while yet it sustains life. What is it?

ARTEMIS. You try to flatter me and disguise it from me at the same time. The riddle is transparent. It's about me. I have a single womb, but as the goddess of childbearing, I birth hundreds. Any man who would dare kiss me, shall certainly taste of blood. And yet I sustain the life of infants and young animals. Is that the answer, Iphigeneia?

IPHIGENEIA. No, my lady, I'm afraid not.

HERACLES. Leave it to a goddess to think that everything relates back to her. My answer is much simpler. It's a pomegranate. A pomegranate is encased in a womb, but has hundreds of seeds. When you eat its seeds, they stain your mouth with blood colored juice; and yet it's a fruit, thus sustains life.

IPHIGENEIA. A pomegranate is the correct answer.

ARTEMIS. I smell treachery in this! Heracles already knew the answer!

HERACLES. I did not!

ARTEMIS. You're a liar.

HERACLES. Don't anger me, Artemis. Goddess or no, I don't let anyone cast doubt on my honor.

ARTEMIS. *(Tense pause.)* Then you have won. Callisto, Iphigeneia and I will join your quest. But first may I send Callisto to tell the rest of my women that I will be gone for some time?

HERACLES. It's a trick.

ARTEMIS. I won't doubt your honor, if you won't doubt mine.

HERACLES. All right.

ARTEMIS. Callisto, go to the women and tell them that we'll be gone then until this quest is over. Until then, they are to guard these forests and to remember their vows. After that, return as fast as you can.

CALLISTO. I'll be swift.

ERYSICHTON. How will she be able to find us again? We'll be miles off before she can get back.

CALLISTO. I could track you in a blizzard, Erysichton, you're so clumsy in your movement.

ERYSICHTON. Why, I resent that.

CALLISTO. Why, you resemble that.

ERYSICHTON. I don't care if you think you are a nymph, there was not a woman in that dancing circle that I would have considered worthy of my intentions.

CALLISTO. Do not insult me, man. I've promised to not kill you, but I haven't promised not to hurt you.

ERYSICHTON. Erm—yes, of course.

CALLISTO. I'll find you before the evening is over, Lady Artemis.

ARTEMIS. Thank you, Callisto.

(Exit CALLISTO.)

ERYSICHTON. Well, what now?

PHOEBE. We have our company, just as Prometheus said we would. So now we'll go free him!

ERYSICHTON. You rather lost my point. We don't know where he is.

PHOEBE. Uh, yes. I guess that could make it difficult.

ARTEMIS. It's rumored that he's in the North. Between here and Olympus, in Thessaly. He's kept somewhere on a hill in a series of barren valleys. From what my scouts have gathered, there's some sort

of cave or labyrinth to get to the hill. It's said that there's a monster guarding the first threshold and then another more powerful guardian at Prometheus Rock.

ERYSICHTON. Sounds like a picnic.

PHOEBE. Shush, Erysichton. Do you know how to get us through there, Artemis?

ARTEMIS. No.

ERYSICHTON. Great use the goddess turns out to be.

ARTEMIS. But I do know how to get us to the general area, pest.

PHOEBE. That's a start. Lead the way then, Artemis.

(Exeunt.)

SCENE SIX

(Enter AJAX and JASON.)

JASON. Well, Ajax, how do you think my head will look on a platter?

AJAX. We can't despair.

JASON. Can't we? The king has told us that we're to find someone to battle the Minotaur or he will throw us in to fight him instead. We have found no such hero, so I'm sure I can find plenty to despair about when I'm making my way down a monster's throat.

AJAX. Jason, we can still find that someone, that great hero which will rid us of this plague.

JASON. When we asked the great Theseus to slay another minotaur, like the one he already killed, he quaked like a little girl. Apparently one Minotaur was enough and he didn't want to repeat the experience. What hope do we have in finding someone better?

AJAX. You're right. We're Minotaur meat. You're fortunate. Skinny as you are, you won't prove to be an enticing morsel. The most he'll be tempted to use you for is an after dinner toothpick. But look at me! I'll be the main course!

JASON. What are we going to do?

AJAX. Why don't we run? Get out of Thessaly and make our fortunes elsewhere.

JASON. How about our families, wives, our children?

AJAX. What of them?

JASON. You suggest we just leave everything—everyone behind?

AJAX. Especially that Minotaur.

JASON. That Minotaur...

AJAX. Unless you think you would look good on a spit, with an apple in your mouth.

JASON. We would be branded as cowards—our children would pass down our names in shame...

AJAX. I wonder, does a minotaur cook his meals or will he eat us raw?

JASON. Isn't it better to die in bravery, than live as cowards?

AJAX. Do you think he will wait until we're dead before chewing away at our drumsticks?

JASON. *(Pause.)* You're right. We'll run away.

(PHOEBE's and ERYSICHTON's voices are heard in the distance.)

Who's that?

AJAX. Hide.

(AJAX and Jason hide. Enter ERYSICHTON and PHOEBE.)

ERYSICHTON. So we're to fetch the wood, while they discuss "further plans concerning our quest." It's *your* quest, and now we're relegated to nothing more than servants. What makes them better than us?

PHOEBE. One's a goddess and the other's a son of Zeus.

ERYSICHTON. In all other ways you are lovely, but you're the most gullible woman alive.

PHOEBE. What more does it take to convince you?

ERYSICHTON. None of these supposed deities and demi-deities have shown anything more than their own fair share of humanity.

PHOEBE. What's your explanation then? They're not really Heracles and Artemis?

ERYSICHTON. No, I think they are exactly who they say they are. I grant you that Heracles and Artemis may live up to some of the stories. They may have done heroic things, strange things, things of abnormal capacity...

PHOEBE. You're impossible.

ERYSICHTON. It would be easy for people to tell stories about them, to celebrate their accomplishments. Then over time those stories become embellished and, eventually, it's rumored that they're gods and demi-gods and heroes and nymphs.

PHOEBE. But then they would be liars to maintain such stories when they know better.

ERYSICHTON. Perhaps they don't know better. Perhaps they have been convinced of the stories themselves.

PHOEBE. What?

ERYSICHTON. Perhaps somehow they feel that because of what's happened to them, they've convinced themselves that they're special, that they are somehow—divine.

PHOEBE. It doesn't make sense...

ERYSICHTON. It makes perfect sense!

PHOEBE. No! Erysichton, there's something more complex going on here. I've had my own experiences. I'm not on this quest because some charlatan is manipulating me, or because some delusional mad man convinced me. I am on this quest because I—I, me, myself!—I had a vision! Something immortal, something beautiful, something divine touched my mind and told me that I had a work to do. We're going to free Prometheus.

ERYSICHTON. Then perhaps you're the deluded one. Or...

PHOEBE. Or what?

ERYSICHTON. Or perhaps you're dishonest. Perhaps you're right and that this is more complex than I first assumed—that you have some ulterior purpose yourself.

PHOEBE. Now you're being paranoid.

ERYSICHTON. Perhaps it's not them I ought to be worried about. Perhaps it's you.

PHOEBE. Erysichton, I swear to you...

ERYSICHTON. I've had many betrayals in my life. When the majority of men swear to me, that's when I have learned to suspect them the most.

PHOEBE. I'm not the majority of men.

ERYSICHTON. Yes, you're a woman. Which makes me even more wary.

PHOEBE. You're not being fair, nor sensible.

ERYSICHTON. Perhaps I'm not. Or perhaps I am.

(Pause.)

Whatever the case, we ought to head back to camp. It's starting to get dark and we'll need the fire wood.

(Exit PHOEBE and ERSICHTON. AJAX and JASON re-emerge.)

JASON. Did you hear that? Heracles! Artemis! They travel with great company.

AJAX. Yes, I heard.

JASON. Do you think, Ajax? Perhaps—perhaps we could meet them?

(Enter ZEUS disguised as an old man.)

ZEUS. You'll do more than meet them.

JASON. Who are you?

ZEUS. You're going to join them.

AJAX. We have troubles of our own, old man.

ZEUS. And they'll help you solve them. Come now, Ajax, you're a smart man. Don't tell me you haven't already thought of it.

AJAX. I think I know what you mean, but—wait. How did you know my name?

ZEUS. I know many things.

JASON. Ajax, I'm getting nervous. Let's get out of here.

AJAX. No, wait. Who are you, old man?

ZEUS. I am who I have to be.

AJAX. And you think—you think they would help us?

ZEUS. If you told them the right kind of story.

JASON. You mean lie.

ZEUS. You would be who you have to be.

JASON. That's enough. Ajax, let's go.

ZEUS. Yes, Ajax, go to that minotaur, or to the king empty-handed, or become a fugitive on the run, always looking behind you.

AJAX. See, how do you know things like that?

ZEUS. The gods will assist you. Make a pact with me. Promise me your loyalty. If you do so, although it may cost them their own blood, I will promise you that these people will kill that minotaur.

AJAX. And how are you going to manage that?

ZEUS. The minotaur is one of my sons. His fate is clear to me. But if you need further proof, look into your pouch.

(AJAX does so and finds gold.)

AJAX. Wow—wow, wow, wow! Jason, we're rich!

JASON. How did you do that?

ZEUS. I bless those that serve me.

JASON. Who are you?

ZEUS. I am who I have to be. Now you're smart men. I am sure you can find a way to lure their company

to minotaur's labyrinth. Swear to me, and all will be right.

AJAX. I swear.

JASON. Ajax!

ZEUS. Your word is good enough then. You'd better obey, too, Jason the doubter.

JASON. We don't know who you are.

ZEUS. As I've told you, I am who I have to be. You, too, will be who you have to be.

(Exit ZEUS.)

AJAX. We've been delivered by the gods! The Fates have kissed us!

JASON. There's something wrong...

AJAX. There's nothing wrong. You heard him. All will be right.

JASON. We don't know what we're stepping into.

AJAX. Jason, have some faith. You've always been the pious one, haven't you?

JASON. I've—I've tried to be.

AJAX. Then we'll trust the gods.

JASON. *(In resignation)* We'll trust the gods.

(Exit AJAX and JASON. Blackout.)

SCENE SEVEN

(IPHIGENEIA is washing her hair. Enter ERYSICHTON.)

ERYSICHTON. Oh, pardon me...

IPHIGENEIA. No, don't leave, Erysichton.

ERYSICHTON. All right.

IPHIGENEIA. I wanted to talk to you. To apologize.

ERYSICHTON. Apologize? For what?

IPHIGENEIA. For trying to kill you.

ERYSICHTON. Oh, yes. That.

IPHIGENEIA. I've never felt such—bloodlust. I was caught up in the moment. I wasn't myself.

ERYSICHTON. I would have assumed that hunts like that would happen all the time for Artemis's nymphs.

IPHIGENEIA. I'm not a nymph and I have only recently come into Artemis's—company.

ERYSICHTON. I don't understand.

IPHIGENEIA. My father was Agamemnon.

ERYSICHTON. Agamemnon? The Agamemnon, who defeated Troy?

IPHIGENEIA. Yes.

ERYSICHTON. You're royalty! But then what are you doing here? You're living in the wild when you could be living the life of luxury.

IPHIGENEIA. Before my father embarked to Troy, he upset Artemis. He boasted that he was a better

hunter than she was and then killed a stag in her sacred grove. She was so furious that she stopped the winds so that his ships could not sail.

ERYSICHTON. But you don't believe that Artemis really made the winds stop?

IPHIGENEIA. I've seen her do uncanny things..

ERYSICHTON. What happened next?

IPHIGENEIA. To get the sailing winds back, Artemis demanded the sacrifice of his virgin daughter. She demanded *my* sacrifice.

ERYSICHTON. By sacrifice, you mean—

IPHIGENEIA. I was to be ritually killed.

ERYSICHTON. Oh my.

IPHIGENEIA. Indeed.

ERYSICHTON. But how is that fair? How was that in any way your fault?

IPHIGENEIA. It was the fault of my father. It was his family who was to pay. If he wanted his precious war with Troy, then he would have to pay for it.

ERYSICHTON. Well, you're alive, so he didn't—

IPHIGENEIA. He did.

ERYSICHTON. But you're alive!

IPHIGENEIA. I—I don't know how it happened. A stag came into my place at the last moment, and although my father's eyes were deceived in making him think he was killing me, he killed the stag instead.

ERYSICHTON. You became part of her entourage?

IPHIGENEIA. First I spent many years as a priestess at one of her temples. Then recently she personally invited me to join her—hunting party. It was meant to be a great honor.

ERYSICHTON. You don't sound so confident in that honor.

IPHIGENEIA. I wasn't, but—

ERYSICHTON. This—this woman demanded that you be slain for someone else's mistake, takes you away from your comfortable life, your privileged life, and you serve her, your would-be murderer? You caused others to serve her?

IPHIGENEIA. You don't understand—

ERYSICHTON. What I don't understand is that you were misused and yet allow yourself to continue to be misused. This is not healthy behavior!

IPHIGENEIA. My father was being tested. He was to prove his worth—or lack thereof. What was to be more important to him: his own flesh and blood, or this vengeance and hatred he had stoked up against the Trojans? He failed— miserably.

ERYSICHTON. But you're punished for his failure?

IPHIGENEIA. Punished? No, liberated! In giving up my life, I found a better one.

ERYSICHTON. You call this life “better” than that of a king's daughter?

IPHIGENEIA. Do you know what has happened to my family since then? My father, upon his return from Troy, was killed by my mother and her lover. To avenge him, my brother Orestes and my sister Elektra killed my mother and her new “husband.” No, I don't mourn for the royal life. I bless the gods for

delivering me from the courts of blood.

ERYSICHTON. The gods told your own father to sacrifice you!

IPHIGENEIA. And yet they were the ones who ended up on the altar of vengeance.

ERYSICHTON. But—the mental pain you must have gone through—the fear—

IPHIGENEIA. You don't understand the gods. You don't understand their ways, nor their motives.

ERYSICHTON. There are no gods!

IPHIGENEIA. Ah. We have found the root of contention then, have we?

(Enter AJAX and JASON, being chased by CALLISTO, armed with her bow and arrow.)

JASON. Help! Help!

CALLISTO. Intruders! Spies!

AJAX. No, you have us all wrong! We—we've sought you out—we have—

CALLISTO. Thieves!

AJAX. No!

(Enter HERACLES, PHOEBE and ARTEMIS.)

HERACLES. Callisto has returned!

CALLISTO. Die, perverse spies!

PHOEBE. And what a surprise—she's chasing more men.

ARTEMIS. Callisto, what's happening here?

CALLISTO. These men were sneaking on the camp!

AJAX. No, no!

JASON. We swear to you, Artemis, goddess of the hunt, goddess of virginity, goddess of childbirth, goddess of the moon, goddess of the sacred stag—

ARTEMIS. Enough!

AJAX. Pardon us, gracious and benevolent Artemis, we were seeking you.

ARTEMIS. Seeking me?

AJAX. You and the great Heracles. It had been rumored that you were traveling together in these parts and—well, we're in great need—

HERACLES. You need help?

AJAX. Yes, yes! We're in dire circumstances! But first let me introduce ourselves. I am Ajax. And this is Jason—

JASON. Not the Argonaut!

AJAX. Erm, yes, not the Argonaut.

JASON. It's very important that my deeds do not be come mixed up with that great man's.

HERACLES. I don't believe we will have that difficulty, sir. I knew the Argonauts, I was one of them.

JASON. Yes! Of course, how wonderful! I refer to him as Jason the Greater. Which would make me, I suppose, uhm--

AJAX. Jason the Lesser.

JASON. Hm... uhm...

AJAX. What's important is that we've found you. If you would be so kind, we would appreciate it if your very skilled nymph would lower her weapon so that we could lay before you our plea.

ARTEMIS. Callisto, put back your bow.

CALLISTO. Oh, but this is the second time—

ARTEMIS. Put back your bow.

CALLISTO. It's not fair—

ARTEMIS. Callisto.

(Reluctantly, CALLISTO puts back her bow.)

HERACLES. Now what is this all about?

AJAX. Great Heracles, we've received instructions from our Oracle that we are to find great beings to assist us in a quest.

HERACLES. And what quest is that?

AJAX. To free Prometheus.

HERACLES. Why, that's amazing!

AJAX. Why is it amazing, Great Heracles?

HERACLES. That's the very quest we're on.

AJAX. What a coincidence!

JASON. Yes, a coincidence! A great coincidence! I marvel at such a momentous coincidence!

AJAX. I think we all get the point, Jason the Lesser.

ERYSICHTON. Don't trust these men.

HERACLES. Why not, Erysichton? They've been sent by the Oracles, just as we have.

ERYSICHTON. They say they've been sent by the Oracles.

AJAX. Are you saying that we are liars, sir?

ERYSICHTON. I am saying that we do not know who you are. We have no reason to trust you.

HERACLES. Or is it that you do not trust anyone who believes in the gods, Erysichton?

ERYSICHTON. Whether they do or do not believe in the gods has nothing to do with this.

HERACLES. I think it does! You know nothing of the gods, nor their ways. But I have dealt with the matters of the gods for many years now, and I say that these men are to be trusted and that the gods have sent them to us.

ARTEMIS. I agree. How would they guess our quest, otherwise? We have told no one.

ERYSICHTON. You're making a mistake.

HERACLES. No, you are the man who dares challenge not only the will of the gods, but their very existence!

PHOEBE. Heracles, please—I agree with Erysichton.

HERACLES. Has his doubting nature poisoned your mind?

PHOEBE. Of course not. Do you forget whose vision it was that sent us on this quest? Do you trust me, Heracles? Do you trust my visions?

HERACLES. Of course I do, my friend.

PHOEBE. In my vision that Prometheus gave me very specific instructions. He described each of those who were to help us and then said, "Once six are gathered, and six seem to be lost, then will I be free to save mankind once again." We have our six. These men were not in the prophecy.

HERACLES. Then the two prophecies contradict?

PHOEBE. Yes.

AJAX. No! No, of course not. This, this woman—what was your name?

PHOEBE. I am Phoebe of Delphi.

AJAX. Well, I'm not going to argue that this Phoebe of Delphi didn't have a true vision, just as our own Pythia delivered to us. However, often when the gods bless persons with such a holy gift, they become proud and think that they are somehow special—that the gods only talk to them.

ERYSICHTON. He's smooth, don't listen to him—

AJAX. I will not have aspersion and doubt cast upon me by an unbeliever!

ARTEMIS. Continue, Ajax. Pay no mind to them.

AJAX. It may be true that the gods touched this woman's eyes, but I assure you that we are humble enough to know that we are but tools in the hands of the gods and nothing special in and of ourselves.

PHOEBE. I don't believe that I'm special.

AJAX. Don't you? Then why won't you concede that the gods have delivered to our Oracle the same message that you received?

PHOEBE. All I know is what Prometheus told me. And Prometheus never mentioned you.

AJAX. Well, he never mentioned you to us either. The gods have a good deal to worry themselves over without mentioning every inconsequential detail.

HERACLES. The man speaks wisdom, Phoebe.

PHOEBE. But, Heracles—

HERACLES. Phoebe, my friend, I know these things can be confusing. You're just a woman brought up in a temple. You haven't been exposed to the world, as I have.

PHOEBE. But the vision was very clear—

HERACLES. Now, Phoebe, did you truly believe yourself of such consequence, that your word would become the law of the gods?

PHOEBE. (*Hurt.*) No, of course not.

HERACLES. Then know your place and be satisfied.

AJAX. You are very wise, Great Heracles. But the Oracle gave us additional information to give to you. We know where Prometheus is bound.

HERACLES. Why, that's wonderful! An absolute boon! Let's discuss it over dinner. Come, come, Ajax! Come, come, Jason!

JASON. Not the Argonaut!

HERACLES. Yes, yes, not the Argonaut! Ha, Ha!

(*Exit HERACLES, AJAX, and JASON.*)

CALLISTO. (*To Artemis*) Mistress, I'm with Phoebe and Erysichton on this one. When I chased these fellows, they ran like guilty men.

ARTEMIS. You scared them, Callisto.

IPHIGENEIA. Dear Artemis, please, listen to Callisto and the others. At my time in my father's house, I eventually was able to discern those who were telling the truth and those who were trying to manipulate my father for their own means. I don't trust these men.

ARTEMIS. (*Pause.*) I'm undecided. But I'll take in consideration all of your counsel. The coincidences are uncanny—how did they know about our quest?

IPHIGENEIA. Perhaps a simple trick they're using, my lady.

ARTEMIS. Whatever the case, I don't like how those men dismissed you, Phoebe. Remember this: do not

let any man, even a man as great as Heracles, ever tell you that you are inconsequential. The gods trusted you with a vision. A vision you acted on, for which you sacrificed. That is no small thing. We will all watch these men like eagles. If they're deceiving us, we'll find them out.

(Exit ARTEMIS, CALLISTO, and IPHIGENEA.)

ERYSICHTON. Phoebe...

PHOEBE. Yes?

ERYSICHTON. I—I wasn't expecting you to take my side there.

PHOEBE. Why not?

ERYSICHTON. Heracles, Artemis—they're legends. They're your religion. And I—

PHOEBE. You are a very good, intelligent man.

ERYSICHTON. But I'm an unbeliever.

PHOEBE. I will cling to truth, wherever I find it—and there are times when the gods may manifest the truth to an honest unbeliever like you.

ERYSICHTON. When I—when I was angry earlier—I said some things that I—

PHOEBE. Erysichton, listen. I care about you. I care about what happens to you.

ERYSICHTON. Yes?

PHOEBE. Be careful.

ERYSICHTON. What do you mean?

PHOEBE. Even without these two new additions, we're in a very dangerous situation. We're mortals caught in a clash of gods and titans.

ERYSICHTON. They're flesh and blood, like we are. I'm not afraid.

PHOEBE. You ought to be. Artemis and her women have already nearly killed you once. And Heracles—you didn't see it.

ERYSICHTON. See what?

PHOEBE. He can lose his—true sight. Normally he is an honorable man but—sometimes he—it's as if he becomes possessed—he sees things which aren't there. He told me that he—he killed his children when he was in one of these delusions.

ERYSICHTON. What? But that's—that's—Phoebe, you're right. We're in danger. We need to get out of here.

PHOEBE. If you feel like you need to go, I can't stop you. But I'm seeing it through.

ERYSICHTON. Why?

PHOEBE. I had a vision.

ERYSICHTON. Phoebe, listen to me, you must come to terms with a frightening possibility.

PHOEBE. Don't. I know what you're going to say.

ERYSICHTON. What if you're like Heracles? What if these experiences that you've had—what if they're nothing but delusions, but you're trusting them to be true when they lead to misery and destruction? I—I care about you too much to let that happen.

PHOEBE. I must see this through.

ERYSICHTON. No, you mustn't! Phoebe, I can help you. We can leave this place together, I can take you to my father's and introduce you to my family—we can live a happy life together and I can help you with your delu...

PHOEBE. No.

ERYSICHTON. You can't believe this impossible vision.

PHOEBE. But that's the thing, I do. Prometheus came to me. Even if by some chance I were to be under some delusion, I would have to follow it through, for I would still believe it. I can't live in constant battle with myself as you do.

ERYSICHTON. I don't battle with myself.

PHOEBE. What if *you're* under the delusion, trying to convince yourself that you really weren't visited by the messenger of the gods?

ERYSICHTON. Then it's even more dangerous. Phoebe, let's escape this insanity. Come with me.

PHOEBE. I can't. I must answer Prometheus' call.

ERYSICHTON. *(Pause)* Then I will stay with you.

PHOEBE. You don't believe in this.

ERYSICHTON. Phoebe, I'm with you. Delusion or not, I'm not leaving you.

(Blackout.)

END ACT ONE

25 MORE PAGES TO THE END OF ACT TWO