

## **Iphigenia at Lesbos**

Story of a Refugee

by  
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## Characters

**Iphigenia**, a 15-year-old girl

**Agamemnon**, Iphigenia's father, a general, a tyrant

**Clyde (Clytemnestra)** Iphigenia's Mother, the general's wife

**Wind**, a chain smoker

**Orestes**, ~~the ghost of~~ Iphigenia's brother

**A Deer**

**Chorus who play:**

**Soldiers**

**Bridesmaids**

**Women prisoners, refugees**

**Voices from under the Sea**

Time

Before the Trojan War

After the Invasion of Iraq 21<sup>st</sup> Century

Place:

Lesvos

Various locations on the Mediterranean Sea,

Note: / indicates overlapping lines

*I saw the dead bring forth the living. I saw the living bring forth the dead.*

Quran10.31

*Maybe we live in a time when the truth is most easily told in song.*

John Berger

## Prologue: Catalogue of Ships

*(Wind lights a cigarette with a Zippo windproof lighter.)*

### WIND

Once upon a time everyone knew this story.  
But now, unless it's on YouTube  
it will probably elude you.  
I'm a long-winded messenger,  
Calling across oceans  
And time,  
    for too long, *millennium*, now.  
Turn me inside out.  
Turn me north and south  
Here's the headline:  
    This *home*, this *land* is cursed.

Is it worth it to name names  
when the guilty walk away free-scot  
And the very next day the stock market surges  
And they all make a fortune?

You can read the future  
In just about anything:  
tarot cards, coffee grounds, the Wall street journal  
But how do you read the past?  
Artifacts. A sea scrubbed toothbrush.  
A waterlogged passport washed ashore.  
A mate-less sock and broken phone.  
A notebook of bleached words and a solitary shoe.  
Dirt mixed with blood  
and deception.

Our story starts with Zeus' son, who  
cut his brother up, turned him into stew,  
and fed him to the gods.  
    He thought  
the gods wouldn't notice but they did.  
None of them ate, except for one insatiable god  
who took a bite and swallowed  
before he realized what he'd done.

Don't fuck with the gods.  
It only takes one to curse the world.  
And their timing is not human.  
The shit might not hit the fan  
right away but it always does.

And when it's your shit, you will know it.  
This is my oracle.

I call it *karma* because so far there's no better name.  
Some people call it vengeance.  
Others, the war on terror. Others call it terrorism.  
Plain and simple, no matter what side you're on.  
We can talk about this later at the bar.

In any language, what happens is unspeakable.

So, the shit went down, as they say,  
It was in the family blood.  
Two bad tempered brothers  
and Helen- the *it-girl*-  
there's all kinds of names for whoring and drilling,  
I won't be crude.  
The deal is everyone wants something  
—in this play we call it *Helen*--  
and even though Menelaus marries her,  
It is Paris who steals her away to Troy.  
And that's the start of the War.  
What war, you say? Which war? Yeah, right.

#### CHORUS

*/According to Homer's catalogue of  
ships:*

*(We love our ships with their)  
29 troops with 49 captains which e  
equals not 1000 like the story goes,  
but 1186 ships,  
120 men times 1186 ships equals  
142,320 men*

*We love our ships  
We love our weapons  
The FGM-148 Javelins  
An avenger weapon system  
And our Patriot PAC-3s*

#### WIND

/Thousands of soldiers are pumped on shore  
ready and waiting to go to war  
but there is no wind.  
And there are mistakes, too:  
Friendly fire.  
Like when Agamemnon kills that sacred deer

What kind of man shoots deer  
a mother and her child  
An oracle for the General!

You killed one of ours, and now in vengeance  
Kill one of yours,  
An oracle for the General Agamemnon  
  your daughter, Iphigenia,  
only then t will he winds blow  
Kill your daughter and let's win this war. *Let's get her done!*

The General tricks Iphigenia, his daughter, into coming to Aulis  
with the promise that she will marry Achilles,  
a wonder boy warrior, and a real beauty to boot.

CHORUS

*We love our weapons  
The M252 Mortars  
our scud missile program  
Our pubic plates  
And battle rattle*

WIND

And this lie is the beginning of a ten-year war,  
No, *endless war*, for generations to come.

CHORUS

*/6526 aerial bombs  
a host of biological poisons  
and a partridge in a pear tree  
Give us a war and  
An idiot stick  
let's get this party started*

WIND

The curse on this world is garbage.  
I call it garbage.  
Because so far there is no better name,  
You can call it what you want.

Why was the ParisPeacePact was never a real Pact...and  
Why do peace treaties mean so little on the ground and  
*Beat*

Why do you throw your garbage in our holy waters?  
There are gods in there. And in our fields?  
Here where we throw seeds down

and things miraculously grow  
Why don't you honor our gods while you walk our fields?  
Why do you throw garbage in our holy waters?

I stick with my own gods.  
Every day – for millennia—  
there are two choices. Clean. Or garbage.  
I try to stay clean.  
Otherwise, how could I tell you this story.

## Act 1 War: Peace equals Diplomacy plus Force

### 1. Deer, the messengers

*(Just before dawn, a road in between times and geographies. On either side of the road are only desolation and ruins, but all we see is the blue blue sky alight)*

#### IPHIGENIA

This was a time of deer and shadows,  
a thing people may not understand,  
without Athena's owl, the honey bees,  
and the 46,000 other species  
Extinct.  
A time of good byes.

How long were the deer trying to tell us---  
Herds of them coming down from the mountains,  
out of the woods in ones and twos  
crossing our roads and fields,  
into our gardens, stopping,  
all heads, all eyes turned our way,  
stock-still-  
----just how *in danger of extinction* we all were?

Deer messengers everywhere  
Telling us to stop  
Stop the *madoilwarweapons*  
A terrible cry it sounded  
We will destroy us all,  
Everything. All.  
*Don't shoot the messenger*, the stories always say, but

The sharp shooters came  
and, one by one, took them out  
Until they were gone. Gone.  
One more species, 46,001, extinct.

But then,  
This morning in the last hour before dawn  
My mother and I set out in the dark  
on highway 1, on the road to my wedding,  
--- I'm getting married---yea, I am,  
*between Mycenae and Aulis,*

#### VOICES

*/ the road out of Fallujah out of  
Damascus out of Gaza City*



*out of Detroit, out of Baghdad, out of  
Sittve, out of Aden, out of Kocho  
to Nakivale, to Jabalia, to Elliniko, to Al  
Zaatari, to Dollo Adu to Dadaab, to  
Kutupalong to Zaatari, Suruc, to Moria*

IPHIGENIA

I, Iphigenia, sit shotgun in the passenger seat – as always-  
next to my mother, Clytemnestra, the *queen*  
when in the light  
of the head lamps we see  
A single doe  
*Where did she come from?*  
My mother swerves into oncoming traffic  
And by luck, or fate, or by the gods  
There is no one coming towards us.  
At that speed, she should have hit her  
At least clipped her back leg  
What happens is impossible:

Time stops.  
The doe looks directly into our eyes,  
both of us at once, how can this be?  
And then she turns into a young woman,  
scarved and cloaked,  
from another time and place.

CLYDE'S VOICE

*Did you see that?*

IPHIGENIA

*I did*

CLYDE

*Who is that?*

IPHIGENIA

Stop! Turn around! Go back.

DEER

*Stop! Turn around! Go back.*

IPHIGENIA

I can't go back.

DEER

*I can't go back*

I'm getting married.

IPHIGENIA

DEER

*They'll shoot me.  
They'll kill you.*

I'm going to my wedding. It's my destiny...

IPHIGENIA

DEER

*None of us can go back.  
Maybe it's destiny.*

*Who are the women who turn into deer and then back into women? And why?*

WIND (VO)

/Who are you?

IPHIGENIA

DEER

/Who are you?

/My name is Iphigenia.

IPHIGENIA

/I am you.

IPHIGENIA

DEER

I am you.

## 2. You Called for Me

*(A clearing near Agamemnon's tent. Not far off, Soldiers swarm a pyre. They listen to techno music and pump themselves up but we hear only their voices shouting over it, hungry and loud. Iphigenia enters, running like a child --- she is a child. The wind, watches and smokes.)*

Father!	IPHIGENIA	
	AGAMEMNON	Iphigenia!
You called for me and here I am. See? <i>(she twirls for him)</i> I'm so happy to see you.	IPHIGENIA	
	AGAMEMNON	And I'm. Happy to see you. Iphigenia.
How I missed your face. It's been so long.	IPHIGENIA	
	AGAMEMNON	/We've been stuck here for so long.
I'm going to be married?	IPHIGENIA	
	AGAMEMNON	/Iphigenia
You say you're happy to see me, But your eyes are troubled.	IPHIGENIA	
	AGAMEMNON	Powerful men have many troubles, especially generals.
I am here. Be with me.	IPHIGENIA	
	AGAMEMNON	I am with you. Iphigenia.

IPHIGENIA

Are you crying?

AGAMEMNON

But the truth is. We will be separated. For so long.

IPHIGENIA

Just come home, father.  
Come home with me.

AGAMEMNON

I can't do what I want. And it makes me unhappy, Iphigenia.

IPHIGENIA

Father, you've been stuck here with these soldiers for so long. It stinks.

AGAMEMNON

We've been stuck here for so long and we haven't done shit.

IPHIGENIA

Where do the Trojans even live?  
You're going all the way to Troy to kill someone else's children.  
And leaving me behind.  
It can't possibly turn out well.

AGAMEMNON

Iphigenia

IPHIGENIA

Orestes, my brother?  
Shall I bring him to you?

AGAMEMNON

No. Don't.

IPHIGENIA

It's my wedding today!

AGAMEMNON

Before you wed, I must  
make a sacrifice, here in Aulis.

IPHIGENIA

Will mother be with me  
or will I be alone?

AGAMEMNON

No Father, no Mother. Alone.

IPHIGENIA

Will I stand by the fountain  
of purifying water?

AGAMEMNON

You will stand by the fountain  
of purifying water.

IPHIGENIA

Will we dance around the altar?

AGAMEMNON

You will dance around the altar. Yes.  
Give me a kiss. And your hand. Now  
go.

IPHIGENIA

But.

AGAMEMNON

Go.

*(Soldiers enter, before Iphigenia can leave and take Wind off.)*

### 3. A War Song

*(The Wind is caught, his hands bound above his head, ready for interrogation, but not realistic. A mass of soldiers put on their bullet proof vests. Between them smoke bellows. Elsewhere, a group of bridesmaids wash and dress Iphigenia, the bride.)*

*(AGAMEMNON enters.)*

AGAMEMNON

Good morning, soldiers!

SOLDIERS

*Good morning, Sir!  
Look! The General's going to  
talk to the prisoner.  
Gag him!*

*(They do.)*

AGAMEMNON

Chill, boys. There's no need for enhanced interrogation,  
I can get whatever I want with a pack of cigarettes  
And a couple of beers. Our intention is clear:  
We're going to war. We need this fucker to blow.

SOLDIERS

*Blow, windbag, blow  
Blow, fucker, blow*

AGAMEMNON

*(to the wind)* Smoke?

*(Wind nods. Agamemnon tenderly takes the gag out of his mouth and puts a cigarette between his lips.)*

What did you say your name was?

SOLDIERS

*A pellet gun and a lost dog,  
A loose target in the woods  
I didn't want to hit him  
But I wanted to know I could*

*I wasn't interested in school  
I could hardly keep still  
But then I read the Odyssey  
It taught me how to kill*

*1000 Ships, 1000 Suns*

AGAMEMNON

I come in peace, with no artillery  
But god help your military  
You fuck with me, I'll kill you

SOLDIERS

*When the bombing and disaster  
Hit us at ground zero  
I enlisted just to show them  
what it means to be a hero*

*I was bored in my village,  
Had a break down on route three,  
It was an easy decision  
When the army came for me.*

*1000 Ships, 1000 suns*

*Now our old lives are over  
We're here till our last breath,  
I took a girl to the altar  
But it's you I love to death*

*1000 ships, 1000 suns*

AGAMEMNON and SOLDIERS

I come in peace, with no artillery  
But god help your military  
You fuck with me, I'll kill you

I come in peace, with no artillery  
But god help your military  
You fuck with me, I'll kill you

SOLDIERS

*Blow fucker blow*

*(Lights up on the Bridesmaids and Iphigenia elsewhere on stage. They wash and dress her, a dance.)*

BRIDESMAIDS

*You're kind of young to get  
married, aren't you, girl?  
Everything looks so pretty. This  
whole party is for you*

IPHIGENIA

I tasted a wild boy's mouth in secret  
Under an upside down boat in the rain,

I won't say his name  
I tattooed his initials on my wrist

BRIDESMAIDS

*You look so young and pretty. I'd  
like to wear that dress! And have  
him take it off! Might as well,  
Time goes so fast.*

IPHIGENIA

I studied acid rain and bees  
I wanted to go to university  
Maybe he doesn't even remember me  
Down there, the swarm of them, in uniform,  
where is my boy in that mob?

SOLDIERS

*Blow, fucker, blow!*

BRIDESMAIDS

*I love sweets. I can't wait for the  
cake! Maybe this is all for the best.  
Maybe so.  
How can we know?*

IPHIGENIA

Those boys want blood  
the initials of his teeth on my wrist,  
I don't know his name anymore  
And he doesn't know mine.  
These boys taste blood--  
Whatever comes between them will die.

*(They release the Wind and he inhales desperately. Agamemnon takes out a cigarette.)*

WIND

How amazing to breathe  
After not breathing for so long!

*(He coughs.)*

What kind of wind strikes your fancy?  
Sirocco, meltemi, mistral?  
Something that blows north to south,  
south to east, west to Desert Storm  
and Troy again?



*(Agamemnon luxuriously lights the cigarette and offers it to the Wind.)*

SOLDIER

*Stop stalling and Blow,  
Blow, you fucking windbag, blow!*

AGAMEMNON

Have a smoke.

*(Wind takes the smoke and inhales deeply.)*

WIND

I'll tell you once more  
war isn't a piece of cake.  
You can't have your piece and eat it too.  
You want war.  
Eat it.

SOLDIER

*Blow, motherfucker. Blow!*

WIND

Okay.

*(With this next word, he lets out a little puff of smoke.)*

Poof.

*(The soldiers are blown back, Agamemnon grips the chair with all his strength, it hurts like hell. He loves it and he won't let go until his tendons tear. Smoke fills the air.)*

WIND

Have your war.

*(The soldiers lead wind off to execution.)*

*Iphigenia and the bridesmaids feel this wind. It's ominous and they all know it. Iphigenia looks up. Everything she didn't know a moment ago, she now knows.*

*The deer appears to her from the smoke. No one else sees it but us.)*

End Act 1