

at sunrise the 'destroyer of Ilium' found himself, like Xerxes at sunset, 'a sovereign of the seas without a fleet'.¹

By this disaster the cause of the conspirators, hitherto almost desperate, was advanced to a fair chance of success. But the final enterprise was still very perilous. The king might have escaped. If he returned, the queen and her lover could triumph only by destroying him, which, if they declared themselves before he came, they would certainly not do without a bloody and doubtful contest against his veteran soldiers and those who would rally round his person. Completing therefore their plans to suit the new situation they waited still a short while for the event. When the moment should arrive, the signal from Mount Arachnaeus was to announce to those in the secret that their accomplices were ready. Fortune stood by them still, so far at least as that the king's ship, which by what seemed a happy miracle had survived the storm, was the first of the survivors to reach Argos. Still more propitious was the hour of arrival. It was in the dead of the winter night that this remnant of the great host came into the bay². By none but those in the plot was such an arrival expected, and they only were upon the watch. The news of the king's approach was instantly carried to the neighbouring eastern hills, and it was still night when the watchman from the palace saw the beacon upon Mount Arachnaeus and carried to his mistress the news, as he supposed, that Troy had fallen, in reality that the king had come, that Aegisthus was ready, and that she and their partizans throughout the Argolid (for the light could be seen far and wide) were to act as had been pre-arranged³.

¹ *v.* 1226.

² The story named the very night. It was the last of the year. That this was so will be seen by comparing the language of the watchman at the opening with the expression of the herald at his first entrance, *δεκάτω σε φέγγει τῶδ' ἀφικόμεν ἔτους* on *this tenth dawn of a year* (*v.* 509). It is an addition to the picturesque impressiveness of the circumstances that the day of the murder was a specially solemn day of religious rejoicing. Clytaemnestra also remembers the season, when she compares the return of a husband to the relief of a beneficent change in the weather (*vv.* 957—963). It will be noticed that, while the other seasons are cited in the aorist tense of

generality and associated with husbands in general, the 'coming in winter' is referred to Agamemnon personally and described in the present tense of actuality. The interval between the fall of Troy and the arrival would thus be something over a month, not at all too much for the repose of the army, the destruction of the city, the preparations for departure, the voyage up to the storm, and the bringing of the king's 'bare hull' from the point to which it was carried (beyond Malea, according to Homer) back to Argos.

³ The arrangement of the circumstances here is exceedingly skilful. The one chance for Aegisthus and Clytaemnestra was that they should strike *immediately* on the king's arrival. Every hour