

The plot now to be executed had three objects, all familiar in the perpetual conspiracies and revolutions of Hellas, first to separate the king from his soldiers and murder him, before his friends could repair to him or open his eyes; secondly to secure the citadel; and thirdly to capture the principal persons of the loyal party. Given the extraordinary circumstances, this was now a hopeful project though, as the sequel shows, by no means certain yet. Upon the report of the signal the queen at once sent out messengers announcing that she had received great news and ordering a general feast in honour of the occasion, thus quieting and diverting the minds of all who were not better informed. At the same time she summoned the king's chief friends, the elders of the city, who in their anxiety at this nocturnal alarm and their eagerness for explanation were but too ready to come¹. On reaching the fortress, they waited in the place of council, which lay as usual before the palace doors², for some time, as the queen, whose object was to detain and to mystify them for the necessary interval, was in no hurry to satisfy their curiosity. It was day-break when at length she appeared and in answer to their enquiry as to her news informed them that Troy had fallen that very night. It had been foreseen that some explanation must be offered, and this particular falsehood had the double advantage of tallying with the belief of the watchman and of removing all apparent need for immediate action of any kind. One question could not be escaped, by what means the intelligence had come; and the queen, with an eloquence which might almost persuade her auditors, traced for them the imaginary links between the visible beacon on Mount Arachnaeus and the king's beacon upon Mount Ida at Troy. It is true that in fabricating this story she betrayed a misconception of the region described, such as might be expected in a queen of Argos in the heroic times. Nor were her auditors contented. Though they had not sufficient knowledge to detect the fraud, the mere circumstances were such as inevitably to prompt suspicion. They tried to probe the evidence. But the queen had taken care to surround

that he passed in communication with his subjects must make the queen's position more perilous and her success more improbable. It is manifest that the situation given by Aeschylus is just one, perhaps the only one, in which by vigilance the conspirators might have several hours of clear advantage. The dramatist probably assumed, as he does in the *Supplices*, that the landing-place for Argos

was in ancient times unoccupied.

¹ *v.* 270 implies that the elders had been sent for. But to repair to the castle would (as they say *v.* 267) have been their impulse. It is evident here and everywhere that, though suspecting or knowing the queen's infidelity, they have not the least glimpse of her treason.

² *v.* 523.