**Stars Smiling Upon You (**[**Iphigenia at Aulis by Euripides**](https://classics.mit.edu/Euripides/iphi_aul.html)**)/1499 words**

They said space was beautiful–gorgeous even. But right now, all I can see is emptiness. Endless darkness, like a cardboard box pricked full of holes, revealing the light of the outside world.

If only there was an outside world.

Or just an ‘outside.’

Some place to escape to.

They speak as if I’m not listening. But Mother brought me here herself, talking about how obedient I was, as she handed me my baby brother. I had stood there blankly, mind split between thinking about how itchy and tight my neotech suit is and why she seemed so scared bringing me here.

It’s just to see Father. She might not love Father, but I do.

I was so excited when he called us out here. Why wouldn’t I be? For one, it’s space. Everyone loves space, the eliteness and the beauty of it. So elite even a ruler like Father can’t easily afford it. It was only once the war started that frequent space travel became a thing for him. And now I got a chance.

And of course, a chance to see Father! I’ve missed him so much, the trip here was agony, waiting. I ran and hugged him the moment the ship’s doors opened.

I don’t even know what to feel now. Hatred? Disgust? But he’s my father. Family I love.

“How can you think to sacrifice our daughter!” Mother shrieks, interrupting my thoughts.

“How could you have known!” Father cries. Maybe he shouldn’t have sent that warning message, telling us of the false marriage and to turn back. Maybe he should have sent it immediately, so it wouldn’t have missed us. Maybe Uncle Menelaus shouldn’t have had a change of heart, and sent another message after we arrived. Then we wouldn’t know.

I wonder, does space feel as empty as I do? Does space think it bad to feel so empty? Does space think what is happening here is wrong? Or does it not even see?

“There is nothing that I do not know!” Mother chides.

“Then why must you confront me, Clytaemenstra? There is no reason, so leave!”

Mother waves him off, and begins to tell her tale of how loveless and forced this marriage was. It’s a practiced speech by now, one she repeats at every opportunity.

“How am I to return home after this? When friends and family ask what happened to my little Iphi, what am I to answer? To return Helen, her life was slain! The insanity! Tell Menelaus to sacrifice his own daughter, in exchange for his wife’s life! My daughter will not be sacrificed for anyone!” Mother wails.

“Father.”

The room stills at my voice. I’m sure they forgot I was here, off to the side, blending in with the golden stars.

“To the stars, nothing here must seem important. And to your soldiers, I must be just as insignificant. I’m only one of three princesses, no, just one girl, whose life is stopping them from going to war. But that’s not what I am to you, am I? I’m your daughter. I’m the first to call you ‘dada’ whilst grasping your finger with tiny hands. I’m the first who got to sit on your lap whilst you called me d-daughter.” I breathe deep, until my lungs can’t hold anymore air.

“Do you remember, when I was just four or five, you bought me the latest t-toy which came… in a great big cardboard box? I found more j-joy in the box than the toy. Space I called it, and Mother, you found me a hair pin to poke stars… which I did in one g-great big smile… I turned to all of you, barely fitting your heads inside the box next to me… I said, ‘the stars are smiling at us!’ I know you two… have never liked each other, but in that moment? We really seemed like family.” Another deep breath, with tears staining my eyes, “Father, would the stars smile upon us now?”

A pained look crosses his face.

“But what can I do? Even if we turn all this around, send everyone home, what will it stop? The warrior’s anger and passion, currently turned towards Troy, will turn onto us! Your death we will not outwit! It will only no longer help us! Nor will it be alone, joined by me, your sisters and mother, every one of us!” Father crumples to the ground, cradling his head in his hands, sobbing. “I love you. I truly do. But what am I to do? As Hellas’s king? As your father? What can I do?”

“Father…” I don’t know what to say, or even what to think. His words tumble in my mind, echoing a truth I hadn’t considered, one I don’t want to consider. My body moves on auto pilot. I simply can’t handle my father on his knees. Father takes my hands, pushing himself up. And just as quickly, he lets go. Before either of us can say another word, he rushes out the door, down the ivory halls.

Did he just… run away? Like myself, were those questions too heavy a burden to carry? But… I don’t want to be a coward. Not like him, who can’t even decide if he wants his daughter to die or not.

It’s plain and simple. So simple it hurts. Either I can die here, a sacrifice to Artemis, or I run away, for all eternity, until either the council or the thousands of warriors gathered here in these ships catch me.

If I run, I have the entire galaxy to escape to.

But they also have all the best ships to chase me with.

And my entire family to threaten me with.

Can I really sacrifice their lives, just to save mine? Is my life really worth that much?

My gaze falls on Orestes. My brother still cradled in my arms. He catches my gaze, breaking into a toothy grin, reaching a chubby hand out.

“Nini.” He babbles. He can’t quite say my name yet. Can I really take his life, just to save my own?

No. No I can’t.

Then footsteps approach, and the conviction I just made wavers. Soldiers? That quickly? No! I haven’t said goodbye, haven’t told Mother anything, haven’t even held Orestes’s hand one last time!

“Mother!”

“Relax Iphigenia. It is the council-born, the one whom you came to ‘marry,’ the one who helps us so, Achilles.”

Somehow that is worse.

“How can I face the one whom I was deceived with?” With nowhere to hide, I pull myself behind Mother.

“Such embarrassment is not needed. Achilles does not care, and now our focus is on saving-”

Achilles burst into the room.

“Lady Clytaemenstra! I come bearing bad news. The word that an offering is needed has spread, and now the entire army is wishing for her head!”

“Everyone?”

“Everyone! But,” Achilles proudly pounded his fist against his chest. “I will stand by your side and aid your cause. I cannot turn a blind eye when it was my name which lured the maiden here, and thus it was in part, me who sacrificed her.”

Did such a righteous man really exist? To help me just for that? Does it matter anymore? I’ve already made up my mind, to burden such a man would only involve more deaths before the inevitable.

“Mother.” I interrupt their conversation, only to find the words stuck in my throat. “Such efforts are… not needed. I cannot in good conscience try to save my own life at the cost of yours, fathers, or any of my siblings. Especially when Orestes…. I cannot be responsible for the death of a council-born either, who knows how they will take such a thing? This whole war was caused by the folly of a council member, and now they block us, who knows what goes on in their heads? I have long resolved myself to whatever fate I may find myself at the council’s side, be it death or something worse, I will bear it if you and Orestes may live another day.”

“Iphigenia! Please, you don’t have to! We can escape, Achilles here bears an artifact from the council which wards all injuries, he can protect us! And this war, like you said, the council started it–let them deal with it!”

I shook my head. “No Mother, I cannot endanger you nor a stranger in such a way. Perhaps… my name will even go down in history books, one who helped Hellas.” Then you can always remember me.

“A heroic spirit! I will not stop you. But I will follow you to the council, in case you change your mind.” With nothing left to do, Achilles left the room.

“My child, I beg of you, don’t leave me!”

“Mother, know I will not die, but join the stars, and smile upon you.”

Orestes held his hand out, babbling my name one more time.

“And of course, smiling down upon you, little Orestes.”