

## E T E O C L E S

Cadmeian citizens, let me be brief.  
I've been entrusted with the state  
and as pilot must stay vigilant.  
If we prosper, credit the gods.  
But if we encounter some trouble  
"Eteocles" becomes the refrain throughout Thebes.  
People lift that song of accusation  
at my failure. I accept it.  
Zeus, named Defender, spare us this.

Now you too have a duty.  
Youths and those in full maturity  
—every man still in his prime—  
must contribute according to his abilities.

Thebes, our gods' altars, their *worship*  
are all in danger of extinction.

This land is mother and nurse.  
You crawled on her good ground.  
She fretted over your entire upbringing  
and raised you to bear shields,  
faithful in this time of need.

And we know the gods favor us.  
We've been besieged for some time  
yet still we maintain the advantage.  
Now the prophet—"bird herder"—speaks.  
He, using only ears and mind,  
reads avian oracles with unfailing skill.  
He is a master of prophecy  
and says this huge Argive force  
devised some scheme in the night.

To the walls! To the gates!  
Every man rise up—arm quickly.  
Mount the barricades and the scaffolds.  
Take up positions at the exits.  
Stand firm. There's nothing to fear  
from foreign mobs.

Gods will deliver.

I've sent scouts to gather intelligence.  
I'm confident they will not fail  
and we'll not be caught unawares.

#### M E S S E N G E R

Lord Eteocles, best of the Cadmeians,  
I bring news of the invaders.  
I have seen these things myself:

Seven men, each a bold captain,  
bled a bull over a shield  
and dipped hands into that bowl.  
By Ares, Enyo, and bloodloving Fear,  
they swore to level the city  
in a rush of force, or  
thicken the earth with *their* blood.  
They sent mementos home to parents  
all placed tearfully on Adrastus's chariot  
but without a word of pity.  
From each an ironminded rage—flared  
by Ares—glared through lion eyes.  
Soon you'll have proof of this.  
I left as they cast lots  
for the gate each would attack.

Select the city's most capable men—  
station them quickly at the gates.  
The Argives, already near, raise dust  
in their advance, the plain flecked  
with the froth of horse breath.

You, careful pilot of this craft,  
secure the city before the storm.  
Waves of men roar over land.  
Seize the next—the best—opportunity.

I'll continue to observe what unfolds  
beyond the walls and bring reports.

## E T E O C L E S

Zeus and Earth and Theban deities,  
curse and Fury of my father,  
don't let my city be destroyed,  
its people uprooted, taken into captivity,  
fire poured on house and home.  
This country and city are free.  
Don't put us under the yoke.  
I trust I speak for all:  
A city that honors gods prevails.

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