

Associated Press WIREPHOTO
TRAGIC PASSAGE—The book "An Anthology of World Poetry" by Reynal & Hitchcock, was found open in the room occupied by former Secretary James Forrestal following his death yesterday at Bethesda Naval Hospital. It was open to the passages shown

Forrestal's Pen Came to Rest On Word of Sophocles Tragedy
The Washington Post (1877-1954) May 23, 1949, p. 1

"'Woe, Woe!' Will Be the Cry . . ."
**Forrestal's Pen Came to Rest
 On Word of Sophocles Tragedy**

Some suggestion of the last thoughts of former Defense Secretary James Forrestal may be found in a partially copied poem found after his death. He had stopped abruptly in the middle of a word.

The manuscript in his handwriting was found tucked in the back of a volume in red leather, "An Anthology of World Poetry," lying open on the radiator beside his bed. The poem, titled "Chorus from Ajax," is from the work of Sophocles, Greek tragic poet who died in 406 B. C.

In the original drama, a tragedy of wounded honor, Ajax, son of

Telamon, is first demented by disappointment when the arms of Achilles have been awarded to Odysseus. Upon his recovery, Ajax is stricken with grief and shame and fatally stabs himself with his own sword.

In the anthology, only the following chorus appears. The portion copied by Forrestal—in a firm, legible hand on hospital memorandum paper—is printed here in italic type, the remainder in roman type. Forrestal stopped

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 Washington Post
 May 23, 1949

The Washington Post
 reported Forrestal stopped
 on the word "nightingale"

In the same 5/23/1949 edition, the
 Washington Post also reported that
 Forrestal copied these lines in "firm
 and legible handwriting."

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**Pen Stopped
 On Poem**

in the middle of the word "nightingale," in the second stanza.

Chorus From Ajax

*Fair Salamis, the billow's roar
 Wanders around thee yet;
 And sailors gaze upon thy shore
 Firm in the Ocean set.
 Thy son is in a foreign clime
 Where Ida feeds her countless
 flocks;
 Far from thy dear remembered
 rocks,
 Worn by the waste of time,—
 Comfortless, nameless, hopeless—
 save
 In the dark prospect of the yawning
 grave.
 And Ajax, in his deep distress
 Allied to our disgrace,
 Hath cherished in his loneliness
 The bosom friend's embrace.
 Frenzy hath seized thy dearest
 son,
 Who from thy shores in glory
 came
 The first in valor and in fame;
 The deeds that he hath done
 Seem hostile all to hostile eyes;
 The sons of Atreus see them and
 despise.*

*Woe to the mother, in her close of
 day,
 Woe to her desolate heart, and
 temples gray,
 When she shall hear
 Her loved one's story whispered in
 her ear!*

*"Woe, woe!" will the cry,—
 No quiet murmur like the tremu-
 lous wail*

*Of the lone bird, the querulous
 nightingale, —
 But shrieks that fly
 Piercing, and wild, and loud, shall
 mourn the tale;*

*And she will beat her breast, and
 rend her hair,
 Scattering the silver locks that
 Time hath left her there.
 Oh! when the pride of Graecia's
 noblest race*

*Wanders, as now, in darkness and
 disgrace,*

*When Reason's day
 Sets rayless—joyless—quenched in
 cold decay,*

*Better to die, and sleep
 The never-waking sleep, than
 linger on,
 And dare to live, when the soul's
 life is gone;*

*But thou shalt weep,
 Thou wretched father, for thy
 dearest son,
 Thy best beloved, by inward
 Furies torn,
 The deepest, bitterest curse thine
 ancient house hath borne!*

The poem appears on pages 277-8 of "An Anthology of World Poetry," edited by Mark Van Doren, in a translation by the early nineteenth century poet Winthrop Mackworth Praed. The book was first copyrighted by Albert & Charles Boni, Inc., in 1928. It was subsequently copyrighted in 1934 and 1936 by Reynal & Hitchcock, Inc., who published a revised edition, and it has also been published by Halycon House, New York.

First Secretary Of Defense Found With His Bathrobe Cord Around Neck

By V. R. Montanari
Post Reporter

James Forrestal, former Secretary of Defense, plunged 13 floors to his death at about 1:50 a. m. yesterday.

Forrestal plummeted from a sixteenth-floor window to a third-floor ledge at Bethesda Naval Hospital, where he had been under psychiatric care.

Dr. F. J. Broschart, Montgomery County medical examiner, certified the death as suicide.

President Truman, who said he was "inexpressibly shocked and grieved," ordered a period of national mourning until after the funeral.

Foiled Special Watch

During a five-minute period between visits to his room of a special watch, Forrestal walked across a corridor from his room to a diet kitchen, pushed open the single screen equipped with two hook-type latches and fell to his death.

A cord from his bathrobe, which he was wearing over his pajamas, was knotted tightly around his neck when he was found, and heavy scuff marks showed on the concrete facing of the hospital outside and below the window.

The marks may have been made in the course of the fall, or, if he did attempt to hang himself, could have been made while he was hanging outside the window, hospital officials said.

Whether he had attempted to tie the cord to a radiator under the window to hang himself may never be determined, hospital officials said. An autopsy has been ordered.

Copied Verse On Death

From a book of verse found lying open on a radiator beside his bed, he had copied several verses of Sophocles' "Chorus from Ajax." In firm and legible handwriting, these lines stood out:

"When Reason's day sets rayless—joyless—quenched in cold decay, better to die, and sleep the never-waking sleep than linger on, and dare to live, when the soul's life is gone."

Forrestal's suicide came less than two months after he had been admitted to the hospital on April 2 for rest and treatment of "operational fatigue."

Rear Admiral M. D. Willcutts, commandant of the Naval Medical Center which includes the hospital, ordered a naval board of inquiry. He said he wants a psychiatrist other than Forrestal's own physician, Capt. George N. Raines, to sit in on the investigation.

Only three weeks ago, Forrestal's psychiatrist had believed him sufficiently improved so that special restrictions on his activities

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