

Electra  
By Euripides

Translated by E. P. Coleridge

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Dramatis Personae

A PEASANT OF MYCENAE, husband of ELECTRA

ELECTRA, daughter of Agamemnon

ORESTES, son of Agamemnon

PYLADES, friend Of ORESTES

CHORUS OF ARGIVE COUNTRY-WOMEN

CLYTEMNESTRA, widow of Agamemnon

OLD MAN, formerly servant of Agamemnon

MESSENGER

THE DIOSCURI

Before the hut of the PEASANT, in the country on the borders of Argolis. It is just before sunrise. The PEASANT is discovered alone.

PEASANT O Argos, ancient land, and streams of Inachus, whence on a day king Agamemnon sailed to the realm of Troy, carrying his warriors aboard a yousand ships; and after he had slain Priam who was reigning in Ilium and captured the famous city of Dardanus, he came hither to Argos and has set up high on the temple-walls many a trophy, spoil of the barbarians. Though all went well with him in Troy, yet was he slain in his own palace by the guile of his wife Clytemnestra and the hand of Aegisthus, son of Thyestes. So he died and left behind him the ancient sceptre of Tantalus, and Aegisthus reigns in his stead, with the daughter of Tyndareus, Agamemnon's queen, to wife. Now as for those whom he left in his halls, when he sailed to Troy, his son Orestes and his tender daughter Electra,—the boy Orestes, as he was like to be slain by Aegisthus, his sire's old foster-father secretly removed to the land of Phocis and gave to Strophius to bring up, but the maid Electra abode in her father's house, and soon as she had budded into maidenhood, came all the princes of Hellas asking her hand in marriage. But Aegisthus kept her at home for fear she might bear a son to some chieftain who would avenge Agamemnon, nor would he betroth her to any. But when e'en thus there seemed some room for fear that she might bear some noble lord a child by stealth and Aegisthus was minded to slay her, her mother, though she had a cruel heart, yet rescued the maiden from his hand. For she could find excuses for having slain her husband, but she feared the hatred she would incur for her children's murder. Wherefore Aegisthus devised this scheme; on Agamemnon's son who had escaped his realm by flight he set a price to be paid to any who should slay him, while he gave Electra to me in marriage, whose ancestors were citizens of Mycenae. It is not that I blame myself for; my family was noble enough, though certainly impoverished, and so my good birth suffers. By making for her this weak alliance he thought he would have little to fear. For if some man of high position had married her, he might have revived the vengeance for Agamemnon's murder, which now is sleeping; in which case Aegisthus would have paid the penalty. But Cypris is my witness that I have ever respected her maidenhood; she is still as though

unwed. Unworryour as I am, honour forbids that I should so affront the daughter of a better man. Yea, and I am sorry for Orestes, hapless youth, who is called my kinsman, to think that he should ever return to Argos and behold his sister's wretched marriage. And whoso counts me but a fool for leaving a tender maid untouched when I have her in my house, to him I say, he measures purity by the vicious standard of his own soul, a standard like himself.  
(ELECTRA enters from the hut, carrying a water pitcher on her head. She is meanly clad.)

ELECTRA O sable night, nurse of the golden stars! beneath your pall I go to fetch water from the brook with my pitcher poised upon my head, not indeed because I am forced to this necessity, but that to the gods I may display the affronts Aegisthus puts upon me, and to the wide firmament pour out my lamentation for my father. For my own mother, the baleful daughter of Tyndareus, has cast me forth from her house to gratify her lord; for since she has borne other children to Aegisthus she puts me and Orestes on one side at home.

PEASANT Oh! why, poor maiden, do you toil so hard on my behalf, you that aforesaid were reared so daintily? why canst you not forego your labour, as I bid you?

ELECTRA As a god's I count your kindness to me, for in my distress you have never made a mock at me. it is rare fortune when mortals find such healing balm for their cruel wounds as it is my lot to find in you. Wherefore I ought, though you forbid me, to lighten your labours, as far as my strength allows, and share all burdens with you to ease your load. You have enough to do abroad; it is only right that I should keep your house in order. For when the toiler comes to his home from the field, it is pleasant to find all comfortable in the house.

PEASANT If such your pleasure, go your way; for, after all, the spring is no great distance from my house. And at break of day I will drive my steers to my field and sow my crop. For no idler, though he has the gods' names ever on his lips, can gather a livelihood without hard work. (ELECTRA and the PEASANT go out. A moment later ORESTES and PYLADES enter.)

ORESTES Ah Pylades, I put you first amongst men for your love, your loyalty and friendliness to me; for you alone of all my friends would still honour poor Orestes, in spite of the grievous plight whereto I am reduced by Aegisthus, who with my accursed mother's aid slew my sire. I am come from Apollo's mystic shrine to the soil of Argos, without the knowledge of any, to avenge my father's death upon his murderers. Last night I went to his tomb and wept thereon, cutting off my hair as an offering and pouring over the grave the blood of a sheep for sacrifice, unmarked by those who lord it over this land. And now though I enter not the walled town, yet by coming to the borders of the land I combine two objects; I can escape to another country if any spy me out and recognize me, and at the same time seek my sister, for I am told she is a maid no longer but is married and living here, that I may meet her, and, after enlisting her aid in the deed of blood, learn for certain what is happening in the town. Let us now, since dawn is uplifting her radiant eye, step aside from this path. For maybe some labouring man or serving maid will come in sight, of whom we may inquire whether it is here that my sister has her home. Lo! yonder I see a servant bearing a full pitcher of water on her shaven head; let us sit down and make inquiry of this bond-maid, if haply we may glean some tidings of the matter which brought us hither, Pylades. (They retire a little, as ELECTRA returns from the spring.)

ELECTRA (chanting, strophe 1)

Bestir your lagging feet, it is high time; on, on over your path of tears! ah misery! I am Agamemnon's daughter, she whom Clytemnestra, hateful child of Tyndareus, bare; hapless Electra is the name my countrymen call me. Ah me! for my cruel lot, my hateful existence! O my father Agamemnon! in Hades art you laid, butchered by your wife and Aegisthus. Come, raise with me that dirge once more; uplift the woful strain that brings relief.

On, on over your path of tears! ah misery! And you, poor brother, in what city and house art you a slave, leaving your suffering sister behind in the halls of our fathers to drain the cup of bitterness? Oh! come, great Zeus, to set me free from this life of sorrow, and to avenge my sire in the blood of his foes, bringing the wanderer home to Argos.

Take this pitcher from my head, put it down, that I may wake betimes, while it is yet night, my lamentation for my sire, my doleful chant, my dirge of death, for you, my father in your grave, which day by day I do rehearse, rending my skin with my nails, and smiting on my shaven head in mourning for your death. Woe, woe! rend the cheek; like a swan with clear loud note beside the brimming river calling to its parent dear that lies a-dying in the meshes of the crafty net, so I bewail you, my hapless sire,

After that last fatal bath of yours laid out most piteously in death. Oh the horror of that axe which hacked you so cruelly, my sire, oh! the bitter thought that prompted your return from Troy! With no garlands or victor's crowns did your wife welcome you, but with his two-edged sword she made you the sad sport of Aegisthus and kept her treacherous paramour. (The CHORUS OF ARGIVE COUNTRY-WOMEN enter. The following lines between ELECTRA and the CHORUS are sung responsively.)

#### CHORUS

O Electra, daughter of Agamemnon, to your rustic cot I come, for a messenger has arrived, a highlander from Mycenae, one who lives on milk, announcing that the Argives are proclaiming a sacrifice for the third day from now, and all our maidens are to go to Hera's temple.

ELECTRA Kind friends, my heart is not set on festivity, nor do necklaces of gold cause any flutter in my sorrowing bosom, nor will I stand up with the maidens of Argos to beat my foot in the dance. Tears have been my meat day and night; ah misery! See my unkempt hair, my tattered dress; are they fit for a princess, a daughter of Agamemnon, or for Troy which once thought of my father as its captor?

#### CHORUS

Mighty is the goddess; so come, and borrow of me broidered robes for apparel and jewels of gold that add a further grace to beauty's charms. Do think to triumph over your foes by tears, if you honour not the gods? it is not by lamentation but by pious prayers to heaved that you, my daughter, will make fortune smile on you.

ELECTRA No god hearkens to the voice of lost Electra, or heeds the sacrifices offered by my father long ago. Ah woe for the dead! woe for the living wanderer, who dwells in some foreign land, an outcast and vagabond at a menial board, sprung though he is of a famous sire! Myself, too, in a poor man's hut do dwell, wasting my soul with grief, an exile from my father's halls, here by the scarred hill-side; while my mother is wedded to a new husband in a marriage stained by blood.

LEADER OF THE CHORUS Many a woe to Hellas and your house did Helen, your mother's sister, cause.

ELECTRA (catching sight of ORESTES AND PYLADES) Ha! Friends, I break off my lament; yonder are strangers just leaving the place of ambush where they were couching, and making for the house. We must seek to escape the villains by flying, you along the path and I into my cottage.

ORESTES Stay, poor maid; fear no violence from me.

ELECTRA O Phoebus Apollo I beseech you spare my life.

ORESTES Give me the lives of others more my foes than you!

ELECTRA Begone! touch me not! you have no right to.

ORESTES There is none I have a better right to touch.

ELECTRA How is it then you waylay me, sword in hand, near my house?

ORESTES Wait and hear, and you will soon agree with me

ELECTRA Here I stand; I am in your power in any case, since you art the stronger.

ORESTES I am come to you with news of your brother.

ELECTRA O best of friends! is he alive or dead?

ORESTES Alive; I would fain give you my good news first.

ELECTRA God bless you! in return for your welcome tidings.

ORESTES I am prepared to share that blessing between us.

ELECTRA In what land is my poor brother spending his dreary exile?

ORESTES His ruined life does not conform to the customs of any one city.

ELECTRA Surely he does not want for daily bread?

ORESTES Bread he has, but an exile is a helpless man at best.

ELECTRA What is this message you have brought from him?

ORESTES He asks, "Art you alive? and if so, How art you faring?"

ELECTRA Well, first you see how haggard I am grown.

ORESTES So wasted with sorrow that I weep for you.

ELECTRA Next mark my head, shorn and shaven like a Scythian's.

ORESTES Your brother's fate and father's death no doubt disturb you.

ELECTRA Yes, alas! for what have I more dear than these?

ORESTES Ah! and what do you suppose is dearer to your brother?

ELECTRA He is far away, not here to show his love to me.

ORESTES Wherefore art you living here far from the city?

ELECTRA I am wedded, sir; a fatal match!

ORESTES Alas! for your brother; I pity him. Is your husband of Mycenae?

ELECTRA He is not the man to whom my father ever thought of betrothing me.

ORESTES Tell me all, that I may report it to your brother.

ELECTRA I live apart from my husband in this house.

ORESTES The only fit inmate would be a hind or herd.

ELECTRA Poor he is, yet he displays a generous consideration for me.

ORESTES Why, what is this consideration that attaches to your husband?

ELECTRA He has never presumed to claim from me a husband's rights.

ORESTES Is he under a vow of chastity? or does he disdain you?

ELECTRA He thought he had no right to flout my ancestry.

ORESTES How was it he was not overjoyed at winning such a bride?

ELECTRA He does not recognize the right of him who disposed of my hand.

ORESTES I understand; he was afraid of the vengeance of Orestes hereafter.

ELECTRA There was that fear, but he was a virtuous man as well.

ORESTES Ah! a noble nature this! He deserves kind treatment.

ELECTRA Yes, if ever the wanderer return.

ORESTES But did your own mother give in to this?

ELECTRA it is her husband, not her children that a woman loves, sir stranger.

ORESTES Wherefore did Aegisthus put this affront on you?

ELECTRA His design in giving me to such a husband was to weaken my offspring

ORESTES To prevent you bearing sons, I suppose, who should punish him?

ELECTRA That was his plan; God grant I may avenge me on him for it!

ORESTES Does your mother's husband know that you art yet a maid?

ELECTRA He does not; our silence robs him of that knowledge.

ORESTES Are these women friends of yours, who overhear our talk?

ELECTRA They are, and they will keep our conversation perfectly secret.

ORESTES What could Orestes do in this matter, if he did return?

ELECTRA Canst you ask? Shame on you for that! Is not this the time for action?

ORESTES But suppose he comes, how could he slay his father's murderers?

ELECTRA By boldly meting out the same fate that his father had meted out to him by his foes.

ORESTES Would you be brave enough to help him slay his mother?

ELECTRA Aye, with the self-same axe that drank my father's blood.

ORESTES Am I to tell him this, and that your purpose firmly holds?

ELECTRA Once I have shed my mother's blood over his, then welcome death!

ORESTES Ah! would Orestes were standing near to hear that!

ELECTRA I should not know him, sir, if I saw him.

ORESTES No wonder; you were both children when you parted.

ELECTRA There is only one of my friends would recognize him.

ORESTES The man maybe who is said to have snatched him away from being murdered?

ELECTRA Yes, the old servant who tended my father's childhood long ago.

ORESTES Did your father's corpse obtain burial?

ELECTRA Such burial as it was, after his body had been flung forth from the palace.

ORESTES O God! how awful is your story! Yes, there is a feeling, arising even from another's distress, that wrings the human heart. Say on, that when know the loveless tale, which yet I needs must hear, I may carry it to your brother. For pity, though it has no place in ignorant natures, is inborn in the wise; still it may cause trouble to find excessive cleverness amongst the wise.

LEADER I too am stirred by the same desire as the stranger. For dwelling so far from the city I know nothing of its ills, and I should like to hear about them now myself.

ELECTRA I will tell you, if I may; and surely I may tell a friend about my own and my father's grievous misfortunes. Now since you move me to speak, I entreat you, sir, tell Orestes of our sorrows; first, describe the dress I wear, the load of squalor that oppresses me, the hovel I inhabit after my royal home; tell him how hard I have to work at weaving clothes myself or else go barely clad and do without; how I carry home on my head water from the brook; no part have I in holy festival, no place amid the dance; a maiden still I turn from married dames and from Castor too, to whom they betrothed me before he joined the heavenly host, for I was his kinswoman. Meantime my mother, 'mid the spoils of Troy, is seated on her throne, and at her foot-stool slaves from Asia stand and wait, captives of my father's spear, whose Trojan robes are fastened with brooches of gold. And there on the wall my father's blood still leaves a deep dark stain, while his murderer mounts the dead man's car and fares forth, proudly grasping in his blood-stained hands the sceptre with which Agamemnon would marshal the sons of Hellas. Dishonoured lies his grave; naught as yet has it received of drink outpoured or myrtle-spray, but bare of ornament his tomb is left. Yea, and it is said that noble hero who is wedded to my mother, in his drunken fits, does leap upon the grave, and pelt with stones my father's monument, boldly gibing at us on this wise, "Where is your son Orestes? Is he ever coming in his glory to defend your tomb?" Thus is Orestes flouted behind his back. Oh! tell him this, kind sir, I pray you. And there be many calling him to come, I am but their mouthpiece, these suppliant hands, this tongue, my broken heart, my shaven head, and his own father too. For it is shameful that the sire should have destroyed Troy's race and the son yet prove too weak to pit himself against one foe to the death, albeit he has youth and better blood as well.

LEADER Lo! here is your husband hurrying homeward, his labour done.

PEASANT (entering and catching sight of strangers talking to ELECTRA) Ha! who are these strangers I see at my door? And why are they come hither to my rustic gate? can they want my help? for it is unseemly for a woman to stand talking with young men.

ELECTRA Dear husband, be not suspicious of me. For you shalt hear the truth; these strangers have come to bring me news of Orestes. Good sirs, pardon him those words.

PEASANT What say they? is that hero yet alive and in the light of day?

ELECTRA He is; at least they say so, and I believe them.

PEASANT Surely then he has some memory of his father and your wrongs?

ELECTRA These are things to hope for; a man in exile is helpless.

PEASANT What message have they brought from Orestes?

ELECTRA He sent them to spy out my evil case.

PEASANT Well, they only see a part of it, though maybe you art telling them the rest.

ELECTRA They know all; there is nothing further they need ask.

PEASANT Long ere this then should you have thrown open our doors to them. Enter, sirs; for in return for your good tidings, shall you find such cheer as my house affords. Ho! servants, take their baggage within; make no excuses, for you are friends sent by one I love; and poor though I am, yet will I never show meanness in my habits.

ORESTES 'Fore heaven! is this the man who is helping you to frustrate your marriage, because he will not shame Orestes?

ELECTRA This is he whom they call my husband, woe is me!

ORESTES Ah! there is no sure mark to recognize a man's worth; for human nature has in it an element of confusion. For I have seen ere now the son of noble sire prove himself a worthless knave, and virtuous children sprung from evil parents; likewise dearth in a rich man's spirit, and in a poor man's frame a mighty soul. By what standard then shall we rightly judge these things? By wealth? An evil test to use. By poverty then? Nay, poverty suffers from this, that it teaches a man to play the villain from necessity. To martial prowess must I turn? But who could pronounce who is the valiant man merely from the look of his spear? Better is it to leave these matters to themselves without troubling. For here is a man of no account in Argos, with no family reputation to boast, one of the common herd, proved a very hero. A truce to your folly! you self-deceivers, swollen with idle fancies; learn to judge men by their converse, and by their habits decide who are noble. Such are they who rule aright both states and families; while those forms of flesh, devoid of intellect, are but figure-heads in the market-place. The strong arm, again, no more than the weak awaits the battle-shock, for this depends on natural courage. Well! absent or present, Agamemnon's son, whose business brings us here, deserves this of us, so let us accept a lodging in this house. (Calling to his servants) Ho! sirrahs, go within. A humble host, who does his best, in preference to a wealyour man for me! And so I thankfully accept this peasant's proffered welcome, though I could have preferred that your brother were conducting me to share his fortune in his halls. Maybe he yet will come; for the oracies of Loxias are sure, but to man's divining "Farewell" say I. (ORESTES, PYLADES and their attendants go into the hut.)

LEADER Electra, I feel a warmer glow of joy suffuse my heart than ever heretofore; perchance our fortune, moving on at last, will find a happy resting-place.

ELECTRA O reckless man, why did you welcome strangers like these, so far beyond your station, knowing the poverty of your house?



PEASANT Why? if they are really as noble as they seem, surely they will be equally content with rich or humble fare.

ELECTRA Well. since you have made this error, poor man as you art, go to my father's kind old foster-sire; on the bank of the river Tanaus, the boundary 'twixt Argos and the land of Sparta, he tends his flocks, an outcast from the city; bid him come hither to our house and some provision for the strangers' entertainment. Glad will he be, and will offer thanks to heaven to hear that the child, whom once he saved, is yet alive. I shall get nothing from my mother from my ancestral halls; for we should rue our message, were she to learn, unnatural wretch! that Orestes lives.

PEASANT I will take this message to the old man, if it seem good to you; but get you in at once and there make ready. A woman, when she chooses, can find dainties in plenty to garnish a feast. Besides, there is quite enough in the house to satisfy them with food for one day at least. it is in such cases, when I come to muse thereon, that I discern the mighty power of wealth, whether to give to strangers, or to expend in curing the body when it falls sick; but our daily food is a small matter; for all of us, rich as well as poor, are in like case, as soon as we are satisfied. (The PEASANT departs as ELECTRA enters the hut.)

CHORUS (singing, strophe 1)

You famous ships, that on a day were brought to land at Troy by those countless oars, what time you led the Nereids' dance, where the dolphin music-loving rolled and gambolled round your dusky prows, escorting Achilles, nimble son of Thetis, when he went with Agamemnon to the banks of Trojan Simois;

(antistrophe 1)

When Nereids left Euboea's strand, bringing from Hephaestus' golden forge the harness he had fashioned for that warrior's use; him long they sought over Pelion and Ossa's spurs, ranging the sacred glens and the peaks of Nymphaea, where his knightly sire was training up a light for Hellas, even the sea-born son of Thetis, a warrior swift to help the sons of Atreus.

(strophe 2)

One that came from Ilium, and set foot in the haven of Nauplia, told me that on the circle of your far-famed targe, O son of Thetis, was wrought this blazon, a terror to the Phrygians; on the rim of the buckler Perseus with winged sandals, was bearing in his hand across the main the Gorgon's head, just severed by the aid of Hermes, the messenger of Zeus, that rural god whom Maia bore;

(antistrophe 2)

While in the centre of the shield the sun's bright orb flashed light on the backs of his winged coursers; there too was the heavenly choir of stars, Pleiades and Hyades, to dazzle Hector's eyes and make him flee; and upon his gold-forged helm were sphinxes, bearing in their talons the prey of which the minstrels sing; on his breast-plate was lioness breathing flame, her eye upon Peirene's steed, in eagerness to rend it.

There too in murderous fray four-footed steeds were prancing, while oer their backs uprose dark clouds of dust. But he who led these warriors stout, was slain by wedding you, malignant child of Tyndareus! Wherefore shall the gods of heaven one day send you to your doom, and I shall yet live to see the sword at your throat, drinking its crimson tide. (The OLD MAN, the former servant of Agamemnon, enters. ELECTRA presently appears at the door of the hut.)

OLD MAN Where is the young princess, my mistress, Agamemnon's daughter, whom I nursed in days gone by? Oh! how steep is the approach to this house, a hard climb for these old wasted feet of mine! Still, to reach such friends as these, I must drag my bent old back and tottering knees up it. Ah, daughter!-for I see you now at your door,-lo! I have brought the this tender lamb from my own flock, having taken it from its dam, with garlands too and cheese straight from the press, and this flask of choice old wine with fragrant bouquet; it is small perhaps, but pour a cup thereof into some weaker drink, and it is a luscious draught. Let some one carry these gifts into the house for the guests; for I would fain wipe from my eyes the rising tears on this tattered cloak.

ELECTRA Why stands the tear-drop in your eye, old friend? Is it that my sorrows have been recalled to you after an interval? or art you bewailing the sad exile of Orestes, and my father's fate, whom you did once fondle in your arms, in vain, alas! for you and for your friends?

OLD MAN Ah yes! in vain; but still I could not bear to leave him thus; and so I added this to my journey that I sought his grave, and, falling thereupon, wept over its desolation; then did I open the wine-skin, my gift to your guests, and poured a libation, and set myrtle-sprigs round the tomb. And lo! upon the grave itself I saw a black ram had been offered, and there was blood, not long poured forth, and severed locks of auburn hair. Much I wondered, my daughter, who had dared approach the tomb; certainly 'twas no Argive. Nay, your brother may perchance have come by stealth, and going thither have done honour to his father's wretched grave. Look at the hair, compare it with your own, to see if the colour of these cut locks is the same; for children in whose veins runs the same father's blood have a close resemblance in many features.

ELECTRA Old sir, your words are unworthy of a wise man, if you think my own brave brother would have come to this land by stealth for fear of Aegisthus. In the next place, how should our hair correspond? His is the hair of a gallant youth trained up in manly sports, mine a woman's curled and combed; nay, that is a hopeless clue. Besides, you couldst find many, whose hair is of the same colour, albeit not sprung from the same blood. No, maybe 'twas some stranger cut off his hair in pity at his tomb, or one that came to spy this land privily.

OLD MAN Put your foot in the print of his shoe and mark whether it correspond with yours, my child.

ELECTRA How should the foot make any impression on stony ground? and if it did, the foot of brother and sister would not be the same in size, for man's is the larger.

OLD MAN Have you no mark, in case your brother should come, whereby to recognize the weaving of your loom, the robe wherein I snatched him from death that day?

ELECTRA Do you forget I was still a babe when Orestes left the country? and even if I had woven him a robe, how should he, a mere child then, be wearing the same now, unless our clothes and bodies grow together?

OLD MAN Where are these guests? I fain would question them face to face about your brother. (As he speaks, ORESTES and PYLADES come out of the hut.)

ELECTRA There they are, in havee to leave the house.

OLD MAN Well born, it seems, but that may be a sham; for there be plenty such prove knaves. Still I give them greeting.

ORESTES All hail, father! To which of your friends, Electra, does this old relic of mortality belong?

ELECTRA This is he who nursed my sire, sir stranger.

ORESTES What! do I behold him who removed your brother out of harm's way?

ELECTRA Behold the man who saved his life; if, that is, he lives still.

ORESTES Ha! why does he look so hard at me, as if he were examining the bright device on silver coin? Is he finding in me a likeness to some other?

ELECTRA Maybe he is glad to see in you a companion of Orestes.

ORESTES A man I love full well. But why is he walking round me?

ELECTRA I, too, am watching his movements with amaze, sir stranger.

OLD MAN My honoured mistress, my daughter Electra, return thanks to heaven,-

ELECTRA For past or present favours? which?

OLD MAN That you have found a treasured prize, which God is now revealing.

ELECTRA Hear me invoke the gods. But what do you mean, old man?

OLD MAN Behold before you, my child, your nearest and dearest.

ELECTRA I have long feared you were not in your sound senses

OLD MAN Not in my sound senses, because I see your brother?

ELECTRA What mean'st you, aged friend, by these astounding words?

OLD MAN That I see Orestes, Agamemnon's son, before me.

ELECTRA What mark do see that I can trust?

OLD MAN A scar along his brow, where he fell and cut himself one day in his father's home when chasing a fawn with you.

ELECTRA Is it possible? True; I see the mark of the fall.

OLD MAN Do hesitate then to embrace your own dear brother?

ELECTRA No! not any longer, old friend; for my soul is convinced by the tokens you show . O my brother, you art come at last, and I embrace you, little as I ever thought to.

ORESTES And you to my bosom at last I press.

ELECTRA I never thought that it would happen.

ORESTES All hope in me was also dead.

ELECTRA Art you really he?

ORESTES Aye, your one and only champion, if I can but safely draw to shore the cast I mean to throw; and I feel sure I shall; else must we cease to believe in gods, if wrong is to triumph over right.

CHORUS (singing) At last, at last appears your radiant dawn, O happy day! and as beacon to the city have you revealed the wanderer, who, long ago, poor boy! was exiled from his father's halls. Now, lady, comes our turn for victory, ushered in by some god. Raise hand and voice in prayer, beseech the gods that good fortune may attend your brother's entry to the city.

ORESTES Enough! sweet though the rapture of this greeting be, I must wait and return it hereafter. Do you, old friend so timely met, tell me how I am to avenge me on my father's murderer, and on my mother, the partner in his guilty marriage. Have I still in Argos any band of kindly friends? or am I, like my fortunes, bankrupt altogether? With whom am I to league myself? by night or day shall I advance? point out a road for me to take against these foes of mine.

OLD MAN My son, you have no friend now in your hour of adversity. No! that is a piece of rare good luck, to find another share your fortunes alike for better and for worse. You art of every friend completely reft, all hope is gone from you; be sure of what I tell you; on your own arm and fortune art you wholly thrown to win your father's home and your city.

ORESTES What must I do to compass this result?

OLD MAN Slay Thyestes' son and your mother.

ORESTES I came to win that victor's crown, but how can I attain it?

OLD MAN You would never achieve it if you did enter the walls.

ORESTES Are they manned with guards and armed sentinels?

OLD MAN Aye truly; for he is afraid of you, and cannot sleep secure.

ORESTES Well then, do you next propose a scheme, old friend.

OLD MAN Hear me a moment; an idea has just occurred to me.

ORESTES May your counsel prove good, and my perception keen!

OLD MAN I saw Aegisthus, as I was slowly pacing hither-

ORESTES I welcome your words. Where was he?

OLD MAN Not far from these fields, at his stables.

ORESTES What was he doing? I see a gleam of hope after our helplessness.

OLD MAN I thought he was preparing a feast for the Nymphs.

ORESTES In return for the bringing up of children or in anticipation of a birth?

OLD MAN All I know is this, he was preparing to sacrifice oxen.

ORESTES How many were with him? or was he alone with his servants?

OLD MAN There was no Argive there; only a band of his own followers.

ORESTES Is it possible that any of them will recognize me, old man?

OLD MAN They are only servants, and they have never even seen you.

ORESTES Will they support me, if I prevail?

OLD MAN Yes, that is the way of slaves, luckily for you.

ORESTES On what pretext can I approach him?

OLD MAN Go to some place where he will see you as he sacrifices.

ORESTES His estate is close to the road then, I suppose.

OLD MAN Yes, and when he sees you there, he will invite you to the feast.

ORESTES So help me God! He shall rue his invitation.

OLD MAN After that, form your own plan according to circumstances.

ORESTES Good advice! But my mother, where is she?

OLD MAN At Argos; but she will yet join her husband for the feast.

ORESTES Why did she not come forth with him?

OLD MAN From fear of the citizens' reproach she stayed behind.

ORESTES I understand; she knows that the city suspects her.

OLD MAN Just so; her wickedness makes her hated.

ORESTES How shall I slay her and him together?

ELECTRA Mine be the preparation of my mother's slaying!

ORESTES Well, as for the other, fortune will favour us.

ELECTRA Our old friend here must help us both.

OLD MAN Aye, that will I; but what is your scheme for slaying your mother?

ELECTRA Go, old man, and tell Clytemnestra from me that I have given birth to a son.

OLD MAN Some time ago, or quite recently?

ELECTRA Ten days ago, which are the days of my purification.

OLD MAN Suppose it done; but how does this help towards slaying your mother?

ELECTRA She will come, when she hears of my confinement.

OLD MAN What! do think she cares aught for you, my child?

ELECTRA Oh yes! she will weep no doubt over my child's low rank.

OLD MAN Perhaps she may; but go back again to the point.

ELECTRA Her death is certain, if she comes.

OLD MAN In that case, let her come right up to the door of the house.

ELECTRA Why then it were a little thing to turn her steps into the road to Hades' halls.

OLD MAN Oh! to see this one day, then die!

ELECTRA First of all, old friend, act as my brother's guide.

OLD MAN To the place where Aegisthus is now sacrificing to the gods?

ELECTRA Then go, find my mother and give her my message.

OLD MAN Aye, that I will, so that she shall think the very words are yours.

ELECTRA (to ORESTES) Your work begins at once; you have drawn the first lot in the tragedy.

ORESTES I will go, if some one will show me the way.

OLD MAN I will myself conduct you nothing loth.

ORESTES O Zeus, god of my fathers, vanquisher of my foes, have pity on us, for a piteous lot has ours been.

ELECTRA Oh! have pity on your own descendants.

ORESTES O Hera, mistress of Mycenae's altars, grant us the victory, if we are asking what is right.

ELECTRA Yes, grant us vengeance on them for our father's death.

ORESTES You too, my father, sent to the land of shades by wicked hands, and Earth, the queen of all, to whom I spread my suppliant palms, up and champion your dear children. Come with all the dead to aid, all they who helped you break the Phrygians' power, and all who hate ungodly crime. Do hear me, father, victim of my mother's rage?

ELECTRA Sure am I he hears all; but it is time to part. For this cause too I bid you strike Aegisthus down, because, if you fall in the struggle and perish, I also die; no longer number me amongst the living; for I will stab myself with a two-edged sword. And now will I go indoors and make all ready there, for, if there come good news from you, my house shall ring with women's cries of joy; but, if you art slain, a different scene must then ensue. These are my instructions to you.

ORESTES I know my lesson well. (ORESTES, PYLADES, the OLD MAN, and attendants, depart.)

ELECTRA Then show yourself a man. And you, my friends, signal to me by cries the certain issue of this fray. Myself will keep the sword ready in my grasp, for I will never accept defeat, and yield my body to my enemies to insult. (ELECTRA goes into the hut.)

CHORUS (singing, strophe 1)

Still the story finds a place in time-honoured legends, how on day Pan, the steward of husbandry, came breathing dulcet music on his jointed pipe, and brought with him from its tender dam on Argive hills, a beauteous lamb with fleece of gold; then stood a herald high upon the rock and cried aloud, "Away to the place of assembly, you folk of Mycenae! to behold the strange and awful sight vouchsafed to our blest rulers." Anon the dancers did obeisance to the family of Atreus;

(antistrophe 1)

The altar-steps of beaten gold were draped; and through that Argive town the altars blazed with fire; sweetly rose the lute's clear note, the handmaid of the Muse's song; and ballads fair were written on the golden lamb, saying that Thyestes had the luck; for he won the guilty love of the wife of Atreus, and carried off to his house the strange creature, and then coming before the assembled folk he declared to them that he had in his house that horned beast with fleece of gold.

(strophe 2)

In the self-same hour it was that Zeus changed the radiant courses of the stars, the light of the sun, and the joyous face of dawn, and drove his car athwart the western sky with fervent heat from heaven's fires, while northward fled the rain-clouds, and Ammon's strand grew parched and faint and void of dew, when it was robbed of heaven's genial showers.

(antistrophe 2)

it is said, though I can scarce believe it, the sun turned round his glowing throne of gold, to vex the sons of men by this change because of the quarrel amongst them. Still, tales of horror have their use in making men regard the gods; of whom you hadst no thought, when you slew your husband, you mother of this noble pair.

LEADER OF THE CHORUS Hark! my friends, did you hear that noise, like to the rumbling of an earthquake, or am I the dupe of idle fancy? Hark! hark! once more that wind-borne sound swells loudly on mine ear. Electra! mistress mine! come forth from the house!

ELECTRA (rushing out) What is it, good friends? how goes the day with us?

LEADER I hear the cries of dying men; no more I know.

ELECTRA I heard them too, far off, but still distinct.

LEADER Yes, the sound came stealing from afar, but yet 'twas clear.

ELECTRA Was it the groan of an Argive, or of my friends?

LEADER I know not; for the cries are all confused.

ELECTRA That word of yours is my death-warrant; why do I delay?

LEADER Stay, till you learn your fate for certain.

ELECTRA No, no; we are vanquished; where are our messengers?

LEADER They will come in time; to slay a king is no light task.  
(A MESSENGER enters in havee.)



MESSENGER All hail! you victors, maidens of Mycenae, to all Orestes' friends his triumph I announce; Aegisthus, the murderer of Agamemnon, lies weltering where he fell; return thanks to heaven.

ELECTRA Who art you? What proof do you give of this?

MESSENGER Look at me, do you not recognize your brother's servant?

ELECTRA O best of friends! 'twas fear that prevented me from recognizing you; now I know you well. What sayst you? Is my father's hateful murderer slain?

MESSENGER He is; I repeat it since it is your wish.

LEADER You gods, and justice, whose eye is on all, at last art you come.

ELECTRA I fain would learn the way and means my brother took to slay Thyestes' son.

MESSENGER After we had set out from this house, we struck into the broad highroad, and came to the place where was the far-famed King of Mycenae. Now he was walking in a garden well-watered, culling a wreath of tender myrtle-sprays for his head, and when he saw us, he called out, "All hail! strangers; who are you? whence come you? from what country?" To him Orestes answered, "We are from Thessaly, on our way to Alpheus' banks to sacrifice to Olympian Zeus." When Aegisthus heard that, he said, "You must be my guests to-day, and share the feast, for I am even now sacrificing to the Nymphs; and by rising with tomorrow's light you will be just as far upon your journey; now let us go within." Therewith he caught us by the hand and led us by the way; refuse we could not; and when we were come to the house, he gave command: "Bring water for my guests to wash forthwith, that they may stand around the altar near the laver." But Orestes answered, "'Twas but now we purified ourselves and washed us clean in water from the river. So if we strangers are to join your citizens in sacrifice, we are ready, King Aegisthus, and will not refuse." So ended they their private conference. Meantime the servants, that composed their master's bodyguard, laid aside their weapons, and one and all were busied at their tasks. Some brought the bowl to catch the blood, others took up baskets, while others kindled fire and set cauldrons round about the altars, and the whole house rang. Then did your mother's husband take the barley for sprinkling, and began casting it upon the hearth with these words, "You Nymphs, who dwell among the rocks, grant that I may often sacrifice with my wife, the daughter of Tyndareus, within my halls, as happily as now, and ruin seize my foes!" (whereby he meant Orestes and yourself) . But my master, lowering his voice, offered a different prayer, that he might regain his father's house. Next Aegisthus took from basket a long straight knife, and cutting off some of the calf's hair, laid it with his right hand on the sacred fire, and then cut its throat when the servants had lifted it upon their shoulders, and thus addressed your brother; "Men declare that amongst the Thessalians this is counted honourable, to cut up a bull neatly and to manage steeds. So take the knife, sir stranger, and show us if rumour speaks true about the Thessalians." Thereon Orestes seized the Dorian knife of tempered steel and cast from his shoulders his graceful buckled robe; then choosing Pylades to help him in his task, he made the servants withdraw, and catching the calf by the hoof, proceeded to lay bare its white flesh, with arm outstretched, and he flayed the hide quicker than a runner ever finishes the two laps of the horses' race-course; next he laid the belly open, and Aegisthus took the entrails in his hands and carefully examined them. Now the liver had no

lobe, while the portal vein leading to the gall-bladder portended dangerous attack on him who was observing it. Dark grows Aegisthus' brow, but my master asks, "Why so despondent, good sir?" Said he, "I fear treachery from a stranger. Agamemnon's son of all men most I hate, and he hates my house." But Orestes cried, "What! fear treachery from an exile! you the ruler of the city? Ho! take this Dorian knife away and bring me a Thessalian cleaver, that we by sacrificial feast may learn the will of heaven; let me cleave the breast-bone." And he took the axe and cut it through. Now Aegisthus was examining the entrails, separating them in his hands, and as he was bending down, your brother rose on tiptoe and smote him on the spine, severing the bones of his back; and his body gave one convulsive shudder from head to foot and writhed in the death-agony. No sooner did his servants see it, than they rushed to arms, a host to fight with two; yet did Pylades and Orestes of their valiancy meet them with brandished spears. Then cried Orestes, "I am no foe that come against this city and my own servants, but I have avenged me on the murderer of my sire, I, ill-starred Orestes. Slay me not, my father's former thralls!" They, when they heard him speak, restrained their spears, and an old man, who had been in the family many a long year, recognized him. Forthwith they crown your brother with a wreath, and utter shouts of joy. And lo! he is coming to show you the head, not the Gorgon's, but the head of your hated foe Aegisthus; his death today has paid in blood a bitter debt of blood.

CHORUS (singing) Dear mistress, now with step as light as fawn join in the dance; lift high the nimble foot and be glad. Victory crowns your brother; he has won a fairer wreath than ever victor gained beside the streams of Alpheus; so raise a fair hymn to victory, the while I dance.

ELECTRA O light of day! O bright careering sun! O earth! and night erewhile my only day; now may I open my eyes in freedom, for Aegisthus is dead, my father's murderer. Come friends, let me bring out whatever my house contains to deck his head and wreath with crowns my conquering brother's brow.

CHORUS (singing) Bring forth your garlands for his head, and we will lead the dance the Muses love. Now shall the royal line, dear to us in days gone by, resume its sway over the realm, having laid low the usurper as he deserves. So let the shout go up, whose notes are those of joy. (ORESTES and PYLADES enter, followed by attendants who are bearing the body of Aegisthus.)

ELECTRA Hail! glorious victor, Orestes, son of a sire who won the day 'neath Ilium's walls, accept this wreath to bind about the tresses of your hair. Not in vain have you run your course to the goal and reached your home again; no! but you have slain your foe, Aegisthus, the murderer of our father. You too, O Pylades, trusty squire, whose training shows your father's sterling worth, receive a garland from my hand, for you no less than he have a share in this emprise; and so I pray, good luck be yours for ever!

ORESTES First recognize the gods, Electra, as being the authors of our fortune, and then praise me their minister and fate's. Yea, I come from having slain Aegisthus in very deed, no mere pretence; and to make you the more certain of this, I am bringing you his corpse, which, if you will, expose for beasts to rend, or set it upon a stake for birds, the children of the air, to prey upon; for now is he your slave, once called your lord and master.

ELECTRA I am ashamed to utter my wishes.

ORESTES What is it? speak out, for you art through the gates of fear.

ELECTRA I am ashamed to flout the dead, for fear some spite assail me.

ORESTES No one would blame you for this.

ELECTRA Our folk are hard to please, and love to blame.

ORESTES Speak all your mind, sister; for we entered on this feud with him on terms admitting not of truce.

ELECTRA Enough! (Turning to the corpse of Aegisthus) With which of your iniquities shall I begin my recital? With which shall I end it? To which allot a middle place? And yet I never ceased, as each day dawned, to rehearse the story I would tell you to your face, if ever I were freed from my old terrors; and now I am; so I will pay you back with the abuse I fain had uttered to you when alive. You were my ruin, making me and my brother orphans, though we had never injured you, and you did make a shameful marriage with my mother, having slain her lord who led the host of Hellas, though yourself did never go to Troy. Such was your folly, you did never dream that my mother would prove your curse when you did marry her, though you were wronging my father's honour. Know this; whoso defiles his neighbour's wife, and afterward is forced to take her to himself, is a wretched wight, if he supposes she will be chavée as his wife, though she sinned against her former lord. Yours was a life most miserable, though you did pretend 'twas otherwise; well you knew how guilty your marriage was, and my mother knew she had a villain for husband. Sinners both you took each other's lot, she your fortune, you her curse. While everywhere in Argos you-would hear such phrases as, "that woman's husband," never "that man's wife." Yet it is shameful for the wife and not the man to rule the house; wherefore I loathe those children, who are called in the city not the sons of the man, their father, but of their mother. For if a man makes a great match above his rank, there is no talk of the husband but only of the wife. Herein lay your grievous error, due to ignorance; you thought yourself some one, relying on your wealth, but this is naught save to stay with us a space. it is nature that stands fast, not wealth. For it, if it abide unchanged, exalts man's horn; but riches dishonestly acquired and in the hands of fools, soon take their flight, their blossom quickly shed. As for your sins with women, I pass them by, it is not for maiden's lips to mention them, but I will shrewdly hint thereat. And then your arrogance! because forsooth you hadst a palace and some looks to boast. May I never have a husband with a girl's face, but one that bears him like a man! For the children of these latter cling to a life of arms, while those, who are so fair to see, do only serve to grace the dance. Away from me! (Spurning the corpse with her foot) Time has shown your villainy, little as you reckon of the forfeit you have paid for it. Let none suppose, though he have run the first stage of his course with joy, that he will get the better of justice, till he have reached the goal and ended his career.

LEADER OF THE CHORUS Terrible alike his crime and your revenge; for mighty is the power of justice.

ORESTES it is well. Carry his body within the house and hide it, sirrahs, that when my mother comes, she may not see his corpse before she is smitten herself. (PYLADES and the attendants take the body into the hut.)

ELECTRA Hold! let us strike out another scheme.

ORESTES How now? Are those allies from Mycenae whom I see?

ELECTRA No, it is my mother, that bare me.

ORESTES Full into the net she is rushing, oh, bravely!

ELECTRA See how proudly she rides in her chariot and fine robes!

ORESTES What must we do to our mother? Slay her?

ELECTRA What! has pity seized you at sight of her?

ORESTES O God! how can I slay her that bare and suckled me?

ELECTRA Slay her as she slew your father and mine.

ORESTES O Phoebus, how foolish was your oracle-

ELECTRA Where Apollo errs, who shall be wise?

ORESTES In bidding me commit this crime-my mother's murder!

ELECTRA How canst you be hurt by avenging your father?

ORESTES Though pure before, I now shall carry into exile the stain of a mother's blood.

ELECTRA Still, if you avenge not your father, you will fail in your duty.

ORESTES And if I slay my mother, I must pay the penalty to her.

ELECTRA And so must you to him, if you resign the avenging of our father.

ORESTES Surely it was a fiend in the likeness of the god that ordered this!

ELECTRA Seated on the holy tripod? I think not so.

ORESTES I cannot believe this oracle was meant.

ELECTRA Turn not coward! Cast not your manliness away!

ORESTES Am I to devise the same crafty scheme for her?

ELECTRA The self-same death you did mete out to her lord Aegisthus.

ORESTES I will go in; it is an awful task I undertake; an awful deed I have to do; still if it is Heaven's will, be it so; I loathe and yet I love the enterprise. (As ORESTES withdraws into

the hut, CLYTEMNESTRA enters in a chariot. Her attendants are hand-maidens attired in gorgeous apparel.)

CHORUS (singing) Hail! Queen of Argos, daughter of Tyndareus, sister of those two noble sons of Zeus, who dwell in the flame-lit firmament amid the stars, whose guerdon high it is to save the sailor tossing on the sea. All hail! because of your wealth and high prosperity, I do you homage as I do the blessed gods. Now is the time, great queen, for us to pay our court to your fortunes.

CLYTEMNESTRA Alight from the car, you Trojan maids, and take my hand that I may step down from the chariot. With Trojan spoils the temples of the gods are decked, but I have obtained these maidens as a special gift from Troy, in return for my lost daughter, a trifling boon no doubt, but still an ornament to my house.

ELECTRA And may not I, mother, take that highly-favoured hand of yours? I am a slave like them, an exile from my father's halls in this miserable abode.

CLYTEMNESTRA See, my servants are here; trouble not on my account.

ELECTRA Why, you did make me your prisoner by robbing me of my home; like these I became a captive when my home was taken, an orphan all forlorn.

CLYTEMNESTRA True; but your father plotted so wickedly against those of his own kin whom least of all he should have treated so. Speak I must; albeit, when woman gets an evil reputation, there is a feeling of bitterness against all she says; unfairly indeed in my case, for it were only fair to hate after learning the circumstances, and seeing if the object deserves it; otherwise, why hate at all? Now Tyndareus bestowed me on your father not that I or any children I might bear should be slain. Yet he went and took my daughter from our house to the fleet at Aulis, persuading me that Achilles was to wed her; and there he held her over the pyre, and cut Iphigenia's snowy throat. Had he slain her to save his city from capture, or to benefit his house, or to preserve his other children, a sacrifice of one for many, could have pardoned him. But, as it was, his reasons for murdering my child were these: the wantonness of Helen and her husband's folly in not punishing the traitress. Still, wronged as I was, my rage had not burst forth for this, nor would I have slain my lord, had he not returned to me with that frenzied maiden and made her his mistress, keeping at once two brides beneath the same roof. Women maybe are given to folly, I do not deny it; this granted, when a husband goes astray and sets aside his own true wife, she fain will follow his example and find another love; and then in our case hot abuse is heard, while the men, who are to blame for this, escape without a word. Again, suppose Menelaus had been secretly snatched from his home, should I have had to kill Orestes to save Menelaus, my sister's husband? How would your father have endured this? Was he then to escape death for slaying what was mine, while I was to suffer at his hands? I slew him, turning, as my only course, to his enemies. For which of all your father's friends would have joined me in his murder? Speak all that is in your heart, and prove against me with all free speech, that your father's death was not deserved.

ELECTRA Justly urged! but your justice is not free from shame; for in all things should every woman of sense yield to her husband. Whoso thinks otherwise comes not within the scope

of what I say. Remember, mother, those last words of yours, allowing me free utterance before you.

CLYTEMNESTRA Daughter, far from refusing it, I grant it again.

ELECTRA You will not, when you hear, wreak your vengeance on me?

CLYTEMNESTRA No, indeed; I shall welcome your opinion.

ELECTRA Then will I speak, and this shall be the prelude of my speech: Ah, mother mine! would you hadst had a better heart; for though your beauty and Helen's win you praises well deserved, yet are you akin in nature, pair of wantons, unworthy of Castor. She was carried off, it is true, but her fall was voluntary: and you have slain the bravest soul in Hellas, excusing yourself on the ground that you did kill a husband to avenge a daughter; the world does not know you so well as I do, you who before ever your daughter's death was decided, yea, soon as your lord had started from his home, were combing your golden tresses at your mirror. That wife who, when her lord is gone from home, sets to beautifying herself, strike off from virtue's list; for she has no need to carry her beauty abroad, save she is seeking some mischief. Of all the wives in Hellas you were the only one I know who were overjoyed when Troy's star was in the ascendant, while, if it set, your brow was clouded, since you hadst no wish that Agamemnon should return from Troy. And yet you couldst have played a virtuous part to your own glory. The husband you hadst was no whit inferior to Aegisthus, for he it was whom Hellas chose to be her captain. And when your sister Helen wrought that deed of shame, you couldst have won yourself great glory, for vice is a warning and calls attention to virtue. If, as you allege, my father slew your daughter, what is the wrong I and my brother have done you? How was it you did not bestow on us our father's halls after your husband's death, instead of bartering them to buy a paramour? Again, your husband is not exiled for your son's sake, nor is he slain to avenge my death, although by him this life is quenched twice as much as ever my sister's was; so if murder is to succeed murder in requital, I and your son Orestes must slay you to avenge our father; if that was just, why so is this. Whoso fixes his gaze on wealth or noble birth and weds a wicked woman, is a fool; better is a humble partner in his home, if she be virtuous, than a proud one.

LEADER OF THE CHORUS Chance rules the marriages of women; some I see turn out well, others ill amongst mankind.

CLYTEMNESTRA Daughter, 'twas ever your nature to love your father. This too one finds; some sons cling to their father, others have a deeper affection for their mother. I will forgive you, for myself am not so exceeding glad at the deed that I have done, my child. But you, - why thus unwashed and clad in foul attire, now that the days of your lying-in are accomplished? Ah me, for my sorry schemes! I have goaded my husband into anger more than ever I should have done.

ELECTRA Your sorrow comes too late; the hour of remedy has gone from you; my father is dead. Yet why not recall that exile, your own wandering son?

CLYTEMNESTRA I am afraid; it is my interest, not his that I regard. For they say he is wroth for his father's murder.

ELECTRA Why, then, do you encourage your husband's bitterness against us?

CLYTEMNESTRA it is his way; you too have a stubborn nature.

ELECTRA Because I am grieved; yet will I check my spirit.

CLYTEMNESTRA I promise then he shall no longer oppress you.

ELECTRA From living in my home he grows too proud.

CLYTEMNESTRA Now there! it is you that art fanning the quarrel into new life.

ELECTRA I say no more; my dread of him is even what it is.

CLYTEMNESTRA Peace! Enough of this. Why did you summon me, my child?

ELECTRA You have heard, I suppose, of my confinement; for this I pray you, since I know not how, offer the customary sacrifice on the tenth day after birth, for I am a novice herein, never having had a child before.

CLYTEMNESTRA This is work for another, even for her who delivered you.

ELECTRA I was all alone in my travail and at the babe's birth.

CLYTEMNESTRA Do live so far from neighbours?

ELECTRA No one cares to make the poor his friends.

CLYTEMNESTRA Well, I will go to offer to the gods a sacrifice for the child's completion of the days; and when I have done you this service, I will seek the field where my husband is sacrificing to the Nymphs. Take this chariot hence, my servants, and tie the horses to the stalls; and when you think that I have finished my offering to the gods, attend me, for I must likewise pleasure my lord. (She goes into the hut.)

ELECTRA Enter our humble cottage; but, priyou, take care that my smoke grimed walls soil not your robes; now will you offer to the gods a fitting sacrifice. There stands the basket ready, and the knife is sharpened, the same that slew the bull, by whose side you soon will lie a corpse; and you shalt be his bride in Hades' halls whose wife you wast on earth. This is the boon I will grant you, while you shalt pay me for my father's blood. (ELECTRA follows her into the hut.)

CHORUS (chanting, strophe)

Misery is changing sides; the breeze veers round, and now blows fair upon my house. The day is past when my chief fell murdered in his bath, and the roof and the very stones of the walls rang with this his cry: "O cruel wife, why art you murdering me on my return to my dear country after ten long years?"

(antistrophe)

The tide is turning, and justice that pursues the faithless wife is drawing within its grasp the murderess, who slew her hapless lord, when he came home at last to these towering Cyclopean walls,-aye, with her own hand she smote him with the sharpened steel, herself the axe uplifting. Unhappy husband! whatever the curse that possessed that wretched woman. Like a lioness of the hills that ranges through the woodland for her prey, she wrought the deed.

CLYTEMNESTRA (within) O my children, by Heaven I pray you spare your mother.

CHORUS (chanting) Do hear her cries within the house?

CLYTEMNESTRA O God! ah me!

CHORUS (chanting) I too bewail you, dying by your children's hands. God deals out His justice in His good time. A cruel fate is yours, unhappy one; yet did you sin in murdering your lord. (ORESTES and ELECTRA come out of the hut, followed by attendants who are carrying the two corpses. The following lines between ELECTRA, ORESTES and the CHORUS are chanted.) But lo! from the house they come, dabbled in their mother's fresh-spilt gore, their triumph proving the piteous butchery. There is not nor ever has been a race more wretched than the line of Tantalus.

ORESTES O Earth, and Zeus whose eye is over all! behold this foul deed of blood, these two corpses lying here that I have slain in vengeance for my sufferings.

ELECTRA Tears are all too weak for this, brother; and I am the guilty cause. Ah, woe is me! How hot my fury burned against the mother that bare me!

ORESTES Alas! for your lot, O mother mine! A piteous, piteous doom, aye, worse than that, have you incurred at children's hands! Yet justly have you paid forfeit for our father's blood. Ah, Phoebus! yours was the voice that praised this vengeance; you it is that have brought these hideous scenes to light, and caused this deed of blood. To what city can I go henceforth? what friend, what man of any piety will bear the sight of a mother's murderer like me?

ELECTRA Ah me! alas! and whither can I go? What share have I henceforth in dance or marriage rite? What husband will accept me as his bride?

ORESTES Again your fancy changes with the wind; for now you think aright, though not so formerly; an awful deed did you urge your brother against his will to commit, dear sister. Oh! did you see how the poor victim threw open her robe and showed her bosom as smote her, sinking on her knees, poor wretch? And her hair I-

ELECTRA Full well I know the agony through which you did pass at hearing your own mother's bitter cry.

ORESTES Ah yes! she laid her band upon my chin, and cried aloud, "My child, I entreat you!" and she clung about my neck, so that I let fall the sword.



ELECTRA O my poor mother! How did you endure to see her breathe her last before your eyes?

ORESTES I threw my mantle over them and began the sacrifice by plunging the sword into my mother's throat.

ELECTRA Yet 'twas I that urged you on, yea, and likewise grasped the steel. Oh! I have done an awful deed.

ORESTES Oh! take and hide our mother's corpse beneath a pall, and close her gaping wound. (Turning to the corpse) Ah! your murderers were yours own children.

ELECTRA (covering the corpse) There! you corpse both loved and loathed; still over you I cast robe, to end the grievous troubles of our house.

CHORUS See! where over the roof-top spirits are appearing, or gods maybe from heaven, for this is not a road that mortals tread. Why come they thus where mortal eyes can see them clearly? (THE DIOSCURI appear from above.)

DIOSCURI Hearken, son of Agamemnon. We, the twin sons of Zeus, your mother's sisters, call you, even Castor and his brother Polydeuces. It is but now we have reached Argos after stilling the fury of the sea for mariners, having seen the slaying of our sister, your mother. She has received her just reward, but yours is no righteous act, and Phoebus-but no! he is my king, my lips are sealed-is Phoebus still, albeit the oracle he gave you was no great proof of his wisdom. But we must acquiesce herein. Henceforth must you follow what Zeus and destiny ordain for you. On Pylades bestow Electra for his wife to take to his home; do you leave Argos, for after your mother's murder you mayst not set foot in the city. And those grim goddesses of doom, that glare like savage hounds, will drive you mad and chase you to and fro; but go you to Athens and make your prayer to the holy image of Pallas, for she will close their fierce serpents' mouths, so that they touch you not, holding over your head her aegis with the Gorgon's head. A hill there is, to Ares sacred, where first the gods in conclave sat to decide the law of blood, in the day that savage Ares slew Halirrothius, son of the ocean-king, in anger for the violence he offered to his daughter's honour; from that time all decisions given there are most holy and have heaven's sanction. There must you have this murder tried; and if equal votes are given, they shall save you from death in the decision, for Loxias will take the blame upon himself, since it was his oracle that advised your mother's murder. And this shall be the law for all posterity; in every trial the accused shall win his case if the votes are equal. Then shall those dread goddesses, stricken with grief at this, vanish into a cleft of the earth close to the hill, revered by men henceforth as a place for holy oracles; whilst you must settle in a city of Arcadia on the banks of the river Alpheus near the shrine of Lycaean Apollo, and the city shall be called after your name. To you I say this. As for the corpse of Aegisthus, the citizens of Argos must give it burial; but Menelaus, who has just arrived at Nauplia from the sack of Troy, shall bury the, mother, Helen helping him; for she has come from her sojourn in Egypt in the halls of Proteus, and has never been to Troy; but Zeus, to stir up strife and bloodshed in the world, sent forth a phantom of Helen to Ilium. Now let Pylades take his maiden wife and bear her to his home in Achaea; also he must conduct your so-called kinsman to the land of Phocis, and there reward him well. But go yourself along the narrow Isthmus, and seek Cecropia's happy home. For once you have

fulfilled the doom appointed for this murder, you shalt be blest and free from all your troubles.  
(The remaining lines of the play are chanted.)

CHORUS You sons of Zeus, may we draw near to speak with you?

DIOSCURI You may, since you are not polluted by this murder.

ORESTES May I too share your converse, of Tyndareus?

DIOSCURI You too! for to Phoebus will I ascribe this deed of blood.

CHORUS How was it that you, the brothers of the murdered woman, gods too, did not ward the doom-goddesses from her roof?

DIOSCURI 'Twas fate that brought resistless doom to her, and that thoughtless oracle that Phoebus gave.

ELECTRA But why did the god, and wherefore did his oracles make me my mother's murderer?

DIOSCURI A share in the deed, a share in its doom; one ancestral curse has ruined both of you.

ORESTES Ah, sister mine! at last I see you again only to be robbed in moment of your dear love; I must leave you, and by you be left.

DIOSCURI Hers are a husband and a home; her only suffering this, that she is quitting Argos.

ORESTES Yet what could call forth deeper grief than exile from one's fatherland? I must leave my father's house, and at a stranger's bar he sentenced for my mother's blood.

DIOSCURI Be of good cheer; go to the holy town of Pallas; keep a stout heart only.

ELECTRA O my brother, best and dearest! clasp me to your breast; for now is the curse of our mother's blood cutting us off from the home of our fathers.

ORESTES Throw your arms in close embrace about me. Oh! weep as over my grave when I am dead.

DIOSCURI Ah me, that bitter cry makes even gods shudder to hear. Yea, for in my breast and in every heavenly being's dwells pity for the sorrows of mankind.

ORESTES Never to see you more!

ELECTRA Never again to stand within your sight!

ORESTES This is my last good-bye to you.

ELECTRA Farewell, farewell, my city! and you my fellow-countrywomen, long farewell to you!

ORESTES Art you going already, truest of your sex?

ELECTRA I go, the tear-drop dimming my tender eyes.

ORESTES Go, Pylades, and be happy; take and wed Electra.

DIOSCURI Their only thoughts will be their marriage; but havee you to Athens, seeking to escape these hounds of hell, for they are on your track in fearful wise, swart monsters, with snakes for hands, who reap a harvest of man's agony. But we twain must havee away over the Sicilian main to save the seaman's ship. Yet as we fly through heaven's expanse we help not the wicked; but whoso in his life loves piety and justice, all such we free from troublous toils and save. Wherefore let no man be minded to act unjustly, or with men foresworn set sail; such the warning I, a god, to mortals give. (THE DIOSCURI vanish.)

CHORUS Farewell! truly that mortal's is a happy lot, who can thus fare, unafflicted by any woe.