

Electra
By Sophocles

Translated by R. C. Jebb
Adapted for Falconbridge Players workshop June 2019 by Jason Compton

Dramatis Personae

ORESTES, son of Agamemnon and Clytemnestra

ELECTRA, sister of Orestes

CHRYSOTHEMIS, sister of Orestes

OLD MAN/PAEDAGOGUS of Orestes

CLYTEMNESTRA

AEGISTHUS

CHORUS OF WOMEN OF MYCENAE

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

Mute Persons

Attendants (incl. Pylades, son of Strophius, King of Crisa, the friend Of Orestes.)

A handmaid of Clytemnestra.

SCENE 1

At Mycenae, before the palace of the Pelopidae. It is morning and the new-risen sun is bright. The PAEDAGOGUS enters accompanied by the youth ORESTES.

PAEDAGOGUS

Son of him who led our hosts at Troy of old, son of Agamemnon!-
now thou mayest behold with thine eyes all that thy soul hath desired
so long. There is the ancient Argos of thy yearning. Deem
that thou seest Mycenae rich in gold, with the house of
the Pelopidae there, so often stained with bloodshed; whence I carried
thee of yore, from the slaying of thy father, as thy kinswoman, thy
sister, charged me; and saved thee, and reared thee up to manhood,
to be the avenger of thy murdered sire.

Now, therefore, Orestes, our plans must be laid quickly; for lo,
already the sun's bright ray is waking the songs of the birds into clearness,

and the dark night of stars is spent.

ORESTES

True friend and follower, how well dost thou prove thy loyalty to our house!
Listen closely to my words, and correct me, if I miss the mark in aught.

Alone, and by stealth, without aid of arms or numbers,
I should snatch the righteous vengeance of my hand. Since the
god spake to us on this wise, thou must go into yonder house, when
opportunity gives thee entrance, and learn all that is passing there,
so that thou mayest report to us from sure knowledge. Thine age, and
the lapse of time, will prevent them from recognising thee; they will
never suspect who thou art, with that silvered hair. Tell them,
and confirm it with thine oath, that Orestes hath perished
by a fatal chance,- hurled at the Pythian games from his rapid chariot;
be that the substance of thy story.

We, meanwhile, will first crown my father's tomb, as the god enjoined,
with drink-offerings and the luxuriant tribute of severed hair; then
come back, bearing in our hands an urn of shapely bronze,-now hidden
in the brushwood, as I think thou knowest,- so to gladden them with
the false tidings that this my body is no more, but has been consumed
with fire and turned to ashes.

O my fatherland, and ye gods of the land, receive me with good fortune
in this journey,- and ye also, halls of my fathers, for I come with
divine mandate to cleanse you righteously; send me not dishonoured
from the land, but grant that I may rule over my possessions, and
restore my house!

ELECTRA

(within) Ah me, ah me!

PAEDAGOGUS

Hark, my son,- from the doors, methought, came the sound
of some handmaid moaning within.

ORESTES

Can it be the hapless Electra? Shall we stay here, and listen to her laments?

PAEDAGOGUS

No, no: before all else, let us make a fair beginning, by pouring libations to thy sire; that brings victory within our grasp, and gives us the mastery in all that we do.

(Exit the conspirators. Enter ELECTRA, from the house. She is meanly clad.)

ELECTRA

O thou pure sunlight, and thou air, earth's canopy, how often have ye heard the strains of my lament, the wild blows dealt against this bleeding breast, when dark night fails! And my wretched couch in yonder house of woe knows well, ere now, how I keep the watches of the night,- how often I bewail my hapless sire; to whom deadly Ares gave not of his gifts in a strange land, but my mother, and her mate Aegisthus, cleft his head with murderous axe, as woodmen fell an oak. And for this no plaint bursts from any lip save mine, when thou, my father, hath died a death so cruel and so piteous!

But never will I cease from dirge and sore lament, while I look on the trembling rays of the bright stars, or on this light of day; but like the nightingale, slayer of her offspring, I will wail without ceasing, and cry aloud to all, here, at the doors of my father.

(As ELECTRA finishes her lament, the CHORUS OF WOMEN OF MYCENAE enter.)

CHORUS

Ah, Electra, child of a wretched mother, why art thou ever pining thus in ceaseless lament for Agamemnon, who long ago was wickedly ensnared by thy false mother's wiles, and betrayed to death by dastardly hand? Perish the author of that deed, if I may utter such prayer!

ELECTRA

Ah, noble-hearted maidens, ye have come to soothe my woes. I know and feel it, it escapes me not; but I cannot leave this task undone, or cease from mourning for my hapless sire. Ah, friends whose love responds to mine in every mood, leave me to rave thus,- Oh leave me, I entreat you!

CHORUS

Not to thee alone of mortals, my daughter, hath come any sorrow which

thou bearest less calmly than those within, thy kinswomen and sisters, Chrysothemis and Iphianassa, I who still live,- as he, too, lives, sorrowing in a secluded youth, yet happy in that this famous realm of Mycenae shall one day welcome him to his heritage, when the kindly guidance of Zeus shall have brought him to this land, Orestes.

ELECTRA

Yes, I wait for him with unwearied longing, as I move on my sad path from day to day, unwed and childless, bathed in tears, bearing that endless doom of woe; but he forgets all that he has suffered and heard. What message comes to me, that is not belied? He is ever yearning to be with us, but, though he yearns, he never resolves.

CHORUS

Courage, my daughter, courage; great still in heaven is Zeus, who sees and governs all: leave thy bitter quarrel to him; forget not thy foes, but refrain from excess of wrath against them; for Time is god who makes rough ways smooth. Not heedless is the son of Agamemnon, who dwells by Crisa's pastoral shore; not heedless is the god who reigns by Acheron.

ELECTRA

O that bitter day, bitter beyond all that have come to me;
O that night, O the horrors of that unutterable feast, the ruthless deathstrokes that my father saw from the hands of twain, who took my life captive by treachery, who doomed me to woe! May the great god of Olympus give them sufferings in requital, and never may their splendour bring them joy, who have done such deeds!

CHORUS

Be advised to say no more; canst thou not see what conduct it is which already plunges thee so cruelly in self-made miseries? Thou hast greatly aggravated thy troubles, ever breeding wars with thy sullen soul; but such strife should not be pushed to a conflict with the strong.

ELECTRA

I have been forced to it,- forced by dread causes; I know my own passion, it escapes me not; but, seeing that the causes are so dire, will never curb these frenzied complaints, while life is in

me. Who indeed, ye kindly sisterhood, who that thinks aright, would deem that any word of solace could avail me? Forbear, forbear, my comforters!

CHORUS

At least it is in love, like a true-hearted mother, that I dissuade thee from adding misery to miseries.

ELECTRA

But what measure is there in my wretchedness? Say, how can it be right to neglect the dead? Was that impiety ever born in mortal? Never may I have praise of such; never when my lot is cast in pleasant places, may I cling to selfish ease, or dishonour my sire by restraining the wings of shrill lamentation!

For if the hapless dead is to lie in dust and nothingness, while the slayers pay not with blood for blood, all regard for man, all fear of heaven, will vanish from the earth.

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

I came, my child, in zeal for thy welfare no less than for mine own; but if I speak not well, then be it as thou wilt; for we will follow thee.

ELECTRA

I am ashamed, my friends. How indeed could any woman of noble nature refrain, who saw the calamities of a father's house, as I see them by day and night continually, not fading, but in the summer of their strength?

When I see Aegisthus sitting on my father's throne, wearing the robes which he wore, and pouring libations at the hearth where he slew my sire; and when I see the outrage that crowns all, the murderer in our father's bed at our wretched mother's side, if mother she should be called, who is his wife; but so hardened is she that she lives with that accursed one as if exulting in her deeds, having found the day on which she treacherously slew my father of old, she keeps it with dance and song, and month by month sacrifices sheep to the gods who have wrought her deliverance.

For this woman, in professions so noble, loudly upbraids me with such taunts as these: 'Impious and hateful girl, hast thou alone lost a father, and is there no other mourner in the world? An evil doom be thine, and may the gods infernal give thee no riddance from thy present laments.'

Thus she insults; save when any one brings her word that Orestes is coming: then, infuriated, she comes up to me, and cries;- 'Hast not thou brought this upon me? Is not this deed thine, who didst steal Orestes from my hands, and privily convey him forth? Yet be sure that thou shalt have thy due reward.'

But I, looking ever for Orestes to come and end these woes, languish in my misery. Always intending to strike a blow, he has worn out every hope that I could conceive. In such a case, then, friends, there is no room for moderation or for reverence; in sooth, the stress of ills leaves no choice but to follow evil ways.

LEADER

Say, is Aegisthus near while thou speakest thus, or absent from home?

ELECTRA

Absent, certainly; do not think that I should have come to the doors, if he had been near; but just now he is afield.

LEADER

What sayest thou of thy brother? Will he come soon, or is he delaying? I fain would know.

ELECTRA

He promises to come; but he never fulfils the promise.

LEADER

Yea, a man will pause on the verge of a great work.

ELECTRA

And yet I saved him without pausing.

LEADER

Courage; he is too noble to fail his friends.

ELECTRA

I believe it; or I should not have lived so long.

LEADER

Say no more now; for I see thy sister coming from the house, Chrysothemis, daughter of the same sire and mother, with sepulchral gifts in her hands, such as are given to those in the world below.

SCENE 2

(CHRYSOTHEMIS enters from the palace. She is richly dressed.)

CHRYSOTHEMIS

Why, sister, hast thou come forth once more to declaim thus at the public doors? Why wilt thou not learn with any lapse of time to desist from vain indulgence of idle wrath? Could I find the strength, I would show what love I bear them. But now, in these troubled waters, 'tis best, methinks, to shorten sail; I care not to seem active, without the power to hurt. And would that thine own conduct were the same! Nevertheless, right is on the side of thy choice, not of that which I advise; but if I am to live in freedom, our rulers must be obeyed in all things.

ELECTRA

Strange indeed, that thou, the daughter of such a sire as thine, shouldst forget him, and think only of thy mother! All thy admonitions to me have been taught by her; no word is thine own. Thou, who hast just said that, couldst thou find the strength, thou wouldst show thy hatred of them; yet, when I am doing my utmost to avenge my sire, thou givest no aid, but seekest to turn thy sister from her deed.

Thou, who tellest me of thy hatred, hatest in word alone, while in deeds thou art with the slayers of thy sire. I, then, would never yield to them, though I were promised the gifts which now make thee proud; thine be the richly-spread table and the life of luxury. Now, when thou mightest be called daughter of

the noblest father among men, be called the child of thy mother; so shall thy baseness be most widely seen, in betrayal of thy dead sire and of thy kindred.

LEADER

No angry word, I entreat! For both of you there is good in what is urged,- if thou, Electra, wouldst learn to profit by her counsel, and she, again, by thine.

CHRYSOTHEMIS

For my part, friends, I am not wholly unused to her discourse; nor should I have touched upon this theme, had I not heard that she was threatened with a dread doom, which shall restrain her from her long-drawn laments.

ELECTRA

Come, declare it then, this terror! If thou canst tell me of aught worse than my present lot, I will resist no more.

CHRYSOTHEMIS

Indeed, I will tell thee all that I know. They purpose, if thou wilt not cease from these laments, to send thee where thou shalt never look upon the sunlight, but pass thy days in a dungeon beyond the borders of this land, there to chant thy dreary strain. Bethink thee, then, and do not blame me hereafter, when the blow hath fallen; now is the time to be wise.

ELECTRA

Have they indeed resolved to treat me thus?

CHRYSOTHEMIS

Assuredly, whenever Aegisthus comes home.

ELECTRA

If that be all, then may he arrive with speed!

CHRYSOTHEMIS

But hast thou no care for thy present life?

ELECTRA

Aye, my life is marvellously fair.

CHRYSOTHEMIS

It might be, couldst thou only learn prudence.

ELECTRA

Do not teach me to betray my friends.

CHRYSOTHEMIS

But our father, I know, pardons me for this.

ELECTRA

It is for cowards to find peace in such maxims.

CHRYSOTHEMIS

So thou wilt not hearken, and take my counsel?

ELECTRA

No, verily; long may be it before I am so foolish.

CHRYSOTHEMIS

Then I will go forth upon mine errand.

ELECTRA

And whither goest thou? To whom bearest thou these offerings?

CHRYSOTHEMIS

Our mother sends me with funeral libations for our sire.

ELECTRA

What friend hath persuaded her? Whose wish was this?

CHRYSOTHEMIS

The cause, I think, was some dread vision of the night.
I can tell but little of the story.

ELECTRA

Tell what thou canst; a little word hath often marred, or
made, men's fortunes.

CHRYSOTHEMIS

'Tis said that she beheld our sire, restored to the sunlight, at her side once more; then he took the sceptre,- Once his own, but now borne by Aegisthus,- and planted it at the hearth; and thence a fruitful bough sprang upward, wherewith the whole land of Mycenae was overshadowed. More than this I know not,- save that she sent me by reason of that fear. So by the- gods of our house I beseech thee, hearken to me, and be not ruined by folly!

ELECTRA

Nay, dear sister, let none of these things in thy hands touch the tomb; for neither custom nor piety allows thee to dedicate gifts or bring libations to our sire from a hateful wife. No- to the winds with them or bury them deep in the earth, where none of them shall ever come near his place of rest; but, when she dies, let her find these treasures laid up for her below.

And were she not the most hardened of all women, she would never have sought to pour these offerings of enmity on the grave of him whom she slew.

Give him rather a lock cut from thine own tresses, and on my part, hapless that I am,-scant gifts these, but my best,- this hair, not glossy with unguents, and this girdle, decked with no rich ornament. Then fall down and pray that he himself may come in kindness from the world below, to aid us against our foes; and that the young Orestes may live to set his foot upon his foes in victorious might, that henceforth we may crown our father's tomb with wealthier hands than those which grace it now.

LEADER (to Chrysothemis)

The maiden counsels piously; and thou, friend, wilt do her bidding, if thou art wise.

CHRYSOTHEMIS

I will. When a duty is clear, reason forbids that two voices should contend, and claims the hastening of the deed. Only, when I attempt this task, aid me with your silence, I entreat you, my friends; for, should my mother hear of it, methinks I shall yet

have cause to rue my venture.

(CHRYSOTHEMIS departs, to take the offerings to Agamemnon's grave.)

SCENE 3

(CLYTEMNESTRA enters from the palace.)

CLYTEMNESTRA At large once more, it seems, thou rangest,- for Aegisthus is not here, who always kept thee at least from passing the gates, to shame thy friends. But now, since he is absent, thou takest no heed of me, though thou hast said of me oft-times, and to many, that I am a bold and lawless tyrant, who insults thee and thine.

Thy father- this is thy constant pretext- was slain by me. Yes, by me- I know it well; it admits of no denial; for justice slew him, and not I alone,- justice, seeing that this father of thine, whom thou art ever lamenting, was the one man of the Greeks who had the heart to sacrifice thy sister to the gods- he, the father, who had not shared the mother's pangs.

For myself, then, I view the past without dismay; but if thou deemest me perverse, see that thine own judgment is just, before thou blame thy neighbour.

ELECTRA This time thou canst not say that I have done anything to provoke such words from thee. But, if thou wilt give me leave, I fain would declare the truth, in the cause alike of my dead sire and of my sister.

CLYTEMNESTRA Indeed, thou hast my leave; and didst thou always address me in such a tone, thou wouldst be heard without pain.

ELECTRA Then I will speak. Thou sayest that thou hast slain my father. What word could bring thee deeper shame than that, whether the deed was just or not? But I must tell thee that thy deed was not just; no, thou wert drawn on to it by the wooing of the base man who is now thy spouse.

Look if thy pretext is not false. For tell me, if thou wilt, wherefore thou art now doing the most shameless deeds of all,- dwelling as wife with that blood-guilty one, who first helped thee to slay my sire,

and bearing children to him, while thou hast cast out the earlier-born, the stainless offspring of a stainless marriage. How can I praise these things? Or wilt thou say that this, too, is thy vengeance for thy daughter? Nay, shameful plea, if so thou plead; 'tis not well to wed an enemy for a daughter's sake.

But indeed I may not even counsel thee, who shriekest that I revile my mother; and truly I think that to me thou art less a mother than mistress; so wretched is the life that I live, ever beset with miseries by thee and by thy partner. And that other, who scarce escaped thy hand, the hapless Orestes, is wearing out his ill-starred days in exile.

LEADER OF THE CHORUS I see that she breathes forth anger; but whether justice be with her, for this she seems to care no longer.

CLYTEMNESTRA (to the CHORUS) And what manner of care do I need to use against her, who hath thus insulted a mother, and this at her ripe age? Thinkest thou not that she would go forward to any deed, without shame?

ELECTRA Now be assured that I do feel shame for this, though thou believe it not; I know that my behaviour is unseemly, and becomes me ill. But then the enmity on thy part, and thy treatment, compel me in mine own despite to do thus; for base deeds are taught by base.

CLYTEMNESTRA Now wilt thou not hush thy clamour, or even suffer me to sacrifice, when I have permitted thee to speak unchecked?

ELECTRA I hinder not,- begin thy rites, I pray thee; and blame not my voice, for I shall say no more.

CLYTEMNESTRA Raise then, my handmaid, the offerings of many fruits, that I may uplift my prayers to this our king, for deliverance from my present fears.

That vision which I saw last night in doubtful dreams- if it hath come for my good, grant, Lycean king, that it be fulfilled; but if for harm, then let it recoil upon my foes. And if any are plotting to hurl me by treachery from the high estate which now is mine, permit

them not; rather vouchsafe that, still living thus unscathed, I may bear sway over the house of the Atreidae and this realm, sharing prosperous days with the friends who share them now, and with those of my children from whom no enmity or bitterness pursues me.

O Lycean Apollo, graciously hear these prayers, and grant them to us all, even as we ask!

SCENE 4

(The PAEDAGOGUS enters.)

PAEDAGOGUS Ladies, might a stranger crave to know if this be the palace of the king Aegisthus?

LEADER It is, sir; thou thyself hast guessed aright.

PAEDAGOGUS And am I right in surmising that this lady is his consort? She is of queenly aspect.

LEADER Assuredly; thou art in the presence of the queen.

PAEDAGOGUS Hail, royal lady! I bring glad tidings to thee and to Aegisthus, from friends.

CLYTEMNESTRA What is it, sir? Tell me: coming from a friend, thou wilt bring, I know; a kindly message.

PAEDAGOGUS Orestes is dead; that is the sum.

ELECTRA Oh, miserable that I am! I am lost this day!

CLYTEMNESTRA What sayest thou, friend, what sayest thou?- listen not to her!

PAEDAGOGUS I said, and say again- Orestes is dead.

ELECTRA I am lost, hapless one, I am undone!

CLYTEMNESTRA (to ELECTRA) See thou to thine own concerns.
But do thou, sir, tell me exactly, how did he perish?

PAEDAGOGUS Having gone to the renowned festival, the pride of Greece, for the Delphian games, when he heard the loud summons to the foot-race which was first to be decided, he entered the lists, a brilliant form, and he went out with the glorious meed of victory.
In all the contests that the judges announced, he bore away the prize; and men deemed him happy, as oft as the herald proclaimed him an Argive, by name Orestes, son of Agamemnon, who once gathered the famous armament of Greece.

Thus far, 'twas well; but, when a god sends harm, not even the strong man can escape. For, on another day, when chariots were to try their speed at sunrise, he entered, with many charioteers.

All shouted to their horses, and shook the reins in their hands; the whole course was filled with the noise of rattling chariots; the dust flew upward; and all, in a confused throng, plied their goads unsparingly, each of them striving to pass the wheels and the snorting steeds of his rivals; for alike at their backs and at their rolling wheels the breath of the horses foamed and smote.

Orestes, driving close to the pillar at either end of the course, almost grazed it with his wheel each time, and, giving rein to the trace-horse on the right, checked the horse on the inner side. Hitherto, all the chariots had escaped overthrow; but presently the Aenian's hard-mouthed colts ran away, and, swerving, as they passed from the sixth into the seventh round, dashed their foreheads against the team of the Barcaean. Other mishaps followed the first, shock on shock and crash on crash, till the whole race-ground of Crisa was strewn with the wreck of the chariots.

Hitherto the ill-fated Orestes had passed safely through every round, steadfast in his steadfast car; at last, slackening his left rein while the horse was turning, unawares he struck the edge of the pillar; he broke the axle-box in twain; he was thrown over the chariot-rail; he was caught in the shapely reins; and, as he fell on the ground, his colts were scattered into the middle of the course.

But when the people saw him fallen from the car, a cry of pity went up for the youth, who had done such deeds and was meeting such a doom,- now dashed to earth, so covered with blood that no friend who saw it would have known the hapless corpse. Straightway they burned it on a pyre; and chosen men of Phocis are bringing in a small urn of bronze the sad dust of that mighty form, to find due burial in his fatherland.

Such is my story, grievous to hear, if words can grieve; but for us, who beheld, the greatest of sorrows that these eyes have seen.

LEADER Alas, alas. Now, methinks, the stock of our ancient masters hath utterly perished, root and branch.

CLYTEMNESTRA O Zeus, what shall I call these tidings,- glad tidings? Or dire, but gainful? 'Tis a bitter lot, when mine own calamities make the safety of my life. He, who sprang from mine own life, yet, forsaking me who had suckled and reared him, became an exile and an alien; charging me with the murder of his sire, he uttered dread threats against me; so that neither by night nor by day could sweet sleep cover mine eyes, but from moment to moment I lived in fear of death. Now, however-since this day I am rid of terror from him, and from this girl,- that worse plague who shared my home, while still she drained my very life-blood,-now, methinks, for aught that she can threaten, I shall pass my days in peace.

ELECTRA Ah, woe is me! Now, indeed, Orestes, thy fortune may be lamented, when it is thus with thee, and thou art mocked by this thy mother! Is it not well?

CLYTEMNESTRA Not with thee; but his state is well.

ELECTRA Hear, Nemesis of him who hath lately died!

CLYTEMNESTRA She hath heard who should be heard, and hath ordained well.

ELECTRA Insult us, for this is the time of thy triumph.

CLYTEMNESTRA Then will not Orestes and thou silence me?

ELECTRA We are silenced; much less should we silence thee.

CLYTEMNESTRA Thy coming, sir, would deserve large recompense, if thou hast hushed her clamorous tongue.

PAEDAGOGUS Then I may take my leave, if all is well.

CLYTEMNESTRA Not so; thy welcome would then be unworthy of me, and of the ally who sent thee. Nay, come thou in; and leave her without, to make loud lament for herself and for her friends.

(CLYTEMNESTRA and the PAEDAGOGUS enter the palace.)

SCENE 5

ELECTRA How think ye? Was there not grief and anguish there, wondrous weeping and wailing of that miserable mother, for the son who perished by such a fate? Nay, she left us with a laugh! Ah, woe is me! Dearest Orestes, how is my life quenched by thy death!

Henceforth I must be a slave again among those whom most I hate, my father's murderers. I desire life no more.

CHORUS Where are the thunderbolts of Zeus, or where is the bright Sun, if they look upon these things, and brand them not, but rest?

ELECTRA Woe, woe, ah me, ah me!

CHORUS Utter no rash cry!

ELECTRA If thou suggest a hope concerning those who have surely passed to the realm below, thou wilt trample yet more upon my misery.

CHORUS Nay, I know how, ensnared by a woman for a chain of gold, the prince Amphiaras found a grave; and now beneath the earth-

ELECTRA Ah me, ah me!

CHORUS -he reigns in fulness of force.

ELECTRA Alas!

CHORUS Alas indeed! for the murderess-

ELECTRA Was slain.

CHORUS Yea.

ELECTRA I know it, I know it; for a champion arose to avenge the mourning dead; but to me no champion remains; for he who yet was left hath been snatched away, when no more can I have the comfort of hope from a brother, the seed of the same noble sire.

CHORUS For all men it is appointed to die.

ELECTRA What, to die as that ill-starred one died, amid the tramp of racing steeds, entangled in the reins that dragged him?

CHORUS Cruel was his doom, beyond thought!

(CHRYSOTHEMIS enters in excitement.)

CHRYSOTHEMIS Joy wings my feet, dear sister, not careful of seemliness, if I come with speed; for I bring joyful news, to relieve thy long sufferings and sorrows.

ELECTRA And whence couldst thou find help for my woes, whereof no cure can be imagined?

CHRYSOTHEMIS Orestes is with us,- know this from my lips, in living presence, as surely as thou seest me here.

ELECTRA What hast thou seen, poor girl, to warrant thy belief?

CHRYSOTHEMIS Thou shalt hear all that I have seen. When I came to our father's ancient tomb, I saw that streams of milk had lately flowed from the top of the mound, and that his sepulchre was encircled with garlands of all flowers that blow, and on the mound's edge I saw a lock of hair, freshly severed.

And the moment that I saw it, ah me, a familiar image rushed upon my soul, telling me that there I beheld a token of him whom most I

love, Orestes. Then I took it in my hands, and uttered no ill-omened word, but the tears of joy straightway filled mine eyes. And I know well, as knew then, these offerings are from Orestes!
Come, dear sister, courage!
No mortal life is attended by a changeless fortune. Ours was once gloomy; but this day, perchance, will seal the promise of much good.

ELECTRA Alas for thy folly! How I have been pitying thee!

CHRYSOTHEMIS What, are not my tidings welcome?

ELECTRA He is dead, poor girl; and thy hopes in that deliverer are gone: look not to him.

CHRYSOTHEMIS Woe, woe is me! From whom hast thou heard this?

ELECTRA From the man who was present when he perished.
He is within, a guest not displeasing to our mother.

CHRYSOTHEMIS Ah, woe is me! Whose, then, can have been those ample offerings to our father's tomb?

ELECTRA Most likely, I think, some one brought those gifts in memory of the dead Orestes.

CHRYSOTHEMIS Oh, hapless that I am! And I was bringing such news in joyous haste, ignorant, it seems, how dire was our plight; but now that I have come, I find fresh sorrows added to the old!

ELECTRA So stands thy case; yet, if thou wilt hearken to me, thou wilt lighten the load of our present trouble.

CHRYSOTHEMIS What biddest thou, then, for which my strength avails?

ELECTRA That thou be brave in doing what I enjoin.

CHRYSOTHEMIS Nay, if any good can be done, I will not refuse.

ELECTRA Hear, then, how I am resolved to act. As for the support of friends, thou thyself must know that we have none; Hades hath taken

our friends away. and we two are left alone. I, so long as I heard that my brother still lived and prospered, had hopes that he would yet come to avenge the murder of our sire. But now that he is no more, I look next to thee, not to flinch from aiding me thy sister to slay our father's murderer, Aegisthus:- I must have no secret from thee more.

Thou hast to complain that thou art robbed of thy father's heritage; thou hast to mourn that thus far thy life is fading without nuptial song or wedded love. Nay, and do not hope that such joys will ever be thine; Aegisthus is not so ill-advised as ever to permit that children should spring from thee or me for his own sure destruction.

“Behold these two sisters, my friends, who saved their father's house; who, when their foes were firmly planted of yore, took their lives in their hands and stood forth as avengers of blood! Worthy of love are these twain, worthy of reverence from all; at festivals, and wherever the folk are assembled, let these be honoured of all men for their prowess.” Thus will every one speak of us, so that in life and in death our glory shall not fail.

Come, dear sister, hearken!

LEADER OF THE CHORUS In such case as this, forethought is helpful for those who speak and those who hear.

CHRYSOTHEMIS Yea, and before she spake, my friends, were she blest with a sound mind, she would have remembered caution, as she doth not remember it.

Now whither canst thou have turned thine eyes, that thou art arming thyself with such rashness, and calling me to aid thee? Seest thou not, thou art a woman, not a man, and no match for thine adversaries in strength? And their fortune prospers day by day, while ours is ebbing and coming to nought. See that we change not our evil plight to worse, if any one hears these words.

Nay, I beseech thee, before we are utterly destroyed, and leave our house desolate, restrain thy rage! I will take care that thy words remain secret and harmless; and learn thou the prudence, at last though

late, of yielding, when so helpless, to thy rulers.

LEADER Hearken; there is no better gain for mortals to win than foresight and a prudent mind.

ELECTRA Thou hast said nothing unlooked-for; I well knew that thou wouldst reject what I proffered. Well! I must do this deed with mine own hand, and alone; for assuredly I will not leave it void.

CHRYSOTHEMIS Alas! Would thou hadst been so purposed on the day of our father's death! What mightst thou not have wrought?

ELECTRA My nature was the same then, but my mind less ripe.

CHRYSOTHEMIS Strive to keep such a mind through all thy life.

ELECTRA These counsels mean that thou wilt not share my deed.

CHRYSOTHEMIS No; for the venture is likely to bring disaster.

ELECTRA I admire thy prudence; thy cowardice I hate.

CHRYSOTHEMIS I will listen not less calmly when thou praise me.

ELECTRA Never fear to suffer that from me.

CHRYSOTHEMIS Time enough in the future to decide that.

ELECTRA Go, declare all this to thy mother!

CHRYSOTHEMIS But, again, I do not hate thee with such a hate.

ELECTRA Yet know at least to what dishonour thou bringest me.

CHRYSOTHEMIS Dishonour, no! I am only thinking of thy good.

ELECTRA How? Dost thou not think that I speak with justice?

CHRYSOTHEMIS But sometimes justice itself is fraught with harm.

ELECTRA I care not to live by such a law.

CHRYSOTHEMIS Well, if thou must do this, thou wilt praise me yet.

ELECTRA And do it I will, no whit dismayed by thee.

CHRYSOTHEMIS Then I will go; thou canst not be brought to approve my words, nor to commend thy conduct.

ELECTRA Nay, go within; never will I follow thee, however much thou mayst desire it; it were great folly even to attempt an idle quest.

CHRYSOTHEMIS Nay, if thou art wise in thine own eyes, be such wisdom thine; by and by, when thou standest in evil plight, thou wilt praise my words.

(CHRYSOTHEMIS goes into the palace.)

SCENE 6

CHORUS

Voice that comest to the dead beneath the earth, send a piteous cry,
I pray thee, to the son of Atreus in that world, a joyless message
of dishonour;

Tell him that the fortunes of his house are now distempered; while,
among his children, strife of sister with sister hath broken the harmony
of loving days. Electra, forsaken, braves the storm alone; she bewails
always, hapless one, her father's fate, like the nightingale unwearied
in lament; she recks not of death, but is ready to leave the sunlight,
could she but quell the two Furies of her house. Who shall match such
noble child of noble sire?

(ORESTES enters, with attendants, one of them carrying a funeral urn.)

ORESTES I have been searching for the home of Aegisthus.

LEADER Well, thou hast found it; and thy guide is blameless.

ORESTES I pray thee, mistress, make it known in the house that certain
men of Phocis seek Aegisthus.

ELECTRA Ah, woe is me! Surely ye are not bringing the visible proofs of that rumour which we heard?

ORESTES I know nothing of thy 'rumour'; but the aged Strophius charged me with tidings of Orestes.

ELECTRA What are they, sir? Ah, how I thrill with fear!

ORESTES He is dead; and in a small urn, as thou seest, we bring the scanty relics home.

ELECTRA Ah me unhappy! There, at last, before mine eyes, I see that woful burden in your hands.

ORESTES If thy tears are for aught which Orestes hath suffered, know that yonder vessel holds his dust.

ELECTRA Ah, sir, allow me, then, I implore thee, if this urn indeed contains him, to take it in my hands,- that I may weep and wail, not for these ashes alone, but for myself and for all our house therewith!

ORESTES (to the attendants) Bring it and give it her, whoe'er she be; for she who begs this boon must be one who wished him no evil, but a friend, or haply a kinswoman in blood.

(The urn is placed in ELECTRA'S hands.)

ELECTRA Ah, memorial of him whom I loved best on earth! Ah, Orestes, whose life hath no relic left save this,- how far from the hopes with which I sent thee forth is the manner in which I receive thee back! Now I carry thy poor dust in my hands; but thou wert radiant, my child, when I sped the forth from home!

But now, an exile from home and fatherland, thou hast perished miserably, far from thy sister.

Ah me, ah me! O piteous dust! Alas, thou dear one, sent on a dire journey, how hast undone me,- undone me indeed, O brother mine!

Therefore take me to this thy home, me who am as nothing, to thy nothingness, that I may dwell with thee henceforth below; for when thou wert on

earth, we shared alike; and now I fain would die, that I may not be parted from thee in the grave. For I see that the dead have rest from pain.

LEADER Bethink thee, Electra, thou art the child of mortal sire, and mortal was Orestes; therefore grieve not too much. This is a debt which all of us must pay.

ORESTES Alas, what shall I say? What words can serve me at this pass? I can restrain my lips no longer!

ELECTRA What hath troubled thee? Why didst thou say that?

ORESTES Is this the form of the illustrious Electra that I behold?

ELECTRA It is; and very grievous is her plight.

ORESTES Alas, then, for this miserable fortune!

ELECTRA Why this steadfast gaze, stranger, and these laments?

ORESTES How ignorant was I, then, of mine own sorrows!

ELECTRA By what that hath been said hast thou perceived this?

ORESTES Could any be more painful to behold?

ELECTRA This, that I share the dwelling of the murderers.

ORESTES Whose murderers? Where lies the guilt at which thou hintest?

ELECTRA My father's;- and then I am their slave perforce.

ORESTES Who is it that subjects thee to this constraint?

ELECTRA A mother-in name, but no mother in her deeds.

ORESTES And is there none to succour, or to hinder?

ELECTRA None. I had one; and thou hast shown me his ashes.

ORESTES No other visitor hath ever shared thy pain?

ELECTRA Surely thou art not some unknown kinsman?

ORESTES I would answer, if these were friends who hear us.

ELECTRA Oh, they are friends; thou canst speak without mistrust.

ORESTES Give up this urn, then, and thou shalt be told all.

ELECTRA Nay, I beseech thee be not so cruel to me, sir!

ORESTES Do as I say, and never fear to do amiss.

ELECTRA Ah woe is me for thee, Orestes, if I am not to give thee burial!

ORESTES Hush!-no such word!-Thou hast no right to lament.

ELECTRA No right to lament for my dead brother?

ORESTES It is not meet for thee to speak of him thus.

ELECTRA Yes, if these are the ashes of Orestes that I hold.

ORESTES They are not; a fiction dothed them with his name.
(He gently takes the urn from her.)

ELECTRA And where is that unhappy one's tomb?

ORESTES There is none; the living have no tomb.

ELECTRA The man is alive?

ORESTES If there be life in me. Look at this signet, once our father's, and judge if I speak truth.

ELECTRA O blissful day!

ORESTES Blissful, in very deed!

ELECTRA Ah, dear friends and fellow-citizens, behold Orestes here, who was feigned dead, and now, by that feigning hath come safely home!

LEADER We see him, daughter; and for this happy fortune a tear of joy trickles from our eyes.

ELECTRA Offspring of him whom I loved best, thou hast come even now, thou hast come, and found and seen her whom thy heart desired!

ORESTES I am with thee;- but keep silence for a while.

ELECTRA What meanest thou?

ORESTES 'Tis better to be silent, lest some one within should hear.

ELECTRA Nay, by ever-virgin Artemis, I will never stoop to fear women, stay-at-homes, vain burdens of the ground!

ORESTES Yet remember that in women, too, dwells the spirit of battle; thou hast had good proof of that, I ween.

ELECTRA What must I do?

ORESTES When the season serves not, do not wish to speak too much.

ELECTRA Nay, who could fitly exchange speech for such silence, when thou hast appeared? For now I have seen thy face, beyond all thought and hope!

ORESTES I am loth, indeed, to curb thy gladness, but yet this excess of joy moves my fear.

ELECTRA Do not rob me of the comfort of thy face; do not force me to forego it!

ORESTES I should be wroth, indeed, if I saw another attempt it.

ELECTRA Ah me! But now I have thee; thou art come to me with the light of that dear countenance, which never, even in sorrow, could I forget.

ORESTES Spare all superfluous words; tell me not of our mother's wickedness, or how Aegisthus drains the wealth of our father's house by lavish luxury or aimless waste; for the story would not suffer thee to keep due limit. Tell me rather that which will serve our present need,- where we must show ourselves, or wait in ambush, that this our coming may confound the triumph of our foes.

And look that our mother read not thy secret in thy radiant face, when we twain have advanced into the house, but make lament, as for the feigned disaster; for when we have prospered, then there will be leisure to rejoice and exult in freedom.

ELECTRA Nay, brother, as it pleases thee, so shall be my conduct also; for all my joy is a gift from thee, and not mine own.

But thou knowest how matters stand here, I doubt not: thou must have heard that Aegisthus is from home, but our mother within;- and fear not that she will ever see my face lit up with smiles; for mine old hatred of her hath sunk into my heart; and, since I have beheld thee, for very joy I shall never cease to weep. How indeed should I cease, who have seen thee come home this day, first as dead, and then in Life? Command me as thou wilt; for, had I been alone, I should have achieved one of two things,- a noble deliverance, or a noble death.

ORESTES Thou hadst best be silent; for I hear some one within preparing to go forth.

ELECTRA (to ORESTES and attendants) Enter, sirs; especially as ye bring that which no one could repulse from these doors, though he receive it without joy. (The PAEDAGOGUS enters from the palace.)

SCENE 7

PAEDAGOGUS Foolish and senseless children! Are ye weary of your lives, or was there no wit born in you, that ye see not how ye stand, in the very midst of deadly perils? Nay, had I not kept watch this long while at these doors, your plans would have been in the house before yourselves; but, as it is, my care shielded you from that. Now have done with this long discourse, these insatiate cries of joy, and pass within; for in such deeds delay is evil, and

'tis well to make an end.

ORESTES Thou hast reported me, I presume, as dead?

PAEDAGOGUS Know that here thou art numbered with the shades.

ORESTES Do they rejoice, then, at these tidings? Or what say they?

PAEDAGOGUS I will tell thee at the end; meanwhile, all is well for us on their party-even that which is not well.

ELECTRA Who is this, brother? I pray thee, tell me.

ORESTES Knowest thou not the man to whose hands thou gavest me once?

ELECTRA What man? How sayest thou?

ORESTES By whose hands, through thy forethought, I was secretly conveyed forth to Phocian soil.

ELECTRA O joyous day! O sole preserver of Agamemnon's house, how hast thou come? Art thou he indeed, who didst save my brother and myself from many sorrows? O dearest hands; O messenger whose feet were kindly servants! How couldst thou be with me so long, and remain unknown, nor give a ray of light, but afflict me by fables, while possessed of truths most sweet? Hail, father,- for 'tis a father that I seem to behold! All hail,- and know that I have hated thee, and loved thee, in one day, as never man before!

PAEDAGOGUS Enough, methinks; as for the story of the past, many are the circling nights, and days as many, which shall show it thee, Electra, in its fulness. (*To ORESTES and attendants*) But this is my counsel to you, now is the time to act; now Clytemnestra is alone,- no man is now within: but, if ye pause, consider that ye will have to fight, not with the inmates alone, but with other foes more numerous and better skilled.

ORESTES This our task seems no longer to crave many words, but rather that we should enter the house forthwith,- first adoring the shrines of my father's gods, who keep these gates.

**(ORESTES enters the Palace, followed by the PAEDAGOGUS.
ELECTRA remains outside.)**

ELECTRA O King Apollo! graciously hear them, and hear me besides, who so oft have come before thine altar with such gifts as my devout hand could bring! And now, O Lycean Apollo, with such vows as I can make, I pray thee, I supplicate, I implore, grant us thy benignant aid in these designs, and show men how impiety is rewarded by the gods!

(ELECTRA enters the palace.)

SCENE 8

CHORUS Even now the pursuers of dark guilt have passed beneath yon roof, the hounds which none may flee. Therefore the vision of my soul shall not long tarry in suspense.

The champion of the spirits infernal is ushered with stealthy feet into the house, the ancestral palace of his sire, bearing keen-edged death in his hands; and Hermes, son of Maia, who hath shrouded the guile in darkness, leads him forward, even to the end, and delays no more.

(ELECTRA enters from the palace.)

ELECTRA Ah, dearest friends, in a moment the men will do the deed;- but wait in silence.

CHORUS How is it? What do they now?

ELECTRA She is decking the urn for burial, and those two stand close to her

CHORUS And why hast thou sped forth?

ELECTRA To guard against Aegisthus entering before we are aware.

CLYTEMNESTRA Alas! Woe for the house forsaken of friends and filled with murderers!

ELECTRA A cry goes up within:- hear ye not, friends?

CHORUS I heard, ah me, sounds dire to hear, and shuddered!

CLYTEMNESTRA O hapless that I am!- Aegisthus, where, where art thou?

ELECTRA Hark, once more a voice resounds!

CLYTEMNESTRA My son, my son, have pity on thy mother!

ELECTRA Thou hadst none for him, nor for the father that begat him.

CHORUS Ill-fated realm and race, now the fate that hath pursued thee day by day is dying,- is dying!

CLYTEMNESTRA Oh, I am smitten!

ELECTRA Smite, if thou canst, once more!

CLYTEMNESTRA Ah, woe is me again!

ELECTRA Would that the woe were for Aegisthus too!

CHORUS The curses are at work; the buried live; blood flows for blood, drained from the slayers by those who died of yore. Behold, they come! That red hand reeks with sacrifice to Ares; nor can I blame the deed.

(ORESTES and attendants enter from the palace)

ELECTRA The guilty one is dead?

ORESTES Fear no more that thy proud mother will ever put thee to dishonour.

CHORUS Cease; for I see Aegisthus full in view.

ELECTRA Yonder, at our mercy, he advances from the suburb, full of joy.

CHORUS Make with all speed for the vestibule; that, as your first task prospered. So this again may prosper now.

ORESTES See, I am gone.

ELECTRA I will look to matters here.

(ORESTES and attendants go back into the palace.)

SCENE 9

CHORUS 'Twere well to soothe his ear with some few words of seeming gentleness, that he may rush blindly upon the struggle with his doom.

(AEGISTHUS enters.)

AEGISTHUS Which of you can tell me, where are those Phocian strangers, who, 'tis said, have brought us tidings of Orestes slain in the wreck of his chariot? Thee, thee I ask, yes, thee, in former days so bold,- for methinks it touches thee most nearly; thou best must know, and best canst tell.

ELECTRA Within; they have found a way to the heart of their hostess.

AEGISTHUS Can I, then, see the corpse with mine own eyes?

ELECTRA Thou canst, indeed; and 'tis no enviable sight.

AEGISTHUS Indeed, thou hast given me a joyful greeting, beyond thy wont.

ELECTRA Joy be thine, if in these things thou findest joy.

AEGISTHUS Silence, I say, and throw wide the gates, for all Mycenaeans and Argives to behold; that, if any of them were once buoyed on empty hopes from this man, now, seeing him dead, they may receive my curb, instead of waiting till my chastisement make them wise perforce!

ELECTRA No loyalty is lacking on my part; time hath taught me the prudence of concord with the stronger.

(The central doors of the palace are thrown open and a shrouded corpse is disclosed. ORESTES and attendants stand near it.)

AEGISTHUS Take all the covering from the face, that kinship, at least, may receive the tribute of lament from me also.

ORESTES Lift the veil thyself; not my part this, but thine, to look upon these relics, and to greet them kindly.

AEGISTHUS 'Tis good counsel, and I will follow it.-
(To ELECTRA) But thou-call me Clytemnestra, if she is within.

ORESTES Lo, she is near thee: turn not thine eyes elsewhere.
(AEGISTHUS removes the face-cloth from the corpse, revealing the face of Clytemnestra)

AEGISTHUS O, what sight is this!

ORESTES Why so scared? Is the face so strange?

AEGISTHUS Who are the men into whose mid toils I have fallen, hapless that I am?

ORESTES Nay, hast thou not discovered ere now that the dead, as thou miscallest them, are living?

AEGISTHUS Alas, I read the riddle: this can be none but Orestes who speaks to me!

ORESTES And, though so good a prophet, thou wast deceived so long?

AEGISTHUS Oh lost, undone! Yet suffer me to say one word...

ELECTRA In heaven's name, my brother, suffer him not to speak further, or to plead at length! When mortals are in the meshes of fate, how can such respite avail one who is to die? No,- slay him forthwith, and cast his corpse to the creatures from whom such as he should have burial, far from our sight! To me, nothing but this can make amends for the woes of the past.

ORESTES (to AEGISTHUS) Go in, and quickly; the issue here is not of words, but of thy life.

AEGISTHUS Why take me into the house? If this deed be fair, what need of darkness? Why is thy hand not prompt to strike?

ORESTES Dictate not, but go where thou didst slay my father, that in the same place thou mayest die.

AEGISTHUS Lead thou.

ORESTES Thou must go first.

AEGISTHUS Lest I escape thee?

ORESTES No, but that thou mayest not choose how to die; I must not spare thee any bitterness of death. And well it were if this judgment came straight-way upon all who dealt in lawless deeds, even the judgment of the sword: so should not wickedness abound.

(ORESTES and attendants drive AEGISTHUS into the palace.)

CHORUS (singing) O house of Atreus, through how many sufferings hast thou come forth at last in freedom, crowned with good by this day's enterprise!

END OF PLAY