

**EURIPIDES’
“ELEKTRA”**

First produced circa 410 BCE

Translated by
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Dramatis Personae:

Elektra

Farmer

(Nominal husband to Elektra)

Orestes

(Attendants to Orestes)

Chorus of Argive women

Old Man

Herald

(and servant to Orestes)

Klytaemestra

Kastor

(brother to Klytaemestra)

Pylades

(friend to Orestes – silent)

Polydeuces

(Kastor’s brother – silent)

A humble peasant’s cottage in a rural environment. Next to it the altar of Apollo.

A starry sky, before the break of Dawn. Sounds of birds nearby (owls, for example) and of brooks in the distance.

Slowly the door of the cottage creaks open and the peasant appears. He is good-natured and smiles as he shakes and stretches himself into the morning. He surveys the land all around him as if he belongs to it, moves forward towards the front of the stage and then speaks.

Peasant:

Good morning, brooks of Inachus that nurture the Pelasgian soil!

It was from here that Agamemnon, leader of men, set sail with a thousand ships for Troy. War Lord Ares filled his sails and the hearts of his men. Then, when he killed Priam, the king of Troy and captured the splendid city of Dardanos, he came back here to Argos and graced its high temples with all the spoils he tore away from the barbarians.

1o

Ah, but though Fate was with him in the battlefield, here, back home, in the halls of his own palace, he wasn’t so fortunate. His wife, Klytaemestra and her lover, Aegisthus, Thyestes’ son, trapped him with a treacherous net and murdered him.

So, now the royal sceptre of Tandalus was taken by the new lord of Argos, Aegisthus and he now rules with Klytaemestra, Tyndareus’ daughter and Agamemnon’s wife.

Now, when Agamemnon left for Troy, he left behind two children, a boy, Orestes and a girl Elektra. As for Orestes, his father’s old tutor stole him away and passed him on to Strophius to be raised at Phockis.

2o

The girl, though, Elektra by name, stayed behind in her father’s palace and when the tender youthful

age bloomed within her, suitors from the whole of Hellas came seeking her hand in marriage. These were men of the highest calibre, noble men. Aegisthus, however, was terribly afraid that if Elektra married one of these noblemen, she might bear a son who one day might try and avenge her father's murder, so he kept her at home taking away the opportunity for her to mate with any of these noblemen.

3o

But this, too, was an unsatisfactory solution because there was an even greater danger that she might bear children to some nobleman in secret. So, Aegisthus then thought of killing her but her mother, even though she was a cruel woman saved her from his murderous hands. You see, so far as her murder of Agamemnon was concerned, she felt she had some adequate excuse, seeing that he had sacrificed their daughter, Iphigeneia to Artemis, goddess of the wild. But to kill her children was something even she did not want to do in case there would arise in the city great resentment against her.

So, Aegisthus thought up the plan of putting up a reward for whoever would kill the exiled Orestes and as for Elektra, he gave her to me to marry.

4o

His reasoning was that even though I am of an indisputably good Argive stock, I am, alas, a poor man, who to his eyes means a weak man. A weak man cannot be a noble man. And weak man also means a weak fear for him. So I am weak and he is less afraid.

There is fear in Aegisthus also that if a nobleman had married Elektra, the whole shameful act of Agamemnon's murder would be awakened from its sleep and Aegisthus would have not escaped his due punishment.

Now, I swear by Aphrodite that I've done nothing to dishonour the girl. She is still a virgin. You see, I too am an honourable man and my own sense of honour prohibits me from damaging the honour of the girl, a girl born in a wealthy and royal family. To my mind, it's just not right and so, I've stayed away from her bed. And then there's Orestes. I would feel dreadfully sorry for him if, when he comes back he finds that his brother-in-law is such a lowly creature as me and that his sister is so unlucky in marriage.

5o

Ha! And if anyone thinks that I am a fool for bringing into my house such a beautiful young virgin like Elektra -legitimately!- (At this stage, unbeknownst to the Peasant, the door of the cottage creaks open again and this time, Elektra emerges holding a water urn. She, too, looks around before she puts the urn upon her head.) -and, let's say, not making good and proper use of the situation, then, to that I say, that these are that man's own views of what constitutes modest behaviour and not mine and his views are wrong and that he'd be a fool to have such views!

(Elektra presents the complete opposite disposition towards life and mood for the play, creating a sharp contrast between the poor of the good deed and of the obliged recipient. She is unaware of her husband's presence. Her head is shaved.)

Elektra: *sighs*

Greetings, black night that nurtures the golden stars! I walk into you with this water urn on my head to get water from the stream, not because I have to but because I want to show the gods Aegisthus' shameful insolence towards me and to raise my voice of grief to the broad heavens, for my father to hear.

6o

My despicable mother, Tyndareus' daughter, Klytimestra, has thrown me out of the house to please her husband and now she has other children by him. Orestes, my brother and I, of course, are treated as illegitimate.

Peasant:

Why do you do this, you poor creature? A delicately raised young girl like you, you shouldn't do all this hard work for me. I've told you, you don't have to!

Elektra:

7o

I do it because you're more than a mere husband to me. You're a god. A god because in my hour of despair you have not tried to take advantage of me. It is a wonderful thing that when people like me find themselves in such a predicament there are men like you, ready to help them out of it. So, even though I don't need to, I think of it as my duty to take some part of your work load and make it easier for you. You do enough work outside the home, I should at least work towards keeping it nice inside. It is a pleasant thing for a man to find his home comfortable and tidy, after a hard day's work.

Peasant:

Well, if you so wish, Elektra, go ahead. In fact the spring is nearby.

80

Soon Dawn will emerge and I should drive the cattle to pasture. I also need to plant the fields. When a man is lazy, no matter how many "Hail Heras" he utters he'll still go hungry if he doesn't do the work.

Exit Elektra and Peasant.

Enter Orestes, Pylades with two attendants. Both wear swords. Both are with beard.

Orestes:

Pylades, my best friend, you've stuck with me more faithfully than all the others. You have stuck with me through my many tribulations and often you even let me stay in your own home with you.

You know very well how terrible the tribulations that I suffer from Aegisthus are. He and my murdering mother slaughtered my father.

I've just left the temple of Apollo where I had performed the appropriate rites and it is he, Apollo, who has sent me here.

90

And so, here I am, walking on Argos' soil without one Argive knowing it. What I want to do is give equal payment to my father's murderers: murder for murder.

Before that I had visited my father's grave and made offerings of my tears and a lock of my hair. I've also sacrificed a lamb and offered its blood to him.

The murderers who rule and tyrannise the people of Argos know nothing of this. For now, I won't set foot inside the city, for two reasons: firstly so that in case I'm recognised by any of the guards I can get out of the Argive jurisdiction quickly and be on another land, and secondly because I want to find my sister.

100

They say she's now married and no longer a virgin. I'd like to find her and convince her to become my accomplice when I commit the twin murder.

As well, I also want to find out from a reliable source, how things are inside the city.

Now then, I can see that the brilliant face of Dawn is rising so let's move out of the way from this path. Perhaps some farmer or woman servant will come by and we can ask her if Elektra lives near by.

All hide behind the altar of Apollo.

Enter Elektra carrying the water urn on her head.

110

Look, Pylades, a servant carrying a water urn on her shaved head. Let's hide well in case we hear something that will help us in our quest.

Elektra: *(to herself)*

Come, girl, move! Move on to the beat of your rushing tears!

Agamemnon is your father and Tyndareus' hateful daughter, Klytimestra, is your mother. A mother, a murderer!

120

All the Argives here call me "misery."

My work is hard, my life is appalling.

Dearest father, Agamemnon, Hades has you now because of the dire deed done to you by your wife and her lover, Aegisthus.

Come, girl, let your cheeks be furrowed by the rush of more tears.

Cry yet again!

Ah, how lovely feels this flood of tears!

Come girl, move! Hurry, girl, hurry!

Move on, move on, to the beat of my rushing tears!

130

Orestes is my brother. Orestes is an exile living in a foreign land in a strange house, wandering in exile and I, his wretched sister was left behind inside our father's halls tortured by unfathomable misfortune.

Come now, Orestes and stop the great flood of tears and the great furrowing of my cheeks.

With the help of Zeus, bring our father's Justice to him.

Vengeance to the murderers!

Come now, Orestes, hurry!

Come to Argos, our city!

A female slave enters from the shack to take the water urn indoors.

140

Come, girl! Take this urn from me and put it down so that I may cry more easily and so that my tears will reach my father before Dawn.

The slave obeys.

Father, father, father!

I shout my lament, shout it loud that you may hear it
Down there, deep deep beneath the Earth.
I shout out my despair
All day long
All day long
I shout my despair every day.
The grief, my dearest father tears at my throat,
The grief my dearest father beats upon my shaved head.
Unfathomable grief my dearest father at
Your death.
Father, father, father!
Sorrow strikes my head!

150

Ah! Just as the hapless swan sings out loudly for her father -for he, too, was murdered in a watery trap of deadly nets., just so, I sing this melancholy song, father, my melancholy song for you.
Father, father, father!

160

Bitter was the crash of the ax upon your skull dear father!
Bitter and murderous!
Bitter was the plot of the assassins when you returned from Troy.
A bitter two-edged sword instead of a crown welcomed you, Father.
And it was her and not her lover who spun enough courage to perform the murderous deed! Aegisthus then became her man.
Enter the chorus, a group of Argive women.

170

Chorus:

Elektra, daughter of Agamemnon, I came to your house to tell you that a Mycaean mountain man and lover of milk came down and brought us the news that in two days' time the Argives will be celebrating a feast, where all the virgins will be marching to Hera's temple.

Elektra:

No, dear friends. This feast is not for someone whose heart is too sad, whose days and nights are too damp with tears. No golden jewels nor fine dresses for me and nor will I dance and twirl and stamp my feet along with the rest of the Argive girls.

180

A dress in tatters and a hair in a mess – Look at me! How would Agamemnon feel if he saw his daughter looking like this? And how would the whole of Troy feel to know that she was conquered by the father of such a sad creature?

190

Chorus:

Our goddess is great, Elektra. Come now and borrow some of my clothes. A fine, beautifully woven gown and a golden necklace. How will the feast enjoy your presence!

Tears alone will not defeat your enemies, Elektra, but honouring the gods will. Send prayers to the gods, not sighs and success will come to you.

Elektra:

My prayers are not heeded by any of the gods, my friends. Nor do they care about my father who was murdered so long ago.

200

I cry for my murdered father and for my brother who lives in exile, far from his own home far from his true station of a glorious king's son, wandering from one common man's hearth to another.

210

And I, too, live in a peasant's hut, on a small plot of mountain ground, with a torn heart, in exile too from my father's house, while my mother lies as wife to Aegisthus in a bed stained full with my father's blood.

Chorus:

Many are the ills for which Greece can blame your mother's sister, Helen.

Enter Orestes and Pylades

Elektra:

Oh, no my friends! Enough crying now! I see strangers appear from behind the altar near my house. Let's escape them. You run that way, along the path and I'll run into the house.

She tries to run but Orestes seizes her arm.

220

Orestes:

Stay you poor creature. Don't be afraid of me.

Elektra:

Oh, Phoebos Apollo, let me not be killed!

Orestes:

There are other much greater enemies than you that I wish I could kill.

Elektra:

Let go. Do not touch what is not right for you to touch!

Orestes:

There's no one else that I could touch with greater right.

Elektra:

So why then wait by my house with sword in hand?

Orestes:

Stay and hear what I have to say and you will understand me.

Elektra:

All right. I shall. You are far stronger than I am.

Orestes:

I've come with news about your brother.

230

Elektra:

Oh, dear friend, is he alive or dead?

Orestes:

To tell you the good news first, he lives.

Elektra:

Bless you for your sweet words.

Orestes:

May we both be blessed.

Elektra:

In what bitter exile is the poor man wandering?

Orestes:

He's a lost soul, wandering from one city to the next.

Elektra:

Does he lack his daily food?

Orestes:

No, he doesn't but one is weak when one lives in exile.

Elektra:

What then is the reason he has sent you?

Orestes:

To find out if you're alive and well. What sort of a life you lead.

240

Elektra:

Look at me then! Look how I have withered!

Orestes:

Misery has hurt you so much that I feel like crying.

Elektra:

And my hair is totally shaved

Orestes:

The pain of losing both your father and your brother is your great burden.

Elektra:

Oh, who could be dearer to me than those two?

Orestes:

What do you think of your brother?

Elektra:

He's too far to be my support.

Orestes:

Why do you live far from the city?

Elektra:

I have made a marriage, friend, that more is like death than marriage.

Orestes:

I pity your brother. Is your husband from Mycaene?

Elektra:

Yes but not the sort of man my father would have me marry.

250

Orestes:

Tell me all you can so that I can convey everything to your brother.

Elektra: (*indicates her house*)

I live there, far from the city.

Orestes:

A shack like this is proper only for diggers and cowherds.

Elektra:

True, he's poor but he is from a good family and he respects me.

Orestes:

Respect? How does he show his respect?

Elektra:

He hasn't yet approached my bed.

Orestes:

Is that because he pledged an oath to the gods or doesn't he find you attractive?

Elektra:

He doesn't feel it's right to insult my parents.

Orestes:

How is it he didn't enjoy you once he married you?

Elektra:

He does not regard as my master the man who gave me to him.

260

Orestes:

I understand. He's afraid he'll be punished by Orestes.

Elektra:

That, too but he's a kind man, as well.

Orestes:

Such a good man, your husband, he should receive a good reward.

Elektra:

Yes, and he will receive it once my brother returns.

Orestes:

But how does your mother cope with all this?

Elektra:

My friend, women love their men more than their children.

Orestes:

But why has Aigisthus shamed you so much?

Elektra:

He wanted me to give birth to a common child so he gave me to a common man.

Orestes:

Obviously so that you won't bear children who'll exact vengeance.

Elektra:

That's what he thought but he'll pay for it heavily.

270

Orestes:

Does he know that you're still a virgin?

Elektra:

No. It's a secret. We won't tell him.

Orestes: (*Indicating the chorus*)

These women who are listening to us, can they be trusted?

Elektra:

Yes. They can hold a secret well.

Orestes:

If Orestes comes to Argos, what can he do?

Elektra:

You are asking me about that? Shame! So he's not coming then?

Orestes:
How will he kill your father's murderers?

Elektra:
By doing what they did to my father.

Orestes:
Would you have killed your mother along with Aigisthus?

Elektra:
With the very ax that my father was slaughtered.

280

Orestes:
I'll tell him that... You won't be changing your mind, will you?

Elektra:
Let me kill my mother and then let me die.

Orestes:
If only Orestes were here to hear you!

Elektra:
Even if I saw him, friend, I would not recognise him.

Orestes:
That's not strange at all. You were young when you were separated.

Elektra:
There's only one person from my lot who'd recognise him.

Orestes:
The man who, as they say, saved Orestes from the murder?

Elektra:
Yes, my father's old tutor.

Orestes:
Does your father have a grave?

Elektra:
Yes, a rather pitiful one. They've placed it far from the palace.

Orestes:
Ah! What is it you're telling me?

290

Sadness bites the mortals hard even when the sadness is of other people.

Tell me then the bitter words I should take to your brother, the ones he needs hear.

The ignorant do not sympathise yet the knowledgeable suffer for having knowledge.

Chorus:

I need to know as well. I live far from the city and I don't know what she's going through. Now I want to know everything.

Elektra:
I shall speak, if I must –and to a friend I must speak- about the heavy Fates that came upon me and my father.

300

And since you made me make this speech, I beg you, stranger tell Orestes of this hard Fate that befell me and my father.

Begin with how I am dressed. Look at my clothes! Tell him of the despair that has overtaken me and in what sort of house I live now compared to the palaces I used to live once.

Now, I mend my clothes myself, otherwise I'd have no clothes to wear and I'd be left naked.

310

I carry water from the fountain and I never go to any festivals or religious celebrations.

Being a virgin, I am ashamed to be with other women and I am ashamed to know that Kastor, before the gods took him, was my suitor, since he was kin.

Yet my mother, adorned with Phrygian gold, sits on a throne, surrounded by the Asian slaves who my father brought home, slaves wearing gowns from Ida pinned with golden brooches.

320

My father's blood, is still rotting black in our palace halls and his murderer runs around in my father's chariots and with puffed up pride carries in his bloody hands the sceptre that once, when it was held by my father, ruled the army of Greece.

And his tomb, abandoned, so far has not received either libations nor branches of myrtle. It's a deserted place with no adornments. They tell me that my mother's husband now, when he is drunk, jumps up and down on the grave throwing stones at his tombstone and yelling, "where is your Orestes now? Is

he standing by your tomb defending it?"

330

This is the sort of insults he casts at him who is absent.

Stranger, I beg you, tell my brother all this! There are many who beg him to come back and I am their voice. Here, look! My hands, my tongue, my hapless heart, my closely shaved head and Agamemnon, his father, all beg him to come back.

340

Because it is a huge shame that while his famous father destroyed Troy, he, in the spring of his youth, is not able to kill one man.

Enter the Peasant

Chorus:

Here is your husband, Elektra. He's finished his work.

Peasant:

Ah, who are these strangers standing by the door of my house? Why have they come here, to my rustic house? Are they after me? Elektra, it's a shame for a woman to be standing around talking with young men.

Elektra:

Don't be suspicious, husband. You'll learn immediately what we were talking about. These strangers have come from Orestes and they brought me messages from him. You, messengers, forgive him for what he said just now.

350

Peasant:

Well, what did they say? Is he alive? Does he see the sun?

Elektra:

They said he lives and I believe them.

Peasant:

And does he remember your father's suffering and yours?

Elektra:

I hope so but the exiled man is weak.

Peasant:

So what news do they bring from Orestes?

Elektra:

He has sent these two men to find out about me.

Peasant:

You tell them about some of your despair. The rest they can see for themselves.

Elektra:

They know it all. There are no secrets left.

Peasant:

Shouldn't you open our doors to them then?

360

Come then, strangers, come in! Come in and I shall repay your kind words with whatever my poor house can afford. (to Orestes' attendants) Come, attendants, take their things inside. (back to Orestes and Pylades) Don't refuse me. You've come from a friend so you are friends and you're most welcome. Even though I was born in poverty I will not be seen as poor in spirit.

Orestes:

By the gods! Is this the man who holds your marriage a secret so that he won't insult Orestes?

Elektra:

Yes, this is the man they call my husband.

Orestes:

It is impossible to judge a man's virtue with accuracy. There's always great confusion in the nature of mortals.

370

I, myself, have seen worthless children born of a virtuous man and from evil parents born brilliant children. I have seen a small, poor mind in a wealthy man and in the soul of a poor man, a great one. How then can someone judge a man when he must consider all these attributes? By wealth? No, he will be a bad judge. By his poverty? No, because poverty brings misery and makes the man turn to evil by necessity. Should I consider arms? Would you believe that a man is brave simply by the fact that he's holding a spear?

380

Much better if one leaves all this to Fate's judgement. This man here is not great amongst the Argives,

nor does he puff his chest up in pride about his ancestors but one sees him as being quite apart from the masses. Speaking to the audience. You, however who, with mindless opinions fall astray, will you never think wisely and consider weighing mortals by their manner and the virtuous among them by their character?

390

They are the men who govern their cities and their houses well. Men of good physiques but who lack thinking are only good as statues in the market place.

Nor can a hand, though mighty in spear, can stand up against it better than someone weak. In this it's a matter of natural strength and bravery.

(To the peasant) Yes, we shall accept your hospitality. It is worthy for the children of Agamemnon, both, for Elektra as well as for Orestes, who's absent far away and on whose behalf we came here. Go on, then servants, go inside. So far as I'm concerned it's better that I am the guest of a willing poor man rather than a wealthy one. I rejoice in the fact that I stand at his household. I'd prefer, however if your brother himself happily entertained us in his own prosperous house.

400

Still, you never know he just might come back because, Apollo's prophecies are always correct whereas the prophecies of men, I do not trust at all.

Orestes, Pylades and his attendants go into the house.

Chorus:

Elektra, now more than before our heart sparks with joy because perhaps Fate might be moving in the right direction judging by what he said.

Elektra: (to the peasant)

Poor man, you know the poverty of your house yet you receive these strangers, these men of a much higher status.

Peasant:

What of it, Elektra? If they are, as they seem to be, from a good and noble family then they'll be just as happy with the little as they would be with the plenty.

410

Elektra:

Well, then, since you made the mistake, poor man, go quickly and see my beloved father's old tutor who's been thrown out of the city and now grazes sheep near Tanaou river, at the border between Sparta and Argos. Tell him that, now that the guests are here to bring some food for them.

420

He will be overjoyed and he'll thank the gods when he finds out that the child whose life he once saved, lives. Forget about asking my mother. Nothing will come from my father's palace. Poor woman, we'd be bringing her bitter news telling her that Orestes is still alive.

Peasant:

Good. All right then, I shall do as you wish. I'll pass your words on to the old man but you go inside and prepare the table. And don't be late with it. A woman can do wonders in the kitchen when the need calls for it. We still have enough food in the house to see the strangers adequately through for a day. When I think of such things then I see what mighty power money has! Not only you help your friends with the stuff but you can also heal yourself from any illness when you have the money to pay.

430

The cost of a normal everyday meal is cheap, because everyone, rich and poor, once he had enough he feels the same joy.

Exit both, Elektra and Peasant into the house.

Chorus:

Famous ships that once sailed for Troy with countless oars and with the daughters of Nereas kept you good company with their dances.

440

All round the blue prows the dolphins leaped about, drunk with the sound of the pipes' song as you took Thetis' son, fleetfooted Achilles to the shores of the Trojan river Simois, with Agamemnon by his side.

They left the shores of Euboa holding the shield and the golden armour forged by Hephaestos on his golden anvil and headed for Pelios and for Ossa's holy tight knit valleys and the lookouts where the nymphs live.

450

These neriads left to find Achilles, the son of the sea goddess, Thetis, there where his horseman father, Peleas raised him, a beacon of light for the Greeks and the fleetfooted sons of Atreas.

I've heard from someone who had left Troy and reached the harbour of Nauplion telling of the

Achilles' famous shield, the son of Thetis. Fearsome! He said it was painted with pictures to spread wild fear among the Trojans, in the land of Phrygia.

460

Around the rim of the shield, the man said, was Perseus with his winged sandals, flying above the sea, his hand grasping the severed head of the Gorgon. Beside him flew Hermes, Zeus' messenger, the peasant son of Maia.

And in the centre of the shield shimmered the blinding glow of the sun's orb, carried in a chariot of winged horses. All around this were the heavens dancing – stars like the Pleiades and the Hyades, frightening enough to make Hektor turn his eyes away.

470

On his golden helmet Sphinxes held with their talons the prey their songs had lured.

A fire-breathing lioness on his chestplate, the chimera, with the sharp paws, speeds off as she sees, Pegasus, Peirene's colt.

And on his murderous sword, the horses pounded and the black dust rose behind them.

480

A King, Klytaimnestra, a King of such brave lot of warriors your evil adultery slaughtered, daughter of Tyndareus, and I hope one day I'll see the gods send you to your death. And so I will. One day I shall see a sword cut through your neck and the blood gush forth from your mortal wound.

Enter the Old Man. He is walking with great difficulty and with the aid of a shepherd's crook. His clothes are old and in tatters. Over his shoulders he is carrying a suckling lamb and a sack of other items.

Old Man:

Where is my noble lady, the daughter of Agamemnon the King, whom I raised all those years ago?

490

Och, what a steep hill this house is on. Too steep for a bent old man like me. Still, it was necessary for me to drag here my bent back and my shaking legs.

Elektra appears at the door.

Ah! Daughter! Now I can see you by the doorway. I brought you a young lamb which I've just taken away from its mother's teat. As well, I've brought along some garlands, some cheeses, just fresh from the presses and this here treasure, a very old, fragrant wine of which I've made only a little.

500

It's not much but if you put but a drop of it in some lesser vintage, you will be drinking a nice sweet wine. Now get someone to carry these things to the strangers inside. I want to wipe my tears with my old, tattered garment.

Elektra claps her hands and a male servant appears from the hut. He picks up the old man's burden and takes it inside.

The old man wipes his tears.

Elektra:

But, old man, why cry? What is the meaning of your teary look? Is it because you still remember my tribulations even though they happened so long ago?

510

Or are you sighing because of Orestes, who is in exile, or is it because of my father whom a long time ago you brought up with your own hands but all to no avail for you or for your friends?

Old Man:

Yes, totally to no avail.

Still I couldn't take it. I came out of this road and went to your father's tomb and as I saw it deserted and full of weeds I fell on my knees and cried. I took some of the wine I brought the strangers and poured libations upon it and placed branches of myrtle around it. But, just then, I saw on the tomb a black sheep, slaughtered and with its blood, still fresh, spilled. Next to it was a lock of blond hair.

I wondered, child, who on earth would have such courage to approach the tomb. Certainly none of the Argives. Perhaps your brother arrived in secret and he honoured your father's poor tomb.

He takes a lock of hair out of his clothes and offers it to Elektra.

520

Here, place this cut hair next to yours and see if the colour matches. It is common that they who have the same father to have many similarities all over their body.

Elektra: *Rejecting the old man's offer.*

Old father, your words are not wise if you're saying that my brave brother came here in secret, because he is afraid of Aigisthus.

530

Also, how could the hair of a noble hero, raised in the wrestling arenas match that of a virgin who

combs her hair the feminine way? Impossible! Matching colour hair, old father, you'll find on many but they are not necessarily of the same blood.

Old Man:

Well, then, my daughter, go and take a look at his footprints. See if they match yours.

Elektra:

But how is it possible for someone to leave footprints on a rocky ground? In any case, even if that were possible, the feet of two siblings, one male the other female wouldn't match. The male feet are always bigger.

540

Old Man:

You have weaved him his clothes before I snatched him away from the slaughter. Will you be able to recognise any of them?

Elektra:

Can you not remember that when you took Orestes I was still a young girl? And even if I did weave his garments, how could he possibly be wearing the same baby clothes? Unless, of course, clothes and bodies grow together! It must have been some stranger who felt sorry for him and gave an offering of his hair, or some local who took with him some guards to help him.

550

Old Man:

Where are the strangers? I want to see them and ask them questions about your brother.

Enter Orestes and Pylades from the house.

Elektra:

Here they are. Just came out of the house.

Old Man:

They seem to be from a good family but I could be wrong. Many men have a bad character even though their parents are nobles. In any case, I greet you friends.

Orestes:

And we greet you, too, old man. Elektra, which one of your friends belongs to this old remnant of a man?

Elektra:

Friend, he is the man who reared my father.

Orestes:

Is this right? Is he also the man who saved your brother from certain death?

Elektra:

Yes, he is the one who saved Orestes and that's why he is still alive.

Orestes:

I see. But why is he staring at me like this, as if he is checking out the bright symbol on a silver coin. Or does he take me for someone I look like?

560

Elektra:

Perhaps he's rejoicing the fact that you have Orestes' years.

The old man is walking around Orestes with extreme curiosity.

Orestes:

He is confusing me with someone he loves. Why is he walking around me?

Elektra:

I, too, wonder at this as I see it, friend.

Old Man:

Lady, my darling Elektra, pray to the gods.

Elektra:

For whom? For these who are here or for those who are not?

Old Man:

Pray that you receive a most precious gift from the gods.

Elektra kneels down and prays silently

Elektra:

There! I prayed. So, what is it you're trying to tell me, old friend?

Old Man: *(Indicating Orestes)*

Look at this man you say is your friend, my child.

570

Elektra:

I've been looking at him for a while now, my old friend. Have you gone mad?

Old Man:

Mad? Have I gone mad if I'm looking at your brother?

Elektra:

My brother? What an unbelievable word you've uttered, old man.

Old Man:

The word I've uttered is that this man here, this man I'm looking at, is Orestes!

Elektra:

What proof do you have of this? Show me the sign.

Old Man:

Look at his eyebrow. See there the cut he received when he was young? You two were chasing a fawn at your father's house.

Elektra:

What? Yes I can see that!

Old Man:

You are taking a long time to fall into the arms of your beloved brother!

Elektra:

Not any more, old friend! My heart has finally recognised the signs you've shown it.

(To Orestes) My brother! You took so many years to come. I hug you in utter disbelief.

Orestes:

And I too, hug you after so many years.

Elektra:

I never thought this would happen.

580

Orestes:

Nor I. I have never thought this would happen either.

Elektra:

Are you truly Orestes?

Orestes:

Yes and your only support, that is if the traps I'm hoping to put in place do their job. But no, I am confident. Otherwise how can we believe in the gods, if injustice can triumph over justice?

Chorus:

O, day that you have taken so many years to come! Finally you have arrived! You dawned and showed the city Orestes, like a brilliant torch. Orestes who has returned to the halls of his father's palace, Orestes who's been a wandering exile for so many years.

590

It is a god, friends, yes a god who brings us once again victory. Come, raise your hands and voice, pray to the gods that your brother enters the city triumphant.

Orestes:

Good. I have felt the warmth of your embrace and later I'll have plenty of time to repay it. Old man, you came just at the right time.

600

Tell me how can I punish my father's murderer and my mother who shares such a sinful marriage with him? I wonder if there are any people in Argos who sympathise with me or is everything lost, just like our Fate? Tell me, whom should I speak with and should I do the deed during the day or the night?

Which road should I take to get to my enemies?

Old Man:

No one, my son. No one loves anyone who's in trouble. It is a hard thing to hope for, to find a friend who stays with you both in joy and in sorrow. You too, have little hope since you left no hope for your friends, so listen to me.

610

Whether or not you gain back your father's palaces and land, now rests wholly in your hands and in the hands of Fate.

Orestes:

Tell me then: how will I achieve this?

Old Man:

Only if you kill both, Aigisthus and your mother, Klytimestra.

Orestes:

This is the glory I came for. How will I get it?

Old Man:

You mustn't enter the palace walls. That way you'll achieve nothing.

Orestes:
Are there many well-armed guards there?

Old Man:
Yes, Aigisthus is afraid of you and he never sleeps.

Orestes:
Right. What next, old man?

620

Old man:
Listen. I just thought of something.

Orestes:
I will hear any good suggestion.

Old Man:
I saw Aigisthus on my way here.

Orestes:
Happy news this. Where did you see him?

Old Man:
Back there, at the paddocks where his horses graze.

Orestes:
What was he doing there? I can see a ray of hope among all our difficulties.

Old Man:
I think he was preparing the festival of the Nymphs.

Orestes:
For the sake of his current children or for one on the way?

Old Man:
I know nothing more than this, that he is preparing to kill a bull.

Orestes:
Are there many slave with him or is he alone?

630

Old Man:
No Argives, just his household slaves.

Orestes:
Will anyone recognise me if they see me, old man?

Old Man:
No, none of the slaves ever saw you.

Orestes:
If I succeed will they come to my side?

Old Man:
Yes, that's the way of the slaves and that will be to your benefit.

Orestes:
How could I get close enough to him?

Old Man:
By going past there when he is performing the sacrifice.

Orestes:
The paddocks are by the side of the road, I believe, aren't they?

Old Man:
As soon as he sees you he will invite you to his table to share the sacrificed meat.

Orestes:
And, god willing, I shall prove to be a bitter company at his feast!

640

Old Man:
Once you do that then you must act as Fate dictates.

Orestes:
Quite right... Where's my mother right now?

Old Man:
She's in Argos right now but in the evening she'll join her husband at the feast.

Orestes:
I wonder why she didn't come out with her husband.

Old Man:
She's afraid of the people's disparaging gossip.

Orestes:

I know. Everyone treats her with suspicion.

Old Man:

True. Everyone hates a sinful woman.

Orestes:

So, how will I kill both of them without the murder of the one reach the ears of the other?

Elektra:

I shall make preparations for the mother's death.

Orestes:

Yes and I think Fate will help in this.

650

Elektra:

Let this old sir help with both deaths.

Orestes:

Good. Have you found a way to murder her?

Elektra:

Old Friend, go and tell Klytaimestra that I have given birth to a boy and that I am lying in the birth bed.

Old Man:

When shall I say you gave birth, a while ago or just now?

Elektra:

Ten days ago, after the purification I was supposed to have.

Old Man:

And this will bring about her death?

Elektra:

The moment she hears of my delivery she'll come.

Old Man:

Why? Do you think she's concerned about you?

Elektra:

Yes. She'll feel sorry for my poor baby!

Old Man:

Perhaps. Let's get back to our matter.

660

Elektra:

If she comes, she'll die for certain.

Old Man:

Let us say she is approaching your threshold.

Elektra:

It'll be like walking into Hades.

Old Man:

If only I could see this, then I could happily die!

Elektra:

But first, old friend, take Orestes...

Old Man:

To where Aegisthus is performing the sacrifice?

Elektra:

Yes, then go and tell my mother what I've just told you.

Old Man:

I will. It'll be like it's coming out of your own mouth.

Elektra: *To Orestes*

To your work now. You have the first murder to perform.

Orestes:

I'm going. Let someone show me the way.

670

Old man: My heart will show you the way.

All kneel to pray

Orestes:

Oh Zeus, god of my ancestors, protector, send our enemies away!

Elektra:

Pity us our pitiful predicament...

Old Man:

Yes, pity them, they are of your house.

Elektra:

And you Hera, mother of the Mycaenean altars...

Orestes:

Give us Victory if we seek her justly.

Old Man:

Help them avenge their father.

Orestes:

You father! You've been sent unjustly to wander beneath the earth...

Elektra:

And you reverent Earth to whom I stretch my hands...

Old Man:

Help them, help the dear children...

Orestes:

Make all the dead our allies

680

Elektra:

All those, dear father, who've helped you destroy the Trojans!

Old Man:

And all those who hate the sinful murderers

Elektra:

Did you hear how we've suffered by our mother?

They all rise.

Old Man:

Your father hears everything. I know. Time now for us to go.

Elektra:

Aigisthus must fall. I tell you this in advance so that you'll know it's like this. If you fall and get killed, then I too will fall and get killed. Don't even think of me as being alive. I shall strike my heart with a double-edged sword.

690

Now I'll go and prepare the house and when your sign comes and it's good, then the house, too, will rejoice but if it's bad it will suffer the opposite. That's all I have to say.

Orestes:

I know.

Elektra:

That's why you must be brave.

Exit Orestes, Pylades and the Old Man

Elektra: *To the chorus:*

You ladies, when the result of this battle arrives you must tell it to me clearly. I'll be waiting with a knife in the hand at the ready. I will never let my enemies insult me if they win.

Elektra Exits into the house

Chorus:

The ancient myths talk of the day when Pan, protector of the valleys, stole from his mother a lamb whose fleece was covered with gold. Then breathing into his beautifully wrought flute of reed, he enticed it all the way to the Argive mountains.

A crier stood on the stone then and cried out to the folk, "Come Mycaeneans, run to the market place to see wondrous signs that foretell of happy Kings!"

710

Chorus:

And everyone cheered and blessed the house of Atreides.

The temples were adorned with gold and everywhere throughout Argos they were opened for the sacrificial altars and the whole city was lit up with the altar fires.

The pipe, servant of the Muses, made of lotus reed, spread about its sweet airs and everywhere people sang songs of praise for the lamb with the golden fleece which they said belonged to Thyestes.

720

Chorus:

But the sheep was gained by deception. Stolen. Thyestes secretly raped Atreas' daughter and then took the animal to his palace. Then he went to the market place and called out in a loud voice that the lamb with the golden fleece was hiding in his palace.

Chorus:

Then Zeus confused the brilliant path of the stars and of the rays of the sun and of the pale white light of Dawn. And with a godsent flame he burned all the lands of the West.

Chorus:

The clouds that bring the rain went off to the North and the dry lands of Ammon withered without the fresh rain which Zeus had taken away.

Chorus:

They say –but I don't believe it at all- that the blazing Helios had turned his golden face, changing his path so that humanity would fall into misery for the sake of one man's punishment.

740

Chorus:

Such shocking myths are for the good of men, to frighten them into believing in the gods. You forgot these gods and you've killed your husband, you, the sister of the glorious twin brothers, the Dioskouroi, Kastor and Polydeuces.

The groan of a man being killed by the sword in the distance:

(Ah!)

Chorus:

Friends, did you hear that sound? It was like the thunder of Zeus coming from beneath the ground!

750

Chorus:

Or is it some hollow fantasy tricking us?

Another groan

Chorus:

There! The wind brings clear sounds. My lady Elektra, come out here!

Enter Elektra from her house.

Elektra:

What is it, my friends? What's going on? What news from Orestes?

Chorus:

I don't know but I've just heard groans of death.

More groans but softer now

Elektra:

I hear them also, in the distance but I do hear them.

Groans continue

Chorus:

The groan has far to travel but it's clear enough.

Elektra:

I wonder whose groans these are? Those of my Orestes or of Aigisthus?

Many loud voices mingled in turbulence within.

Chorus:

I don't know the voices are many and mixed.

Elektra:

You're telling me I should die. Why am I waiting?

Chorus:

Wait and see your Fate clearly!

Elektra:

No. The enemy has won. Where are the heralds?

Chorus:

They'll appear soon. It's a hard thing to kill a king.

Enter the Herald

Herald:

Glorious Victory, daughters of Mycaene. I bring the news of Orestes' victory to all. Thank the gods.

Agamemnon's murderer, Aigisthus is lying dead on the ground.

Elektra:

Who are you and how do I know you're telling the truth?

Herald:

Don't you recognise me? I am your brother's servant.

Elektra:

Ah, my dear man. Fear prevented me from recognising you. Now I remember you.

770

So what are you saying, is it true that my father's most hated murderer is dead?

Herald:

When we set off from the house we took the Two Carriage Road and eventually we arrived at the spot where the famous king of Mycaene was.

780

He was in a cool, fresh garden, picking myrtle branches to make a garland for his head. As soon as he saw us he called out, "Greetings friends, who are you? Where are you from? What is your city?"

Orestes answered him, "We are Thessalians, we are going to the land of Alphios to perform sacrifices to Olympian Zeus"

Hearing this Aigisthus then told us, "for now you'll stay with me and you will dine with me.

790

I am sacrificing a bull to the Nymphs. If you get up with Dawn you wouldn't have lost any time. Let us go to my house. Come on, it's not right to refuse me." That's what he said and then taking us by the hand he led us into the house. When we got inside he shouted, "Hurry, someone bring water for the strangers to purify themselves so that they can stand next to us at the altar by the lustral basin!"

But Orestes said to him, "My Lord Aigisthus, only just now we purified ourselves by the clear waters of the river. If it is proper for strangers, my lord king to stand next to local folk then we will not refuse. We will happily do so."

800

So, they left it at that. Then the slaves who had accompanied Aigisthus so as to protect him, put their spears down and fell into the work of preparing the sacrifice. They brought a vessel to catch the blood from the slaughter and the cuttings of the meat. Others brought panniers, others lit up the altars and others again set the cauldrons ready. The whole house was echoing with the sounds of the work.

Then your mother's husband Aigisthus, took some barley flour and sprinkled it over the altars, saying, "Nymphs of the rocks make it possible for me and my wife, daughter of the house of the Tyndarides, who is now back at home, to perform many more sacrifices for you, to be always as happy as this and for our enemies to live in misery."

810

He said all this referring to you and Orestes. But my Lord was praying the opposite, which was, to regain his father's palace. Then Aigisthus took a sacrificial knife –one with a straight blade- from the pannier and with it cut some from the calf. With his right hand he threw the hair on the holy flame and, with the help of his slaves who lifted the animal up into the air, he killed it.

Then he said this to your brother: "They say that the Thessalians pride themselves in their ability to slaughter a bull and to break a horse. Come then, friend, take the knife and show us what a Thessalian can really do."

820

Then Orestes chose a strong Doric blade and throwing away from his shoulders his beautiful cape he called Pylades to help him, sending all others away. He stretched his arms and grabbing the calf from the leg he laid bare the white flesh beneath its skin. He took less time to skin the calf than a runner takes to run two circles around a horse stadium. Then he stretched the flanks open.

830

Aigisthus then took the innards in his hands and began inspecting them. He could not see a liver-lobe and the valves of the heart and the gall bladder gave him the truth about the evil he was about to encounter.

He frowned and my lord asked him, "What is wrong? Why do you look worried?" To that Aigisthus replied, "Stranger, I fear some trap from abroad. Agamemnon's son is my enemy and I hate him more than everyone else."

Orestes replied, "You? The king of a nation and you're afraid of the trap of someone in exile? Let us go on with the feast. Will someone bring me a Phthian cleaver instead of this Doric knife? I'll cut the animal through the chest so we can eat the entrails."

He took the cleaver and began cutting through the animal.

840

Meantime Aigisthus was carefully examining each part of the entrails and just as he was bent over them, Orestes stood on his toes and hit him on his spine crushing all his joints. Aigisthus' whole body shook up and down and he groaned wildly in the agony of a bloody death.

The slaves saw what had happened and immediately reached for their spear – they, in great number to do battle with two.

850

But Orestes and Pylades bravely stopped them on their tracks, shaking their own spears. Your brother spoke to them saying, "I have not come here as an enemy to my own people. Rather I've come to punish the murderer of my father. I am luckless Orestes. So, you, old servants of my father, do not kill

me.” They heard his words and drew back their spears. An old slave of your father’s recognised him and immediately there was enormous joy and a garland was placed around Orestes’ head. Orestes is now on his way to show you not Medusa’s head but the head of the man you hated so much, that of Aigisthus. The blood of his own murder has paid for the blood of your father’s murder.

860

Chorus:

Raise your feet to a dance dear girl. Jump joyfully high into the sky. Light feet, like that of a fawn!

Dance, my dear girl, dance!

Chorus:

Your brother has won a wreath, a better reward than that gained by those athletes who win them by the waters of Alpheios. Come, sing the victory song to go with my dance.

Elektra:

O, light! O, flame of the sun on his chariot and O Earth! O, Night, once I could only look at you but now my eyes are free to see because my father’s murderer is gone.

870

Right! I shall go inside and bring out whatever adornments I have in there so as to adorn the head of my victorious brother.

Elektra exits into the house.

Chorus:

You bring the adornments for your brother. We won’t stop our dance so loved by the Muses. Now our first kings shall rule again, having justly destroyed this evil lot. Come let the breath of a flute accompany my joy.

Elektra comes out of the house carrying a basket of adornments just as Orestes enters with Pylades and some attendants carrying the body of Aigisthus on a bier.

880

Elektra: *Offering a garland*

O, glorious Orestes, son of the glorious man who won a victory against the Trojans, accept this garland for your hair. It was not a vain marathon you ran before you returned here but you have killed Aigisthus, murderer of our father. And you, too, Pylades, his companion in battle, reared by a most reverent father, here is a garland for you. Take it from my hand; you’ve earned an equal reward in this battle.

May I always see you two happy!

891

Orestes:

First thank the gods, Elektra who guided this great fate and then you can praise me for being a servant of the gods and of Fate.

I have killed Aigisthus and I have come here. These are no empty words but deeds.

And I say this to you so that you may believe me. I bring him to you dead.

900

If you wish you can throw him to the wild beasts or you can impale him on a high stake to be devoured by the birds of prey, children of the ether. He is your slave now and no longer, as they used to call him, your master.

Elektra:

I hesitate but still I want to say it.

Orestes:

Say what? Speak. There is nothing to fear.

Elektra:

I’m afraid they’ll say I dishonour the dead.

Orestes:

No one will speak ill of you.

Elektra:

The city has an ill will towards us. Argos will shun us.

Orestes:

Come, sister, speak whatever you like. This man’s deadly hatred has separated us.

Elektra: *To Aigisthus’ corpse*

Fine then, I shall speak. What charge should I make my first, what charge should I utter last and what words should I put in the middle?

910

Yet I have never stopped whispering to every Dawn those things I wanted to shout at you if I were free from my old fears. Now I am free and I shall throw at you all the evil deeds you committed while you

were alive.

You've destroyed my life and his (Indicating Orestes) life and made orphans out of both of us killing our beloved father without any injustice done by us to you.

920

You, who have never fought the Trojans, married my mother improperly and murdered her husband, the leader of the Greek army.

You were such a fool, thinking that marrying my mother and dishonouring my father's bed, she would stay faithful to you. Yet everyone should know this: when a man seduces another man's wife with secret love and then is forced to marry her, he is a fool to think that she'd be honest with him if she wasn't with her first husband.

You lived in misery yet you didn't suspect it and felt, instead, that you were happy. Of course both of you knew your union was unholy. Unholy marriage, unlawful husband.

930

You two, being evil, hid each other's misery: she hid yours and you hid hers. All the Argives would say, "Look, there goes Klytaimestra's husband" and not, "there goes Aigisthus' wife!"

It's a great shame to see a house being ruled by the woman and not by the man. I turn away from any child whom the city calls not a father's son but a mother's. This is because if the man marries a woman of a far better standing than his and far more noble than him, the citizen will never speak about him but about his wife.

940

And you, Aigisthus, because of your lack of intelligence, fell into a big trap which is that you thought that the great wealth made you important. Yet wealth is not something you can have for long.

A man's strength is his nature, not his wealth because that is what stays with us and that is what defeats our troubles. When the unjust joy falls into sinful ways, it blossoms in the house for a very short time before it flies away again.

I am not going to talk openly about your behaviour towards women; a virgin must not do so but if I speak of them in hidden terms they will still be easy to understand.

You dishonoured them because, they say, you had royal palaces and beauty.

950

So far as I am concerned, I don't want my husband to have the face of a virgin but that of a real man. Such are the men who serve Ares the war god. The spoiled children are only for decoration. So, then die Aigisthus! You've showed yourself a mindless man and it's now time to pay for that. (To the audience) Let every criminal like him know that just because his first criminal steps went according to his wishes that he has defeated Justice before his life's end.

960

Chorus:

Justice has enormous strength. His deeds were horrible and horribly he paid for them before you and before Orestes.

Elektra:

Now then. You, servants, take his corpse indoors and hide it in the dark so that my mother won't see it before she meets her own death.

The attendants pick up the bier and exit into the house.

Orestes:

Now, enough of this. Let's talk of other matters.

Elektra: (*Looks into the distance within*)

What's this? Are these his allies from Mycenae?

Orestes:

No, it's my mother.

Elektra:

She is coming straight into my net! And look how proudly she moves in her finery and inside her chariot.

Orestes:

What shall we do then? Slaughter our mother?

Elektra:

Have you succumbed to pity the moment you saw her?

Orestes:

Ah, but how can I kill the woman who has given birth to me and nurtured me?

970

Elektra:

In the same way she killed our father.

Orestes:

Phoebus Apollo! What a thoughtless oracle you gave me.

Elektra:

If Apollo is thoughtless then who are the wise and knowledgeable?

Orestes:

Apollo, you shouldn't have given me the oracle to kill my mother. It is not proper.

Elektra:

What could you suffer by avenging your father?

Orestes:

I have come as an innocent. Now I shall leave as a matricide.

Elektra:

If you don't stand by your father you will be guilty according to the gods.

Orestes:

But my mother? I know but I will not be guilty of murdering my mother.

Elektra:

And if you do not avenge your father?

Orestes:

Some evil spirit must have spoken the oracle, an evil spirit disguised as a god.

980

Elektra:

Sitting on the holy tripod? I don't think so.

Orestes:

It's hard for me to believe these are proper oracles.

Elektra:

Now don't hesitate and behave like a coward.

Orestes:

Will I concoct the same trap for her?

Elektra:

Kill her as you've killed Aigisthus.

Orestes:

Fine. I am going inside. Terrible the deed I shall begin and frightening the deeds I shall accomplish. If this is liked by the gods then so be it. My battle is bitter, not sweet.

All except Elektra and the chorus go into the house to hide.

Enter Klytimestra on a highly adorned chariot, behind which is a wagon carrying female Trojan slaves. Other slaves follow her.

Chorus:

Greetings queen of Argos, daughter of Tyndareus and sister of the two brilliant sons of Zeus who live among the stars and in the blazing ether. The twins, Kastor and Polydeuces whose grace it is to save men from the sea's harsh waves.

990

Greetings. I revere you in the same way as I do the blessed gods, for your great wealth and your great joy. It is time, my queen to serve you.

1000

Klytimestra: *To her slaves*

Trojan maids, come down from the wagon and hold my hand so I can get down. The temples of the gods are resplendent with the Phrygian spoils but I've kept these Trojan maids for myself, chosen personally by me, a small gift and ornament to my palace, a replacement of my daughter whom I've lost.

Elektra:

Allow me to give you my hand, mother. I, who have been cast out of my father's house and now live in that deserted hut over there, let me hold your blessed hand.

Klytimestra:

Don't bother. My slaves are here.

1010

Elektra:

Why not? You've cast me away from my palaces like a slave, when you've emptied them of all life and so I, too, became like them, a slave and a fatherless orphan.

Klytimestra:

That was your father's thinking: always act against his own folk. He plotted against those he should love and not kill.

Let me tell you all about them. When a woman gets a bad name then her tongue also becomes somewhat bitter, though not in my case. Learn the full story first and if then I deserve it, by all means, do hate me. Otherwise why hold a grudge against me?

1020

Tyndareus gave me to your father not so that I'd be murdered nor so that my children be murdered. Your father, tricked my daughter, Iphigeneia by telling her that he would give her to Achilles as his wife, took her from our palace and brought her to Aulis where all the ships were stuck. He then placed my girl onto the altar and cut her beautiful white neck.

Had he done this because he was trying to save a city or to save his family and his house, to save his other children, everyone would have forgiven him because he would have sacrificed one for the sake of many. But no, he had killed her because Helen was insatiably lustful and her husband had not the courage to punish her. That's why your father killed my daughter.

1030

And even though they did me such a wrong, I was still not overtaken by rage nor did I want to murder the man. But then he came back from Troy bringing with him this possessed, virgin, prophetic, Cassandra to share our bed and our halls. It's true, I won't dispute it, that women are mindless. But when the husband wanders away from his wife then she, too will try and copy him in trying to find another lover.

1040

And then the whole city criticises us, women whereas no one says a thing about the man who caused the problem in the first place. Would I have to kill my son Orestes if they had stolen Menelaos, my sister's husband? How would you father take that? Why should he not be the one to die? He had killed my own daughter so why should it be that I die?

1050

I did the crime and took the only path I could. I took the side of his enemies. Which friend of his would come to my aid when I killed your father?

Say what you like and speak with a perfectly free mind. Show me where the injustice of your father's murder is.

Chorus:

You spoke justly, though such Justice brings shame because if a woman is wise she should always forgive her husband and I personally, treat with disdain the woman who doesn't think so.

Elektra:

Mother, remember your final words: you said that I could speak to you freely.

Klytaimestra:

And I say it again, my child. I do not deny it.

Elektra:

Will you hurt me after you hear me?

Klytaimestra:

No. I shall welcome your words whatever they are.

1060

Elektra:

Well, then, I speak and this is my prologue. If only you had a better brain, mother! I won't deny that people praise you and Helen for your beauty but both of you were born, thoughtless and unworthy sisters of Kastor and Polydeuces.

I'm saying this because one of you, your sister, was "stolen" willingly and then vanished; You then killed the best of Greek men with the excuse that he killed your daughter.

1070

Mother, no one knows you as well as I do.

The moment your husband left your house and well before the decision was made to kill Iphigeneia, you stood in front of your mirror, combing your golden hair. A woman who cares only after her beauty, as soon as her husband leaves, is not an honourable woman. What is the point? There is no need for her to show her face outside the house, looking to do some mischief.

I also know that you, of all the Greek women, were the only one who was happy when the Trojans were winning and, if they were losing your face would frown because you didn't want Agamemnon to return.

1080

But, of course, you had to contain yourself because my father was a far better man than Aigisthus was and that's why Greece chose him as her army's leader. Then, since your sister, Helen, behaved so appallingly, you had every opportunity to gain great glory because for the good people, the evil acts are a lesson to give themselves a chance to reflect.

1090

And if, as you say, my father has killed Iphigeneia, how am I and my brother at fault?
Once you've killed your husband why didn't you give my father's house to me and Orestes rather than as dowry to your lover? These were things that did not belong to you in the first place.
And has your new husband gone to exile as payment of your son's exile? Or was he killed, in payment of my own death which he caused doubly, even though I live a life harder than that of my sister?
If it is a just thing that a murder must be repaid by murder then Orestes and I will kill you, as payment for my father's murder because if the first deed was just then so is the second. He who marries a woman because of her wealth or her birth is a fool and he'll end up with a bad woman.

1100

It is far better to have a well behaved, humble woman in the house even though she is of low rank than an arrogant one who is of an established family.

Chorus:

One gets the woman chosen by Fate not by himself. I know because I can see that some are happy in their marriage and others are not.

Klytaimestra:

It has always been in your nature, my daughter, to love your father. That's how it often is: some children love their fathers more than their mothers and other children again love their mothers more. I don't hold that against you but nor do I feel good about my own deeds. Oh, but look how awful you look, unwashed and so badly dressed! O, what misery all my plotting has brought me!

1110

How did it happen that I allowed the excessive rage take me and make me take it out on my husband!

Elektra:

Your sighs are belated. It's impossible now to heal your evil deed.

My father is dead. Fine but why don't you bring your son back from exile, wandering about from one city to the next, like a vagabond?

Klytaimestra:

I'm afraid. I'm thinking of my own good, not that of Orestes because they tell me he's outraged by his father's murder.

Elektra:

Why then do you constantly push your husband against me?

Klytaimestra:

It's in his nature but you too, are arrogant.

Elektra:

Because I hurt but I shall hold my anger in the future.

Klytaimestra:

And he will no longer be harsh towards you.

1120

Elektra:

He's been arrogant himself, because he lives in my house.

Klytaimestra:

See? You're starting off new hatreds now!

Elektra:

I shall be quiet. I fear him in my own way.

Klytaimestra:

Enough of these words. Why did you call me?

Elektra:

I have given birth and I thought you would have heard about it. I want you to perform the appropriate sacrifices to thank the gods. I don't know how to do this since I've never had any children before. It is the baby's tenth night and custom declares that sacrifices be performed.

Klytaimestra:

This is not my job but the job of the woman who has delivered your baby.

Elektra:

I delivered the baby myself. I was the midwife.

Klytaimestra:

Is your house empty and without neighbours?

1130

Elektra:

No one wants to have poor friends.

Klytaimestra:

Since the baby's days are complete, I shall go and perform the sacrifices. Then, when I have finished this favour for you, I shall go to the farms where my husband is performing sacrifices for the Nymphs. Slaves, take the horses to graze and when you think I've finished the sacrifice come back. I'll need to also thank my husband.

The slaves exit taking with them the chariot and the wagon.

1139

Elektra:

Come, come into my poor house.

Be careful of the soot on the walls, mother, lest they dirty your gown because you'll need to perform the sacrifice just as declared by the gods.

Klytaimestra enters the house.

The basket is ready, the sword with which he has killed the bull is sharpened. There, by his side you will also fall. He'll be your husband in Hades as he was up here, beneath the sun, when you shared his bed. This is the favour I'm doing for you and with it you will repay my father's murder.

Elektra, too, enters the house.

Chorus:

The evil deeds are now being paid. The winds of vengeance are sweeping through the palace halls. Once my master was killed in the bath. The roof and the stony cornices of the palace echoed when he shouted the words, "Aaa! Poor me! Why kill me wife? The farms have been sown ten times by the time I came back to my sweet country. Why kill me?"

Chorus:

By and by the years brought back a punishment to the lawless woman who when Agamemnon had returned after so many years to his own palace and to the Cyclopean castles that touch the sky, she alone and with her own hand killed him using a sharpened axe.

1160

Chorus:

A! Her ill-fated mate, whatever was that madness that seized the wretched woman!
Like a mountain lioness that lives in the green valleys she accomplished this murder.

Klytaimestra: *Loud cries from within*

(By the gods, children, don't kill your mother!)

Chorus:

Did you hear the cry from the house?

Klytaimestra: *Loud cries from within*

(Oooo!)

Chorus:

I, too, cry for you that your own children are murdering you. When the Fated hour comes the gods disperse the just punishment.

1170

Chorus:

A dreadful punishment now strikes back at you but with dreadful deeds you struck your husband, poor creature.

Enter Orestes, Pylades and Elektra with the eccyclema exposing the corpses of Aigisthus and Klytaimestra. All three are steeped in blood.

Chorus:

Ah! Here they are, steeped in the blood of their mother whom they've only just now murdered, the cause of her wild cries.

There is, nor ever was, a house more wretched than that of the house of Tantalos.

Orestes:

Earth and Zeus! Seers of all of man's work! Look now upon these murderous, unholy deeds!

1180

Look at these two bodies lying on the ground! Both were struck down by my own knife, both, a recompense for the evil deeds they've committed to me.

Elektra:

Your suffering, my brother is sorrowful and I am its cause for I have fallen like a furious blaze upon my mother, the woman who has given birth to me.

Chorus:

Fate! Your Fate Klytaimestra! How cruel the fury of your suffering! What cruel deeds you dared, what cruel deeds—even more cruel!—returned to you from your own children! But it was a just payment for the murder of their father!

Orestes:

Phoebus Apollo, you prophesied justice with a dark oracle but the pains you gave me are fully visible. You declared that I would have a bloody Fate away from Greece. To what other land should I go? Who is the god-fearing man, who is the friend who will turn to look kindly upon me now – me a man who murdered his mother?

Elektra:

What festivals, what dances will now let me join in? What marriage, what husband will have me in his bridal bed?

1200

Chorus: (*To Elektra*)

Again! Like the wind you've changed direction! Now your thoughts are right. Now, not before and you, daughter, did your brother a great wrong. You made him perform an act he was unwilling to perform.

Orestes:

Did you see how the poor woman tore off her gown and showed me her breast, as I was about to strike her?

How the poor wretch dropped her legs to the ground! Those legs through which I was born! And I snatched her hair...

Chorus:

I know. I know the awful pain you felt when you heard the pitiable cry of the woman who gave birth to you.

Orestes:

Through her groans she stretched her hands to my chin and cried, "My son, I beg you!" She hung from my beard and my sword fell from my hand.

1220

Chorus:

Poor woman! How did you have the courage to watch your mother's blood spill as she was dying?

Orestes:

I used my cape to cover my eyes when I slaughtered her. I plunged my sword into her neck.

Elektra:

And I urged you on, my brother and held the sword with you.

Chorus:

You've committed a most atrocious crime.

Orestes:

Come now, cover our mother's body with her gowns. Hide her wounds.

To Klytaimestra: There, mother! You bore children so that they may kill you.

Elektra: Also to Klytaimestra

Both loved and hated! Let us cover you with these gowns.

Chorus:

The misery of this palace has reached its peak.

(Looking up from whence the Dioskouroi will descend via deus ex machina

Or from behind the house.)

What's this? Do I see gods or spirits, above the house? This is no path for mortals but do they appear to the eyes of men?

Dioskouroi:

Son of Agamemnon listen to us. We the Dioskouroi, your mother's brothers, speak to you. I am Kastor and this is my twin brother Polydeuces. No sooner have we saved a ship from a wild sea and we came to Argos because we've witnessed the murder of our sister, your mother.

She was punished justly but you acted wrongly.

Apollo, yes Apollo, who is my master and so I shall not say too much, even though Apollo is a wise god, has given you unwise advice. But, we must accept his commands.

(To Orestes:)

1250

Do what Zeus and Fate have declared for you. Let Pylades have Elektra as his wife and let him take her to his home. You must leave Argos. You cannot step foot on this land since you are a matricide. The fearsome goddesses, the dog-eyed Keires will hound you and, in your frenzy, you'll be wandering from place to place.

1260

When you reach Athens embrace the sacred statue of Pallas Athena. The snakes upon these dog-eyed Keires will shudder but Athena will prevent them from touching you by placing her shield that has the

gorgon's head over you.

There is a rock there, belonging to Ares where the gods sat to judge for the first time the murder of Alirrothios by hard-hearted Ares himself because Alirrothios, Poseidon's son had raped Ares' daughter. This is why this place is where the gods do the judging and it is most sacred and most just. To this place you, too, must run, so that they can judge the murder you've committed. The result of the hearing will be votes cast in equal number – and this will save you.

1270

This is because Apollo will take the blame since it was his bad oracle that send you to kill your mother. And so for the generations to come there will be this law: When the votes are equal on both sides the defendant will be declared innocent.

So, then, these fearsome goddesses, becoming disconsolate by this decision, will fall into a deep chasm near the hill, which will become a holy temple for the believers.

You must live in an Arcadian city, near the stream of Alpheios and near the temple of Zeus the Lyceus. The city will be named after you: Oresteion.

These are the things I have to tell you.

The Argives will bury Aigisthus' corpse. As for your mother, she will be buried by Helen and Menelaos. Menelaos has just returned to Nauplion after he had destroyed Troy.

1280

Helen has just returned from Proteus' house in Egypt. She has never gone to Troy. This was a trick of Zeus. He had sent her image to Troy so that many mortals would find their gruesome death.

As for Pylades, he should take Elektra, who is now both a wife and a virgin from the land of the Greeks and bring her to his own home. And as for your supposed brother-in-law, take him to Phockis and grant him great wealth.

Finally, you, Orestes, should pass quickly through the Isthmus and go to the happy city of Cecropia, Athens' Acropolis.

1290

Because, once you shed away from you the effects of ill-fated murder, you will live happily and you'll be freed of tribulations.

Chorus:

Sons of Zeus may I speak?

Dioskouroi:

You can. You're not polluted by the murder.

Elektra:

May I speak as well, sons of Tyndareus?

Dioskouroi:

You, too. I blame Apollo for this murder.

1300

Chorus:

How is it that you two, who are gods and siblings of the murdered woman did not cast the black spirits out of the palace?

Dioskouroi:

Fate and Necessity guided that which needed to happen. They and Apollo's bad oracle.

Elektra:

And me? What oracle of Apollo's declared that I should become my mother's murderer?

Dioskouroi:

Similar deeds and similar Fates, as well as an ancestral curse ruined both of you.

Orestes:

My sister! I have only just found you after so many years yet I must leave you immediately and for ever and miss the warmth of your love.

1310

Dioskouroi:

Apart from the fact that she must leave Greece, she has both, a husband and a home. Her suffering is not bitter.

Elektra:

Yet what else other than leaving your own land is worthy of grief?

Orestes:

Still, I must leave my father's palace and must submit to the judgement of strangers for the murder of my mother.

1320

Dioskouroi:

Be brave. You'll eventually reach the city of Palas Athena. Have courage.

Elektra:

Hug me tightly my brother because our mother's fatal curses are sending us away from our home.

Orestes:

Come to my arms, hug me, Elektra and cry as you cry upon a grave.

1330

Dioskouroi:

Even for the gods it is a hard thing to hear your words. I and all the gods in the heavens pity the suffering mortals.

Orestes:

I will never see you again!

Elektra:

Nor I will ever see your eyes again.

Orestes:

These are your last words.

Elektra:

Good bye Argos, my city! And you, too, women of my city!

Orestes:

Beloved sister, are you leaving already?

1340

Elektra:

I am leaving, my eyes steeped in tears.

Orestes:

Go Pylades! Go in happiness and marry Elektra.

Dioskouroi:

These two will take care of their marriage but you, Orestes, run to Athens to save your life. The dog-eyed spirits are approaching. They're right behind you, hunting you, these dark, dreaded spirits, shaking their snakes, they feed on intolerable pain.

Now we will rush to the Sicilian sea to save some ships from the high waves.

When we are flying through the ether we cannot help the lawless We save from tribulations only those who love the sacred and the just. Let no one perform unjust acts nor travel with the faithless who stomp upon their oath. I, a god, say this to the mortals.

Exit Pylades with Elektra from one side, Orestes, alone from the other and the Dioskouroi from behind the house.

Chorus:

Good bye. Blessed is the human who can live happily without the weight of suffering.

Exit all

END OF EURIPIDIS'

"ELEKTRA"