

# Orestes

## Euripides

Translated by E. P. Coleridge

### CHARACTERS IN THE PLAY

Electra, daughter of Agamemnon and Clytemnestra

Helen, wife of Menelaus

Chorus of Argive Maidens

Orestes, brother of Electra

Menelaus, brother of Agamemnon; King of Argos

Pylades, friend Of Orestes

Messenger, formerly servant of Agamemnon

Hermione, daughter of Menelaus and Helen

A Phrygian Eunuch, in Helen's retinue

Apollo

Tyndareus, father of Clytemnestra

Attendants

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(Scene:-Before the royal palace at Argos. It is the sixth day after the murder of Clytemnestra and Aegisthus. Electra is discovered alone. Orestes lies sleeping on a couch in the background.)

Electra There is naught so terrible to describe, be it physical pain or heaven-sent affliction, that man's nature may not have to bear the burden of it. Tantalus, they say, once so prosperous,-and I am not now taunting him with his misfortunes,-Tantalus, the reputed son of Zeus, hangs suspended in mid air, quailing at the crag which looms above his head; paying this penalty, they say, for the shameful weakness he displayed in failing to keep a bridle on his lips, when admitted by gods, though he was but mortal, to share the honours of their feasts like one of them.

He it was that begat Pelops, the father of Atreus, for whom the goddess, when she had carded her wool, spun a web of strife, even to the making of war with his own brother Thyestes. But why need I repeat that hideous tale?

Well, Atreus slew Thyestes' children and feasted him on them; but,-passing over intermediate events-from Atreus and Aerope of Crete sprang Agamemnon, that famous chief,-if his was really fame,-and Menelaus. Now it was this Menelaus who married Helen, Heaven's abhorrence; while his brother, King Agamemnon, took Clytemnestra to wife, name of note in Hellas, and we three daughters were his issue, Chrysothemis, Iphigenia, and myself Electra; also a son Orestes; all of that one accursed mother, who slew her lord, after snaring him in a robe that had no outlet. Her reason a maiden's lips may not declare, and so leave that unexplained for the world to guess at. What need for me to charge Phoebus with wrong-doing, though he instigated Orestes to slay his own mother, a deed that few approved; still it was his obedience to the god that made him slay her; I, too, feebly as a woman would, shared in the deed of blood, as did Pylades who helped us to bring it about.

After this my poor Orestes fell sick of a cruel wasting disease; upon his couch he lies prostrated, and it is his mother's blood that goads him into frenzied fits; this I say, from dread of naming those goddesses, whose terrors are chasing him before them,-even the Eumenides. 'Tis now the sixth day since the body of his murdered mother was committed to the cleansing fire; since then no food has passed his lips, nor hath he washed his skin; but wrapped in his cloak he weeps in his lucid moments, whenever the fever leaves him; other whiles he bounds headlong from his couch, as colt when it is loosed from the yoke. Moreover, this city of Argos has decreed that no man give us shelter at his fireside or speak to matricides like us; yea, and this is the fateful day on which Argos will decide our

sentence, whether we are both to die by stoning, or to whet the steel and plunge it in our necks. There is, 'tis true, one hope of escape still left us; Menelaus has landed from Troy; his fleet now crowds the haven of Nauplia where he is come to anchor, returned at last from Troy after ceaseless wanderings; but Helen, that "lady of sorrows," as she styles herself, hath he sent on to our palace, carefully waiting for the night, lest any of those parents whose sons were slain beneath the walls of Troy, might see her if she went by day, and set to stoning her. Within she sits, weeping for her sister and the calamities of her family, and yet she hath still some solace in her woe; for Hermione, the child she left at home in the hour she sailed for Troys-the maid whom Menelaus brought from Sparta and entrusted to my mother's keeping,-is still a cause of joy to her and a reason to forget her sorrows.

I, meantime, am watching each approach, against the moment I see Menelaus arriving; for unless we find some safety there, we have but feeble anchor to ride on otherwise.

A helpless thing, an unlucky house!

(Helen enters from the palace.)

Helen Daughter of Clytemnestra and Agamemnon, hapless Electra, too long now left a maid unwed! how is it with thee and thy brother, this ill-starred Orestes who slew his mother! Speak; for referring the sin as I do to Phoebus, I incur no pollution by letting thee accost me; and yet am truly sorry for the fate of my sister Clytemnestra, on whom I ne'er set eyes after I was driven by heaven-sent frenzy to sail on my disastrous voyage to Ilium; but now that I am parted from her I bewail our misfortunes.

Electra Prithee, Helen, why should I speak of that which thine own eyes can see the son of Agamemnon in his misery?

Beside his wretched corpse I sit, a sleepless sentinel; for corpse he is, so faint his breath; not that I reproach him with his sufferings; but thou art highly blest and thy husband too, and ye are come upon us in the hour of adversity.

Helen How long hath he been laid thus upon his couch?

Electra Ever since he spilt his mother's blood-

Helen Unhappy wretch! unhappy mother! what a death she died!

Electra Unhappy enough to succumb to his misery.

Helen Prithee, maiden, wilt hear me a moment?

Electra Aye, with such small leisure as this watching o'er a brother leaves.

Helen Wilt go for me to my sister's tomb?

Electra Wouldst have me seek my mother's tomb? And why?

Helen To carry an offering of hair and a libation from me.

Electra Art forbidden then to go to the tombs of those thou lovest?

Helen Nay, but I am ashamed to show myself in Argos.

Electra A late repentance surely for one who left her home so shamefully then.

Helen Thou hast told the truth, but thy telling is not kind to me.

Electra What is this supposed modesty before the eyes of Mycenae that possesses thee?

Helen I am afraid of the fathers of those who lie dead beneath the walls of Ilium.

Electra Good cause for fear; thy name is on every tongue in Argos.

Helen Then free me of my fear and grant me this boon.

Electra I could not bear to face my mother's grave.

Helen And yet 'twere shame indeed to send these offerings by a servant's hand.

Electra Then why not send thy daughter Hermione?

Helen 'Tis not seemly for a tender maid to make her way amongst a crowd.

Electra And yet she would thus be repaying her dead foster-mother's care.

Helen True; thou hast convinced me, maiden. Yes, I will send my daughter; for thou art right. (Calling) Hermione, my child, come forth before the palace; (Hermione and attendants come out of the palace.) take these libations and these

tresses of mine in thy hands, and go pour round Clytemnestra's tomb a mingled cup of honey, milk, and frothing wine; then stand upon the heaped-up grave, and proclaim therefrom, "Helen, thy sister, sends thee these libations as her gift, fearing herself to approach thy tomb from terror of the Argive mob"; and bid her harbour kindly thoughts towards me and thee and my husband; towards these two wretched sufferers, too, whom Heaven hath afflicted. Likewise promise that I will pay in full whatever funeral gifts are due from me to a sister. Now go, my child, and tarry not; and soon as thou hast made the offering at the tomb, bethink thee of thy return.

(Helen goes into the palace as Hermione and her attendants depart with the offerings.)

Electra O human nature, what a grievous curse thou art in this world! and what salvation, too, to those who have a goodly heritage therein!

Did ye mark how she cut off her hair only at the ends, careful to preserve its beauty? 'Tis the same woman as of old. May Heaven's hate pursue thee! for thou hast proved the ruin of me and my poor brother and all Hellas.

Alack! here are my friends once more, coming to unite their plaintive dirge with mine; they will soon put an end to my brother's peaceful sleep and cause my tears to flow when I see his frenzied fit.

(The Chorus of Argive Maidens enters quietly. The following lines between Electra and the Chorus are chanted responsively.)

Good friends, step softly; not a sound; not a whisper! for though this kindness is well-meant, rouse him and I shall rue it.

Chorus Hush! hush! let your footsteps fall lightly! not a sound! not whisper!

Electra Further, further from his couch! I beseech ye.

Chorus There! there! I obey.

Electra Hush! hush! good friend, I pray. Soft as the breath of slender reedy

pipe be thy every accent!

Chorus Hark, how soft and low I drop my voice!

Electra Yes, lower thy voice e'en thus; approach now, softly, softly! Tell me what reason ye had for coming at all. 'Tis so long since he laid him down to sleep.

Chorus How is it with him? Impart thy news, dear lady. Is it weal or woe I am to tell?

Electra He is still alive, but his moans grow feeble.

Chorus What sayest thou? (Turning to Orestes) Poor wretch!

Electra Awake him from the deep sweet slumber he is now enjoying and thou wilt cause his death.

Chorus Ah, poor sufferer! victim of Heaven's vengeful hate!

Electra Ah, misery! It seems it was a wicked utterance by a wicked god delivered, the day that Loxias from his seat upon the tripod of Themis decreed my mother's most unnatural murder.

Chorus He stirs beneath his robe! Dost see?

Electra Alas! I do; thy noisy words have roused him from his sleep.

Chorus Nay, methinks he slumbers still.

Electra Begone! quit the house! retrace thy footsteps! a truce to this din!

Chorus He sleeps. Thou art right.

Electra O Night, majestic queen, giver of sleep to toiling men, rise from the abyss of Erebus and wing thy way to the palace of Agamemnon! For beneath our load of misery and woe we sink, aye, sink oppressed.

There! (To the Chorus) that noise again! Be still and keep that high-pitched voice of thine away from his couch; suffer him to enjoy his sleep in peace!

Chorus Tell me, what end awaits his troubles?

Electra Death, death; what else? for he does not even miss his food.

Chorus Why, then his doom is full in view.

Electra Phoebus marked us out as his victims by imposing a foul unnatural task, even the shedding of the blood of our mother, who slew our sire.

Chorus 'Twas just, but 'twas not well.

Electra Dead, dead, O mother mine! and thou hast slain a father and these the children of thy womb; for we are dead or as the dead. Yes, thou art in thy grave, and more than half my life is spent in weeping and wailing and midnight lamentations; oh, look on me! a maid unwed, unblest with babes, I drag out a joyless existence as if for ever.

Leader of the Chorus My daughter Electra, from thy near station there see whether thy brother hath not passed away without thy knowing it; for I like not his utter prostration.

Orestes (awaking refreshed) Sweet charm of sleep! saviour in sickness! how dear to me thy coming was! how needed! All hail, majestic power, oblivion of woe! How wise this goddess is, how earnestly invoked by every suffering soul!

(Addressing Electra) Whence came I hither? How is it I am here? for I have lost all previous recollection and remember nothing.

Electra Dearest brother, how glad I was to see thee fall asleep! Wouldst have me take thee in my arms and lift thy body?

Orestes Take, oh! take me in thy arms, and from this sufferer's mouth and eyes wipe off the flakes of foam.

Electra Ah! 'tis a service I love; nor do I scorn with sister's hand to tend a brother's limbs.

Orestes Prop me up, thy side to mine; brush the matted hair from off my face, for I see but dimly.

Electra Ah, poor head! how squalid are thy locks become! How wild thy look from remaining so long uncleansed!

Orestes Lay me once more upon the couch; when my fit leaves me, I am all unnerved, unstrung.

Electra (as she lays him down) Welcome to the sick man is his couch, for painful though it be to take thereto, yet is it necessary.

Orestes Set me upright once again, turn me round; it is their helplessness makes the sick so hard to please.

Electra Wilt put thy feet upon the ground and take a step at last? Change is

always pleasant.

Orestes That will I; for that has a semblance of health; and that seeming, though it be far from the reality, is preferable to this.

Electra Hear me then, O brother mine, while yet the avenging fiends permit thee to use thy senses.

Orestes Hast news to tell? so it be good, thou dost me a kindness; but if it tend to my hurt, lo! I have sorrow enough.

Electra Menelaus, thy father's brother, is arrived; in Nauplia his fleet lies at anchor.

Orestes Ha! is he come to cast a ray of light upon our gloom, a man of our own kin who owes our sire a debt of gratitude?

Electra Yes, he is come, and is bringing Helen with him from the walls of Troy; accept this as a sure proof of what I say.

Orestes Had he returned alone in safety, he were more to be envied; for if he is bringing his wife with him, he is bringing a load of evil.

Electra Tyndareus begat a race of daughters notorious for the shame they earned, infamous throughout Hellas.

Orestes Be thou then different from that evil brood, for well thou mayest, and that not only in profession, but also in heart.

Electra Ah! brother, thine eye is growing wild, and in a moment art thou passing from thy recent saneness back to frenzy.

Orestes (starting up wildly) Mother, I implore thee! let not loose on me those maidens with their bloodshot eyes and snaky hair. Ha! see, see where they approach to leap upon me!

Electra Lie still, poor sufferer, on thy couch; thine eye sees none of the things which thy fancy paints so clear.

Orestes O Phoebus! they will kill me, yon hounds of hell, death's priestesses with glaring eyes, terrific goddesses.

Electra I will not let thee go; but with arms twined round thee will prevent thy piteous tossing to and fro.

Orestes Loose me! thou art one of those fiends that plague me, and art gripping me by the waist to hurl my body into Tartarus.

Electra Woe is me! what succour can I find, seeing that we have Heaven's forces set against us?

Orestes Give me my horn-tipped bow, Apollo's gift, wherewith that god declared that I should defend myself against these goddesses, if ever they sought to scare me with wild transports of madness.

A mortal hand will wound one of these goddesses, unless she vanish from my sight. Do ye not heed me, or mark the feathered shaft of my far-shooting bow ready to wing its flight? What! do ye linger still? Spread your pinions, skim the sky, and blame those oracles of Phoebus.

Ah! why am I raving, panting, gasping? Whither, oh! whither have leapt from off my couch? Once more the storm is past; I see a calm.

Sister, why weepest thou, thy head wrapped in thy robe? I am ashamed that I should make thee a partner in my sufferings and distress a maid like thee through sickness of mine. Cease to fret for my troubles; for though thou didst consent to it, yet 'twas I that spilt our mother's blood. 'Tis Loxias I blame, for urging me on to do a deed most damned, encouraging me with words but no real help; for I am sure that, had I asked my father to his face whether I was to slay my mother, he would have implored me oft and earnestly by this beard never to plunge a murderer's sword into my mother's breast, since he would not thereby regain his life, whilst I, poor wretch, should be doomed to drain this cup of sorrow.

E'en as it is, dear sister, unveil thy face and cease to weep, despite our abject misery; and whensoever thou seest me give way to despair, be it thine to calm and soothe the terrors and distorted fancies of my brain; likewise when sorrow comes to thee, I must be at thy side and give the words of comfort; for to help our friends like this is a gracious task.

Seek thy chamber now, poor sister; lie down and close awhile thy sleepless eyes; take food and bathe thy body; for if thou leave me or fall sick from nursing me, my doom is sealed; for thou art the only champion I now have, by all the rest deserted, as thou seest.

Electra I leave thee! never! With thee I am resolved to live and die; for 'tis the same; if thou diest, what can I, a woman, do? How shall I escape alone, reft of

brother, sire, and friends?

Still if it be thy pleasure, I must do thy bidding. But lay thee down upon thy couch, and pay not too great heed to the terrors and alarms that scare thee from thy rest; lie still upon thy pallet bed; for e'en though one be not sick but only fancy it, this is a source of weariness and perplexity to mortals.

(Electra enters the palace, as Orestes lies back upon his couch.)

Chorus (singing) Ah! ye goddesses terrific, swiftly careering on outspread pinions, whose lot it is 'mid tears and groans to hold revel not with Bacchic rites; ye avenging spirits swarthy-hued, that dart along the spacious firmament, exacting a penalty for blood, a penalty for murder, to you I make my suppliant prayer: suffer the son of Agamemnon to forget his wild whirling frenzy!

Ah, woe for the troublous task! which thou, poor wretch, didst strive to compass to thy ruin, listening to the voice prophetic, proclaimed aloud by Phoebus from the tripod throughout his sanctuary, where is a secret spot they call "the navel of the earth."

O Zeus! What pity will be shown? what deadly struggle is here at hand, hurrying thee on o'er thy path of woe, a victim on whom some fiend is heaping tribulation, by bringing on thy house thy mother's bloodshed which drives thee raving mad? I weep for thee, for thee I weep.

Great prosperity abideth not amongst mankind; but some power divine, shaking it to and fro like the sail of a swift galley, plunges it deep in the waves of grievous affliction, boisterous and deadly as the waves of the sea. For what new family am I henceforth to honour by preference other than that which sprung from a marriage divine, even from Tantalus?

Behold a king draws near, prince Menelaus! From his magnificence 'tis plain to see that he is a scion of the race of Tantalus.

All hail! thou that didst sail with a thousand ships to Asia's strand, and by Heaven's help accomplish all thy heart's desire, making good-fortune a friend to thyself.

(Menelaus and his retinue enter.)

Menelaus All hail, my home! Some joy I feel on seeing thee again on my return from Troy, some sorrow too the sight recalls; for never yet have I beheld a house more closely encircled by the net of dire affliction.

Concerning Agamemnon's fate and the awful death he died at his wife's hands I learnt as I was trying to put in at Malea, when the sailors' seer from out the waves, unerring Glaucus, Nereus' spokesman, brought the news to me; for he stationed himself in full view by our ship and thus addressed me. "Yonder, Menelaus, lies thy brother slain, plunged in a fatal bath, the last his wife will ever give him"; filling high the cup of tears for me and my brave crew. Arrived at Nauplia, my wife already, on the point of starting hither, I was dreaming of folding Orestes, Agamemnon's son, and his mother in a fond embrace, as if 'twere well with them, when I heard a mariner relate the murder of the daughter of Tyndareus. Tell me then, good girls, where to find the son of Agamemnon, the daring author of that fearful crime; for he was but a babe in Clytemnestra's arms that day I left my home to go to Troy, so that I should not recognize him, e'en were I to see him.

Orestes (staggering towards him from the couch) Behold the object of thy inquiry, Menelaus; this is Orestes. To the will I of mine own accord relate my sufferings. But as the prelude to my speech I clasp thy knees in suppliant wise, seeking thus to tie to thee the prayer of lips that lack the suppliant's bough; save me, for thou art arrived at the very crisis of my trouble.

Menelaus Ye gods! what do I see? what death's-head greets my sight?

Orestes Thou art right; I am dead through misery, though I still gaze upon the sun.

Menelaus How wild the look thy unkempt hair gives thee, poor wretch!

Orestes 'Tis not my looks, but my deeds that torture me.

Menelaus How terribly thy tearless eyeballs glare!

Orestes My body is vanished and gone, though my name hath not yet deserted me.

Menelaus Unsightly apparition, so different from what I expected!

Orestes In me behold a man that hath slain his hapless mother.

Menelaus I have heard all; be chary of thy tale of woe.

Orestes I will; but the deity is lavish of woe to me.

Menelaus What ails thee? what is thy deadly sickness?

Orestes My conscience; I know that I am guilty of an awful crime.

Menelaus Explain thyself; wisdom is shown in clearness, not in obscurity.

Orestes 'Tis grief that is my chief complaint.

Menelaus True; she is a goddess dire; yet are there cures for her.

Orestes Mad transports too, and the vengeance due to a mother's blood.

Menelaus When did thy fit begin? which day was it?

Orestes On the day I was heaping the mound o'er my poor mother's grave,

Menelaus When thou wast in the house, or watching by the pyre?

Orestes As I was waiting by night to gather up her bones.

Menelaus Was any one else there to help thee rise?

Orestes Yes, Pylades who shared with me the bloody deed, my mother's murder.

Menelaus What phantom forms afflict thee thus?

Orestes Three maidens black as night I seem to see.

Menelaus I know of whom thou speakest, but I will not name them.

Orestes Do not; they are too dread; thou wert wise to avoid naming them.

Menelaus Are these the fiends that persecute thee with the curse of kindred blood?

Orestes Oh! the torment I endure from their hot pursuit!

Menelaus That they who have done an awful deed should be so done by is not strange.

Orestes Ah, well! I must have recourse in these troubles —

Menelaus Speak not of dying; that were folly.

Orestes To Phoebus, by whose command I shed my mother's blood.

Menelaus Showing a strange ignorance of what is fair and right.

Orestes We must obey the gods, whatever those gods are.

Menelaus Spite of all this doth not Loxias help thy affliction?

Orestes He will in time; to wait like this is the way with gods.

Menelaus How long is it since thy mother breathed her last?

Orestes This is now the sixth day; her funeral pyre is still warm.

Menelaus How soon the goddesses arrived to require thy mother's blood of thee!

Orestes To cleverness I lay no claim, but I was a true friend to friends.

Menelaus Does thy father afford thee any help at all?

Orestes Not as yet; and delaying to do so is, methinks, equivalent to not doing it.

Menelaus How dost thou stand towards the city after that deed of thine?

Orestes So hated am I that I cannot speak to any man.

Menelaus Have not thy hands been even cleansed of their blood-guiltiness, as the law requires?

Orestes No; for where'er I go, the door is shut against me.

Menelaus Which of the citizens drive thee from the land?

Orestes Æax, who refers to my father his reason for hating Troy.

Menelaus I understand; he is visiting on thee the blood of Palamedes.

Orestes I at least had naught to do with that; yet am I utterly o'erthrown.

Menelaus Who else? some of the friends of Ægisthus perhaps?

Orestes Yes, they insult me, and the city listens to them now.

Menelaus Will it not suffer thee to keep the sceptre of Agamemnon?

Orestes How should it? seeing that they will not suffer me to remain alive.

Menelaus What is their method? canst thou tell me plainly?

Orestes Today is sentence to be passed upon me.

Menelaus Exile, or death, or something else?

Orestes Death by stoning at the hands of the citizens.

Menelaus Then why not cross the frontier and fly?

Orestes Why not? because I am hemmed in by a ring of armed men.

Menelaus Private foes or Argive troops?

Orestes By all the citizens, to the end that I may die; 'tis shortly told.

Menelaus Poor wretch! thou hast arrived at the extremity of woe.

Orestes In thee I still have hopes of escape from my troubles. Yea, since fortune smiles upon thy coming, impart to thy less favoured friends some of thy prosperity, not reserving that luck exclusively for thyself; no! take thy turn too at suffering, and so pay back my father's kindness to those who have a claim on thee. For such friends as desert us in the hour of adversity, are friends in name but not in reality.

Chorus Lo! Tyndareus, the Spartan, is making his way hither with the step of age, clad in black raiment, with his hair shorn short in mourning for his daughter.

Orestes Menelaus, I am ruined. See! Tyndareus approaches, the man of all others I most shrink from facing, because of the deed I have done; for he it was that nursed me when a babe, and lavished on me many a fond caress, carrying me about in his arms as the son of Agamemnon, and so did Leda; for they both regarded me as much as the Dioscuri,

Ah me! my wretched heart and soul! 'twas a sorry return I made them. What darkness can I find to veil my head? what cloud can I spread before me in my efforts to escape the old man's eye?

Tyndareus Where, where may I find Menelaus, my daughter's husband? for as I was pouring libations on Clytemnestra's grave I heard that he was come to Nauplia with his wife, safe home again after many a long year. Lead me to him; for I would fain stand at his right hand and give him greeting as a friend whom at last I see again.

Menelaus Hail, reverend father! rival of Zeus for a bride!

Tyndareus All hail to thee! Menelaus, kinsman mine!

Ha! (Catching sight of Orestes.) What an evil it is to be ignorant of the future! There lies that matricide before the house, a viper darting venom from his eyes, whom my soul abhors. What! Menelaus, speaking to a godless wretch like him?

Menelaus And why not? He is the son of one whom I loved well.

Tyndareus This his son? this creature here?

Menelaus Yes, his son; and therefore worthy of respect, albeit in distress.

Tyndareus Thou hast been so long amongst barbarians that thou art one of them.

Menelaus Always to respect one's kith and kin is a custom in Hellas.

Tyndareus Aye, another custom is to yield a willing deference to the laws.

Menelaus The wise hold that everything which depends on necessity, is its slave.

Tyndareus Keep that wisdom for thyself; I will not admit it.

Menelaus No, for thou art angry, and old age is not wise.

Tyndareus What could a dispute about wisdom have to do with him? If right and wrong are clear to all, who was ever more senseless than this man, seeing that he never weighed the justice of the case, nor yet appealed to the universal law of Hellas? For instance, when Agamemnon breathed his last beneath the blow my daughter dealt upon his head, — a deed most foul, which I will never defend, — he should have brought a charge against his mother and inflicted the penalty allowed by law for bloodshed, banishing her from his house; thus would he have gained the credit of forbearance from the calamity, keeping strictly to the law and showing his piety as well. As it is, he is come into the same misfortune as his mother; for though he had just cause for thinking her a wicked woman, he has surpassed her himself by murdering her. I will ask thee, Menelaus, just one question. Take this case: the wife of his bosom has slain him; his son follows suit and kills his mother in revenge; next the avenger's son to expiate this murder commits another; where, pray, will the chain of horrors end?

Our forefathers settled these matters the right way. They forbade any one with blood upon his hands to appear in their sight or cross their path; "purify him by exile," said they, "but no retaliation!" Otherwise there must always have been one who, by taking the pollution last upon his hands, would be liable to have his

own blood shed.

For my part I abhor wicked women, especially my daughter who slew her husband; Helen, too, thy own wife, will I ne'er commend; no! I would not even speak to her, and little I envy thee a voyage to Troy for so worthless a woman. But the law will I defend with all my might, seeking to check this brutal spirit of murder, which is always the ruin of countries and cities alike. Wretch! (Turning to Orestes.) Hadst thou no heart when thy mother was baring her breast in her appeal to thee? True; I did not witness that awful deed, yet do my poor old eyes run down with tears. One thing at least attests the truth of what I say: thou art abhorred by Heaven, and this aimless wandering, these transports of madness and terror are thy atonement for a mother's blood. What need have I of others to testify where I can see for myself? Take warning therefore, Menelaus; seek not to oppose the gods from any wish to help this wretch, but leave him to be stoned to death by his fellow-citizens; [else set not foot on Sparta's soil.] My daughter is dead, and she deserved her fate; but it should not have been his hand that slew her. In all except my daughters have I been a happy man; there my fortune stopped.

Chorus His is an enviable lot, who is blest in his children, and does not find himself brought into evil notoriety.

Orestes I am afraid to speak before thee, aged prince [in a matter where I am sure to grieve thee to the heart.] Only let thy years, which frighten me from speaking, set no barrier in the path of my words, and I will go forward; but, as it is, I fear thy grey hairs. My crime is, I slew my mother; yet on another count this is no crime, being vengeance for my father. What ought I to have done? Set one thing against another. My father begat me; thy daughter gave me birth, being the field that received the seed from another; for without a sire no child would ever be born. So I reasoned thus: I ought to stand by the author of my being rather than the woman who undertook to rear me. Now thy daughter — mother I blush to call her — was engaged in secret intrigues with a lover; (reviling her I shall revile myself; yet speak I will Aegisthus was that stealthy paramour who lived with her; him I slew, and after him I sacrificed my mother, — a crime, no doubt, but done to avenge my father. Now, as regards the matters for which I deserve to be stoned as thou threatenest, hear the service I am conferring on all Hellas. If women become so bold as to murder their husbands, taking refuge in their children, with the

mother's breast to catch their pity, they would think nothing of destroying their husbands on any plea whatsoever. But I, by a horrible crime — such is thy exaggerated phrase — have put an end to this custom. I hated my mother and had good cause to slay her. She was false to her husband when he was gone from his home to fight for all Hellas at the head of its armies, neither did she keep his honour undefiled; and when her sin had found her out, she wreaked no punishment upon herself, but, to avoid the vengeance of her lord, visited her sins on my father and slew him. By Heaven! ill time as it is for me to mention Heaven, when defending the cause of murder; still, suppose I had by my silence consented to my mother's conduct, what would the murdered man have done to me? Would he not now for very hate be tormenting me with avenging fiends? or are there goddesses to help my mother, and are there none to aid him in his deeper wrong? Thou, yes! thou, old man, hast been my ruin by begetting a daughter so abandoned; for it was owing to her audacious deed that I lost my father and became my mother's murderer.

Attend, I say. Telemachus did not kill the wife of Odysseus; why? because she wedded not a second husband, but the marriage-bed remained untainted in her halls. Once more; Apollo, who makes the navel of the earth his home, vouchsafing unerring prophecies to man, the god whom we obey in all he saith, — 'twas he to whom I hearkened when I slew my mother. Find him guilty of the crime, slay him; his was the sin, not mine. What ought I to have done? or is not the god competent to expiate the pollution when I refer it to him? Whither should one fly henceforth, if he will not rescue me from death after giving his commands? Say not then that the deed was badly done, but unfortunately for me who did it.

A blessed life those mortals lead who make wise marriages; but those who wed unhappily are alike unfortunate in their public and private concerns.

Chorus Tis ever woman's way to thwart men's fortunes to the increase of their sorrow.

Tyndareus Since thou adoptest so bold a tone, suppressing naught, but answering me back in such wise that my heart is vexed within me, thou wilt incense me to go to greater lengths in procuring thy execution; and I shall regard this as a fine addition to my purpose in coming hither to deck my daughter's grave. Yes; I will go .to the chosen council of Argos and set the citizens, whether they will or not, on thee and thy sister, that ye may suffer stoning. She deserves to

die even more than thou, for it was she who embittered thee against thy mother by carrying tales to thine ear from time to time to whet thy hate the more [announcing dreams from Agamemnon], and speaking of the amour with Aegisthus as an abomination to the gods in Hades, for even here on earth it was hateful, till she set the house ablaze with fires never kindled by Hephaestus. This I tell thee, Menelaus; and more, — I will perform it. If then thou makest my hatred or our connexion of any account, seek not to avert this miscreant's doom in direct defiance of the gods, but leave him to be stoned to death by the citizens; else never set foot on Spartan soil. Remember thou hast been told all this, and choose not for friends the ungodly, excluding more righteous folk.

Ho! servants, lead me hence. [Exit Tyndareus.]

Orestes Get thee gone! that the remainder of my speech may be addressed to Menelaus without interruption, free from the restrictions thy old age exerts.

Wherefore, Menelaus, art thou pacing round and round to think the matter over, up and down in thought perplexed?

Menelaus Let me alone! I am somewhat at a loss, as I turn it over in my mind, towards which side I am to lean.

Orestes Do not then decide finally, but after first hearing what I have to say, then make up thy mind.

Menelaus Good advice! say on. There are occasions when silence would be better than speech; there are others when the reverse holds good.

Orestes I will begin forthwith. A long statement has advantages over a short one and is more intelligible to listen to. Give me nothing of thine own, Menelaus, but repay what thou didst thyself receive from my father. (As Menelaus makes a deprecating gesture.) 'Tis not goods I mean; save my life, and that is goods, the dearest I possess.

Say I am doing wrong. Well, I have a right to a little wrong-doing at thy hands to requite that wrong; for my father Agamemnon also did wrong in gathering the host of Hellas and going up against Ilium, not that he had sinned himself, but he was trying to find a cure for the sin and wrong-doing of thy wife. So this is one thing thou art bound to pay me back. For he had really sold his life to thee, a duty owed by friend to friend, toiling hard in the press of battle that so thou mightest win thy wife again. This is what thou didst receive at Troy; make me the same

return. For one brief day exert thyself, not ten full years, on my behalf, standing up in my defence.

As for the loan paid to Aulis in the blood of my sister, I leave that to thy credit, not saying .” Slay Hermione”; for in my present plight thou must needs have an advantage over me and I must let that pass. But grant my hapless sire this boon, my life and the life of her who has pined so long in maidenhood, my sister; for by my death I shall leave my father’s house without an heir.

“Impossible!” thou’lt say. Why, there’s the point of that old adage, “ Friends are bound to succour friends in trouble.” But when fortune giveth of her best, what need of friends? for God’s help is enough of itself when he chooses to give it.

All Hellas credits thee with deep affection for thy wife — and I am not saying this with any subtle attempt at wheedling thee — by her I implore thee.

(As Menelaus turns away.) Ah me, my misery! at what a pass have I arrived! what avails my wretched effort? Still, (preparing to make a final appeal) ’tis my whole family on whose behalf I am making this appeal! O my uncle, my father’s own brother! imagine that the dead man in his grave is listening, that his spirit is hovering o’er thy head and speaking through my lips. [I have said my say with reference to tears and groans and misfortunes, and I have begged my life — the aim of every man’s endeavour, not of mine alone.]

Chorus I, too, weak woman though I am, beseech thee, as thou hast the power, succour those in need.

Menelaus Orestes, thou art a man for whom I have a deep regard, and I would fain help thee bear thy load of woe; yea, for it is a duty, too, to lend a kinsman such assistance by dying or slaying his enemies, provided Heaven grants the means. I only wish I had that power granted me by the gods; as it is, I have arrived quite destitute of allies, after my long weary wanderings, with such feeble succour as my surviving friends afford. As then we should never get the better of Pelasgian Argos by fighting, our hopes now rest on this, the chance of prevailing by persuasion; and we must try that, for how can you win a great cause by small efforts? it were senseless even to wish it. For when the people fall into a fury and their rage is still fresh, they are as hard to appease as a fierce fire is to quench; but if you gently slacken your hold and yield a little to their tension, cautiously watching your opportunity, they may possibly exhaust their fit; and then as soon as they have

spent their rage, thou mayest obtain whatever thou wilt from them without any trouble; for they have a natural sense of pity, and a hot temper too, an invaluable quality if you watch it closely. So I will go and try to persuade Tyndareus and the citizens to moderate their excessive anger against thee; for it is with them as with a ship; she dips if her sheet is hauled too taut, but rights herself again if it is let go.

Attempts to do too much are as keenly resented by the citizens as they are by the gods; and so it must be by cleverness, not by the force of superior numbers, I frankly tell thee, that I must try to save thee. No prowess of mine as perhaps thou fanciest, could do it; for, had it been so easy to triumph single-handed over the troubles that beset thee, I should never have tried to bring Argives over to the side of mercy; but, as it is, the wise find themselves forced to bow to fortune. [Exit Menelaus.

Orestes O thou that hast no use, save to head a host in a woman's cause! thou traitor in thy friends' defence! dost turn thy back on me? What Agamemnon did is all forgotten.

Ah, my father! thy friends, it seems, desert thee in adversity. Alas! I am betrayed; no longer have I any hope of finding a refuge where I may escape the death-sentence of Argos; for this man was my haven of safety.

Ha! a welcome sight, there comes Pylades, my best of friends, running hither from Phocis. A trusty comrade is a more cheering sight in trouble than a calm is to sailors.

Pylades On my way hither I traversed the town with more haste than I need have used, to find thee and thy sister, having heard or rather myself seen the citizens assembling, under the belief that they intend your immediate execution. What is happening here? how is it with thee? how farest thou, my best of comrades, friends, and kin? for thou art all these to me.

Orestes Let one brief word declare to thee my evil case — it is "Ruin."

Pylades Include me then in it; for friends have all in common.

Orestes Menelaus is a traitor to me and my sister.

Pylades 'Tis only natural that the husband of a traitress should prove a traitor.

Orestes He no more repaid me when he came than if he had never come.

Pylades Has he really arrived then in this land?

Orestes He was a long time coming, but very soon detected for all that in treachery to his friends.

Pylades And did he bring his wife, that queen of traitresses, with him on his ship?

Orestes It was not he who brought her, but she him.

Pylades Where is she who proved the ruin of so many Achaeans, though she was only a woman?

Orestes In my house; if, that is, I ought to call it mine.

Pylades And thou — what didst thou say to thy father's brother?

Orestes I besought him not to look on, while I and my sister were slain by the citizens.

Pylades By heaven! what said he to this? I fain would know.

Orestes Caution was the line he took — the usual policy of traitorous friends.

Pylades What excuse does he allege? when I have heard that, I know all.

Orestes The worthy sire arrived, who begat those peerless daughters.

Pylades Thou meanest Tyndareus; he was angry with thee, perhaps, for his daughter's sake.

Orestes Thou hast it; and Menelaus preferred his relationship to my father's.

Pylades Had he not courage enough to share thy troubles, when he did come?

Orestes Not he; he never was a warrior, though a doughty knight amongst women.

Pylades Thy case is desperate, it seems, and thou must die.

Orestes The citizens are to give their vote about us on the question of the murder.

Pylades And what is that to decide? tell me, for I am alarmed.

Orestes Our life or death; so short the words that tell of things so long!

Pylades Leave the palace, then, with thy sister and fly.

Orestes Look! we are being watched by guards on every side.

Pylades I saw that the streets of the city were secured with armed men.

Orestes We are as closely beleaguered as a city by its foes.

Pylades Ask me also of my state; for I too am ruined.

Orestes By whom? this would be a further sorrow to add to mine.

Pylades Strophius, my father, in a fit of anger, hath banished me his halls.

Orestes On some private charge, or one in which the citizens share?

Pylades He says it is a crime to have helped thee slay thy mother.

Orestes Woe is me! it seems my troubles will cause thee grief as well.

Pylades I am not like Menelaus; this must be endured.

Orestes Art thou not afraid that Argos will desire thy death as well as mine?

Pylades I am not theirs to punish; I belong to Phocis.

Orestes a terrible thing is the mob, when it has villains to lead it.

Pylades Aye, but with honest leaders its counsels are honest.

Orestes Go to; we must consult together.

Pylades What is it we must consider?

Orestes Suppose I go and tell the citizens —

Pylades That thy action was just —

Orestes In avenging my father?

Pylades I am afraid they will be glad enough to catch thee.

Orestes Well, am I to crouch in fear and die without a word?

Pylades That were cowardly.

Orestes How then shall I act?

Pylades Suppose thou stay here, what means of safety hast thou?

Orestes None.

Pylades And if thou go away, is there any hope of escaping thy troubles?

Orestes There might be possibly.

Pylades Well, is not that better than staying?

Orestes Am I to go, then?

Pylades Yes; if thou art slain, there will be some honour in dying thus.

Orestes True; thus I escape cowardice.

Pylades Better than by staying.

Orestes After all, I can justify my action.

Pylades Pray that this may be the only view they take.

Orestes Some one or two maybe will pity me —

Pylades Yes, thy noble birth is a great point.

Orestes Resenting my father's death.

Pylades That is all quite clear.

Orestes I must go, for to die ignobly is a coward's part.

Pylades Well said!

Orestes Shall we tell my sister?

Pylades God forbid!

Orestes True, there might be tears.

Pylades Would not that be a grave omen?

Orestes Yes, silence is manifestly the better course.

Pylades Thou wilt thus gain time.

Orestes There is only one obstacle in my way, —

Pylades What fresh objection now?

Orestes I am afraid the goddesses will prevent me by madness.

Pylades Nay, but I will take care of thee.

Orestes a wretched task, to come in contact with a sick man.

Pylades That is not my view in thy case.

Orestes Beware of becoming a partner in my madness.

Pylades Let that pass!

Orestes Thou wilt not hesitate?

Pylades Not I; hesitation is a grave mischief amongst friends.

Orestes On then, pilot of my course!

Pylades a service I am glad to render.

Orestes And guide me to my father's tomb.

Pylades For what purpose?

Orestes That I may appeal to him to save me.

Pylades No doubt that is the proper way.

Orestes May I not even see my mother's grave!

Pylades No; she was an enemy. But hasten, supporting those limbs, so slow from sickness, on mine, that the decision of Argos may not catch thee first; for I will carry thee through the town, careless of the mob and unabashed. For how shall I prove my friendship if not by helping thee in sore distress?

Orestes Ah! the old saying again, "Get friends, not relations only." For a man whose soul is knit with thine, though he is not of thy kin, is better worth owning as a friend than a whole host of relations.

[Exeunt Orestes and Pylades.]

Chorus Long, long ago, by reason of an old misfortune to their house, the sons of Atreus saw the tide roll back from weal to woe, carrying with it their great prosperity and that prowess proudly vaunted through the length of Hellas and by the streams of Simois, on the day that strife found its way to the sons of Tantalus — that strife for a golden ram, to end in bitter banqueting and the slaughter of high-born babes; and this is why a succession of murders committed by kinsmen never fails the twin Atridae.

What seemed so right became so wrong, to cut a mother's skin with ruthless hand and show the bloodstained sword to the sun's bright beams; and yet her guilty deed was a piece of frantic wickedness and the folly of beings demented. Hapless daughter of Tyndareus! in terror of death she screamed to him, "My son, this is a crime, thy bold attempt upon thy mother's life; do not, whilst honouring thy father, fasten on thyself an eternity of shame."

To stain the hand in a mother's blood! What affliction on earth surpasseth this? what calls for keener grief or pity? Oh! what an awful crime Agamemnon's

son committed, ending in his raving madness, so that he is become a prey to the avenging fiends for the murder, darting distracted glances round him! O the wretch! to have seen a mother's bosom o'er her robe of golden woof, and yet make her his victim, in recompense for his father's sufferings!

Electra Surely, friends, my poor Orestes hath never left the house, mastered by the heaven-sent madness?

Chorus No; but he is gone to stand the trial appointed concerning his life before the Argive populace, in which it will be decided whether he and thou are to live or die.

Electra Oh! why did he do it? who persuaded him?

Chorus Pylades; but this messenger, now close at hand, will no doubt tell us thy brother's fate at the trial.

Messenger Woe is thee, unhappy daughter of our captain Agamemnon, my lady Electra! hearken to the sad tidings I bring thee.

Electra Alas! our fate is sealed; thy words show it; thou art clearly come with tidings of woe.

Messenger Today have the folk decided by vote that thou and thy brother are to die, poor lady.

Electra Alas! my expectations are realized. I have long feared this, and been wasting away in mourning for what was sure to happen. But come, old friend, describe the trial, and tell me what was said in the Argive assembly to condemn us and confirm our doom; is it stoning or the sword that is to cut short my existence? for I share my brother's misfortunes.

Messenger I had just come from the country and was entering the gates, anxious to learn what was decided about thee and Orestes — for I was ever well-disposed to thy father, and it was thy house that fed and reared me, poor, 'tis true, yet loyal in the service of friends — when lo! I saw a crowd streaming to their seats on yonder height, where 'tis said Danaus first gathered his people and settled them in new homes, when he was paying the penalty to Aegyptus. So, when I saw them thronging together, I asked a citizen, "What news in Argos? Have tidings of hostilities ruffled the city of Danaus?" But he replied, "Dost thou not see the man Orestes on his way to be tried for his life?" Then I beheld an unexpected sight,

which I would I never had seen — Pylades and thy brother approaching together; the one with his head sunken on his breast, weakened by sickness; the other like a brother in the way he shared his friend's sorrow, tending his complaint with constant care.

Now when the Argives were fully gathered, a herald rose and asked, “ Who wishes to give his opinion whether Orestes is to be slain or not for the murder of his mother?” Then up stood Talthybius, who helped thy father sack the Phrygians' city. He adopted a trimming tone, a mere tool of those in power as he always is, expressing high admiration for thy father, but saying not a word for thy brother, urging his crooked sentiments in specious words, to this effect; “it is not a good precedent he is establishing as regards parents,” and all the while he had a pleasant look for the friends of AEGISTHUS. That is like the tribe of heralds; they always trip across to the lucky side; whoso hath influence in the city or a post in the government, he is the friend for them. After him prince DIOMEDES made harangue; not death but exile was the punishment he would have had them inflict on thee and thy brother, and so keep clear of guilt. Some murmured their assent, saying his words were good, but others disapproved.

Next stood up a fellow, who cannot close his lips; one whose impudence is his strength; an Argive, but not of Argos; an alien forced on us; confident in bluster and licensed ignorance, and plausible enough to involve his hearers in some mischief sooner or later; for when a man with a pleasing trick of speech, but of unsound principles, persuades the mob, it is a serious evil to the state; whereas all who give sound and sensible advice on all occasions, if not immediately useful to the state, yet prove so afterwards. And this is the light in which to regard a party leader; for the position is much the same [in the case of an orator and a man in office.] This fellow was for stoning thee and Orestes to death, but it was TYNDAREUS who kept suggesting arguments of this kind to him as he urged the death of both of you.

Another then stood up, not fair to outward view perhaps but a brave man, rarely coming in contact with the town or the gatherings in the market-place; a yeoman, one of a class who form the only real support of our country; shrewd enough, and eager to grapple with the arguments; his character without a blemish, his walk in life beyond reproach. He moved that they should crown Orestes, the son of AGAMEMNON, for showing his willingness to avenge a father in the blood of

a wicked profligate who was preventing men from taking up arms and going on foreign service; “since,” said he, “those, who remain behind, corrupt and seduce our wives left at home to keep house.” To the better sort his words carried conviction; and no one rose to speak after him. So thy brother advanced and spoke. “Ye dwellers in the land of Inachus! [Pelagians in ancient times, and later Danai,] I helped you no less than my father when I slew my mother; for if the murder of men by women is to be sanctioned, then the sooner you die, the better for you; otherwise you must needs become the slaves of women; and that will be doing the very reverse of what ye should. As it is, she who betrayed my father’s honour has met her death, but if ye take my life, as is proposed, the strictness of the law becomes relaxed, and the sooner every one of you is dead, the better; for it will” never be daring at any rate that they will lack.” Yet, for all he seemed to speak so fair, he could not persuade the assembly; but that villain who spoke in favour of slaying thee and thy brother, gained his point by appealing to the mob.

Orestes, poor wretch, scarce prevailed on them to spare him death by stoning, promising to die by his own hand, and thou by thine, within the space of today; and Pylades is now bringing him from the conclave, weeping the while, and his friends bear him company, with tears and lamentation; so he Cometh, a sad and piteous sight for thee to see. Make ready the sword, prepare the noose for thy neck, for thou must die; thy noble birth availed thee naught, nor Phoebus either from his seat on the tripod at Delphi; no! he was thy undoing. [Exit Messenger.

Chorus [Ah, hapless maid! How dumb thou art, thy face veiled and bent upon the ground, as if ere long to start on a course of lamentation and wailing!]

Electra Land of Argos! I take up the dirge, doing bloody outrage on my cheek with pearly nail, and beating on my head, the meed of [Persephone ‘] that fair young goddess of the nether world. Let the land of the Cyclopes break forth into wailing for the sorrows of our house, laying the steel upon the head to crop it close. This is the piteous strain that goeth up for those who are doomed to perish, the chieftains once of Hellas.

Gone, gone and brought to naught is all the race of Pelops’ sons! and with them the blessedness that crowned their happy home of yore; the wrath of God gat hold on them and that cruel murdering vote which prevails among the citizens.

Woe to you! ye tribes of short-lived men, full of tears and born to suffering, see how fate runs counter to your hopes! All in time’s long march receive in turn

their several troubles; and man throughout his life can never rest.

Oh! to reach that rock which hangs suspended midway 'twixt earth and heaven, that fragment from Olympus torn, which swings on chains of gold in ceaseless revolution, that I may utter my lament to Tantalus my forefather, who begat the ancestors of my house; these were witnesses of infatuate deeds when Pelops in four-horsed car drove winged steeds in hot pursuit along the sea, hurling the corpse of murdered Myrtilus into the heaving deep, after his race near the foam-flecked strand of Geraestus. From this came a woful curse upon my house, in the day that there appeared among the flocks of Atreus, breeder of horses, that baleful portent of a lamb with golden fleece, the creation of the son of Maia; for from it sprang a quarrel, which made the sun's winged steeds swerve from their course, turning them by a westward track along the sky towards the single horse of Dawn; and Zeus diverted the career of the seven Pleiads into a new path; yea, and it is that banquet to which Thyestes gave his name, and the guilty love of Cretan Aërope, the treacherous wife, that is requiting those murders with others; but the crowning woe is come on me and on my sire by reason of the bitter destinies of our house.

Chorus See where thy brother comes, condemned to die, and with him Pylades, most loyal of friends, true as a brother, guiding the feeble steps of Orestes, as he paces carefully at his side.

Electra Ah! brother mine, I weep to see thee stand before the tomb, face to face with the funeral pyre. Again that sigh escapes me; my senses leave me as I take my last fond look at thee.

Orestes Peace! an end to womanish lamenting! resign thyself to thy fate. True, 'tis a piteous end, but yet [we needs must bear the present.]

Electra How can I hold my peace, when we poor sufferers are no more to gaze upon the sun-god's light?

Orestes Oh! spare me that death! Enough that this unhappy wretch is already slain by Argives; forego our present sufferings.

Electra Alas for thy young life, Orestes! alas for the untimely death o'ertaking it! Thou shouldst have begun to live just as thou art dying.

Orestes Unman me not, I do adjure thee! bringing me to tears by the recollection of my sorrows.

Electra We are to die, and I cannot but bemoan our fate; for all men grieve to lose dear life.

Orestes This is the day appointed us; and we must fit the dangling noose about our necks or whet the sword for use.

Electra Be thou my executioner, brother, that no Argive may insult the child of Agamemnon and slay her.

Orestes Enough that I have a mother's blood upon me; thee I will not slay; but die by any self-inflicted death thou wilt.

Electra Agreed; I will not be behind thee in using the sword; only I long to throw my arms about thy neck.

Orestes Enjoy that idle satisfaction, if embraces have any joy for those who are come so nigh to death.

Electra Dear brother mine! bearer of a name that sounds most sweet in thy sister's ear, partner in one soul with her!

Orestes Oh! thou wilt melt my heart. I long to give thee back a fond embrace; and why should such a wretch as I feel any shame henceforth? [embracing Electra]. Heart to heart, O sister mine! how sweet to me this close embrace! In place of wedded joys, in place of babes, this greeting is all that is possible to us poor sufferers.

Electra Ah, would the self-same sword, if only it might be, could slay us both, and one coffin of cedar-wood receive us!

Orestes That would be an end most sweet; but surely thou seest we are too destitute of friends to be allowed one tomb between us.

Electra Did not that coward Menelaus, that traitor to my father's memory, even speak for thee, making an effort to save thy life?

Orestes He did not so much as show himself, but having his hopes centred on the throne he was more cautious than to attempt the rescue of relatives.

Ah! well, let us take care to quit ourselves gallantly and die as most befits the children of Agamemnon. I, for my part, will let this city see my noble spirit when I plunge the sword to my heart, and thou, for thine, must imitate my brave example. Do thou, Pylades, stand umpire to our bloody feat, and, when we both are dead,

lay out our bodies decently; then carry them to our father's grave and bury us there with him. Farewell now; I go to do the deed, as thou seest.

Pylades Stay a moment; there is first one point I have to blame thee for, if thou thinkest I care to live when thou art dead.

Orestes But why art thou called on to die with me?

Pylades Canst ask? What is life to me with thee my comrade gone?

Orestes Thou didst not slay thy mother, as I did to my sorrow.

Pylades At least I helped thee; and so I ought to suffer alike.

Orestes Surrender to thy father; and seek not to die with me. Thou hast still a city, while I no longer have; thou hast still thy father's home, and mighty stores of wealth: and though thou art disappointed in thy marriage with my poor sister, whom I betrothed to thee from a deep regard for thy fellowship, yet choose thee another bride and rear a family; for the tie which bound us binds no more. Fare thee well, my comrade fondly called; for us such faring cannot be, for thee perhaps; for we that are as dead are robbed of joy henceforth.

Pylades How far thou art from grasping what I mean! Oh! may the fruitful earth, the radiant sky refuse to hold my blood, if ever I turn traitor and desert thee when I have cleared myself; for I not only shared in the murder, which I will not disown, but also schemed the whole plot for which thou art now paying the penalty; wherefore I ought also to die as much as thou or she; for I consider her, whose hand thou didst promise me, as my wife. What specious tale shall I ever tell, when I reach Delphi, the citadel of Phocis? I who, before your misfortunes came, was so close a friend, but ceased to be, when thou wert unlucky. That must not be; no! this is my business too. But since we are to die, let us take counsel together that Menelaus may share our misfortune.

Orestes Best of friends! if only I could see this ere I die!

Pylades Hearken then, and defer awhile the fatal stroke.

Orestes I will wait in the hope of avenging me on my foe.

Pylades Hush! I have small confidence in women.

Orestes Have no fear of these; for they are our friends who are here.

Pylades Let us kill Helen, a bitter grief to Menelaus.

Orestes How? I am ready enough, if there is any chance of success.

Pylades With our swords; she is hiding in thy house.

Orestes Aye, that she is, and already she is putting her seal on everything.

Pylades She shall do so no more, after she is wedded to Hades.

Orestes Impossible! she has her barbarian attendants.

Pylades Barbarians indeed! I am not the man to fear any Phrygian.

Orestes Creatures only fit to look after mirrors and unguents!

Pylades What I has she brought Trojan effeminacy with her here?

Orestes So much so that Hellas is become too small for her to live in.

Pylades The race of slaves is no match for free-born men.

Orestes Well, if I can do this deed, I fear not death twice over.

Pylades No, nor I either, if it is thee I am avenging.

Orestes Declare the matter and tell me what thou proposest.

Pylades We will enter the house on the pretence of going to our death.

Orestes So far I follow thee, but not beyond.

Pylades We will begin bewailing our sufferings to her.

Orestes Aye, so that she will shed tears, although her heart is glad.

Pylades And we shall then be in the same predicament as she.

Orestes How shall we proceed next in the enterprise?

Pylades We shall have swords concealed in our cloaks.

Orestes But, before attacking her, how are we to kill her attendants?

Pylades We will shut them up in different parts of the house.

Orestes And whoever refuses to be quiet, we must kill.

Pylades That done, our very deed shows us to what we must direct our efforts.

Orestes To Helen's slaughter; I understand that watch-word.

Pylades Thou hast it; now hear how sound my scheme is; if we had drawn the sword upon a woman of better morals, it would have been foul murder; but, as it

is, she will be punished for the sake of all Hellas, whose sires she slew; while those whose children she destroyed, whose wives she widowed, will shout aloud for joy and kindle the altars of the gods, invoking on our heads a thousand blessings, because we shed this wicked woman's blood; for after killing her, thy name shall no more be "the matricide," but, resigning that title, thou shalt succeed to a, better and be called "the slayer of Helen the murderess." It can never, never be right that Menelaus should prosper, and thy father, thy sister and thou be put to death, and thy mother too — (but I pass that by, for it is not seemly to mention it); — while he possesses thy home, though it was by Agamemnon's prowess that he recovered his wife. May I perish then, if I draw not my sword upon her! But if after all we fail to compass Helen's death, we will fire the palace and die; for we will not fail to achieve one distinction, be it an honourable death or an honourable escape therefrom.

Chorus The daughter of Tyndareus, who has brought shame on her sex, has justly earned the hate of every woman.

Orestes Ah! there is nothing better than a trusty friend, neither wealth nor princely power; mere number is a senseless thing to set off against a noble friend. Such art thou, for thou didst not only devise the vengeance we took on AEGISTHUS, but didst stand by me at the gates of danger, and now again thou art offering me a means to punish my foes and dost not stand aloof thyself; but I will cease praising thee, for there is something wearisome even in being praised to excess. Now since in any case I must breathe my last, I would fain my death should do my foes some hurt, that I may requite with ruin those who betrayed me, and that they too who made me suffer may taste of sorrow. Lo! I am the son of that Agamemnon, who was counted worthy to rule Hellas, exerting no tyrant's power but yet possessed of almost god-like might; him will I not disgrace by submitting to die like a slave; no! my last breath shall be free and I will avenge me on Menelaus. For could we but secure one object we should be lucky, if from some unexpected quarter a means of safety should arise and we be the slayers, not the slain; this is what I pray for; for this wish of mine is a pleasant dream to cheer the heart, without cost, by means of the tongue's winged utterances.

Electra Why, brother, I have it! a means of safety, first for thee, then for him, and thirdly for myself.

Orestes Divine providence, I suppose. But what use in suggesting that? seeing

that I know the natural shrewdness of thy heart.

Electra Hearken a moment; do thou (to Pylades) like-wise attend.

Orestes Say on; the prospect of hearing good news affords a certain pleasure.

Electra Thou knowest Helen's daughter? of course thou must.

Orestes Hermione, whom my own mother reared, — know her? yes.

Electra She hath gone to Clytemnestra's grave.

Orestes With what intent? What hope art thou hinting at?

Electra Her purpose was to pour a libation over the tomb of our mother.

Orestes Well, granting that, how does this which thou hast mentioned conduce to our safety?

Electra Seize her as a hostage on her way back.

Orestes What good can thy suggested remedy do us three friends?

Electra If, after Helen's slaughter, Menelaus does anything to thee or to Pylades and me, — for we three friends are wholly one, — say thou wilt slay Hermione; then draw thy sword and keep it at the maiden's throat. If Menelaus, when he sees Helen weltering in her blood, tries to save thee to insure his daughter's life, allow him to take his child to his father's arms; but if he makes no effort to curb the angry outburst and leaves thee to die, then do thou plunge thy sword in his daughter's throat. Methinks though he show himself violent at first, he will gradually grow milder; for he is not naturally bold or brave. That is the tower of defence I have for us, and now my tale is told.

Orestes O thou that hast the spirit of a man, though thy body clearly shows thee a tender woman, how far more worthy thou to live than die! This, Pylades, is the peerless woman thou wilt lose to thy sorrow, or, shouldst thou live, wilt marry to thy joy!

Pylades Then may I live and may she be brought to the capital of Phocis with all the honours of a happy marriage!

Orestes How soon will Hermione return to the palace? All else thou saidst was well, if only we are lucky in catching the villain's child.

Electra I expect she is near the house already, for the time agrees exactly.

Orestes Tis well. Plant thyself before the palace, Electra my sister, and await the maid's approach; keep watch in case any one, an ally maybe or my father's brother, forestal us by his entry, ere the bloody deed is completed; and then make a signal to be heard inside the house, either by beating on a panel of the door or calling to us within.

Let us enter now, Pylades, and arm ourselves for the final struggle, for thou art the comrade that sharest the enterprise with me. Hearken! father, in thy home of darkest gloom! it is thy son Orestes who is calling thee to come to the rescue of the destitute; it is on thy account I am unjustly suffering woe, and it is by thy brother that I have been betrayed for practising justice; wherefore I would fain take and slay his wife; and do thou help us compass this.

Electra Oh! come, my father, come! if within the ground thou hearest the cry of thy children, who for thy sake are dying.

Pylades Hear my prayer too, Agamemnon, kinsman of my father, and save thy children.

Orestes I slew my mother, —

Pylades I held the sword —

Electra 'Twas I that urged them on and set them free from fear —

Orestes All to succour thee, my sire.

Electra I proved no traitress either.

Pylades Wilt thou not hearken then to these reproaches and save thy children?

Orestes With tears I pour thee a libation.

Electra And I with notes of woe.

Pylades Cease, and let us about our business. If prayers do really penetrate the ground, he hears. O Zeus, god of my fathers, O Justice, queen revered, vouchsafe us three success; three friends are we, but one the struggle, one the forfeit all must pay, to live or die.

[Exeunt Orestes and Pylades.]

Electra My own townswomen, of foremost rank in Argos, the home of the Pelasgi!

Chorus Mistress, why dost thou address us? for still this honoured name is left thee in the Danaid town.

Electra Station yourselves, some here along the high road, others yonder on some other path, to watch the house.

Chorus But why dost thou summon me to this service? tell me, dear mistress.

Electra I am afraid that some one, who is stationed at the house for a bloody purpose, may cause troubles, only to find them himself.

First Semi-Chorus Lead on; let us hasten; I will keep careful watch upon this track towards the east.

Second Semi-Chorus And I on this, that leadeth westward. Throw a glance sideways, letting the eye range from point to point; then look back again.

First Semi-Chorus We are directing them as thou biddest.

Electra Cast your eyes around, let them peer in every direction through your tresses.

Second Semi-Chorus Who is that on the road? Who is yonder countryman I see wandering round thy house?

Electra Ah! friends, we are undone; he will at once reveal to our enemies the armed ambush of that lion-like pair.

First Semi-Chorus (Reconnoitring.) Calm thy fears; the road is not occupied, as thou thinkest, dear mistress.

Electra (Turning to the other watchers.) And can I count thy side safe still? reassure me; is yonder space before the courtyard still deserted?

Second Semi-Chorus All goes well here; look to thy own watch, for no Argive is approaching us.

First Semi-Chorus Thy report agrees with mine; there is no Doise here either.

Electra Well then, let me make myself heard in the gateway. (Calling through the door.) Why are ye within the house delaying to spill your victim's blood, now that all is quiet? They do not hear; ah, woe is me! Can it be that their swords have lost their edge at the sight of her beauty? Soon will some mail-clad Argive, hurrying to her rescue, attack the palace. Keep a better look-out; 'tis no time for sitting still; bestir yourselves, some here, some there.

Chorus My eye is ranging to and fro all along the road.

Helen (within.) Help, Pelasgian Argos! I am being foully murdered.

First Semi-Chorus Heard ye that? Those men are now about the bloody deed.

Second Semi-Chorus 'Tis Helen screaming, to hazard a guess.

Electra Come, eternal might of Zeus, oh, come to help my friends!

Helen (within.) Menelaus, I am being murdered, but thou, though near, affordest me no aid.

Electra Cut, stab, and kill; all eager for the fray dart out your swords, double-handed, double-edged, against the woman who left her father's home and husband's side, and did to death so many of the men of Hellas, slain beside the river-bank, where tears rained down beneath the iron darts all round Scamander's eddying tides.

Chorus Hush! hush! I caught the sound of a foot-fall on the road near the house.

Electra Ladies, my dearest friends, it is Hermione advancing into the midst of the bloodshed. Let our clamour cease; on she comes headlong into the meshes of the net. Fair will the quarry prove if caught. Resume your station, looks composed and faces not betraying what has happened; and I too will wear a look of melancholy, as if forsooth I knew nothing of that desperate deed. (Addressing Hermione as she approaches.) Ah! maiden, hast thou come from wreathing Clytemnestra's grave and from pouring libations to the dead?

Hermione Yes, I have returned after securing a gracious recognition; but I was filled with some alarm as to the import of a cry I heard in the palace as I was still at a distance.

Electra But why? Our present lot gives cause for groans.

Hermione Hush! What is thy news?

Electra Argos has sentenced Orestes and myself to death.

Hermione Kinsfolk of my own! God forbid!

Electra It is decreed; the yoke of necessity is on our necks.

Hermione Was this the reason then of the cry within?

Electra Yes, 'twas the cry of the suppliant as he fell at Helen's knees.

Hermione Who is he? I am none the wiser, if thou tell me not.

Electra Orestes the hapless, entreating mercy for himself and me.

Hermione Good reason then has the house to cry out.

Electra What else would make a man entreat more earnestly? Come, throw thyself before thy mother in her proud prosperity, and join thy friends in beseeching Menelaus not to look on and see us die. O thou that wert nursed in the same mother's arms as I, have pity on us and relieve our pain. Come hither to the struggle, and I myself will be thy guide; for thou and thou alone, hast the issue of our safety in thy hands.

Hermione Behold me hastening to the house; as far as rests with me, regard yourselves as safe. [Exit Hermione.

Electra Now, friends, secure the prey in your armed ambush in the house.

Hermione (calling from within.) Ah! who are these I see?

Orestes (within) Silence! 'tis our safety, not thine, thou art here to insure.

Electra Hold her hard and fast; point a sword at her throat; then wait in silence, that Menelaus may learn that they are men, not Phrygian cowards, whom he has found and treated as only cowards deserve.

Chorus What ho! my comrades, raise a din, a din and shouting before the house, that the murder done may not inspire the Argives with wild alarm, to make them bring aid to the royal palace, before I see for certain whether Helen's corpse lies weltering in the house or hear the news from one of her attendants; for I know but a part of the tragedy, of the rest I am not sure. Thanks to Justice the wrath of God has come on Helen; for she filled all Hellas with tears because of her accursed paramour, Paris of Ida, who took our countrymen to Troy.

But hist! the bolts of the palace-doors rattle; be silent; for one of her Phrygians is coming out, from whom we will inquire of the state of matters within.

Phrygian (expressing the most abject terror.) From death escaped, in my barbaric slippers have I fled away, away from the Argive sword, escaping as best a barbarian might by clambering over the cedar beams that roof the porch and through the Doric triglyphs. (O my country, my country!) Alack, alack! oh! whither

can I fly, ye foreign dames, winging my way through the clear bright sky or over the sea, whose circle horned Ocean draws, as he girdles the world in his embrace?

Chorus What news, slave of Helen, creature from Ida?

Phrygian Ah me for Ilium, for Ilium, the city of Phrygia, and for Ida's holy hill with fruitful soil! in foreign accents hear me raise a plaintive strain over thee, whose ruin luckless Helen caused,-that lovely child whom Leda bore to a feathered swan, to be a curse to Apollo's towers of polished stone. Ah! well-a-day! woe to Dardania for the wailings wrung from it by the steeds that bought his minion Ganymede for Zeus.

Chorus Tell us plainly exactly what happened in the house, for till now have been guessing at what I do not clearly understand.

Phrygian "Ah, for Linus! woe is him!" That is what barbarians say in their eastern tongue as a prelude to the dirge of death, whene'er royal blood is spilt upon the ground by deadly iron blades.

To tell thee exactly what happened: there came into the palace two lion-like men of Hellas, twins in nature; your famous chief was sire of one, 'twas said; the other was the son of Strophius; a crafty knave was he, like to Odysseus, subtle, silent, but staunch to his friends, daring enough for any valiant deed, versed in war and blood-thirsty as a serpent. Ruin seize him for his quiet plotting, the villain!

In they came, their eyes bedimmed with tears, and took their seats in all humility near the chair of the lady whom Paris the archer once wedded, one on this side, one on that, to right and left, with weapons on them; and both threw their suppliant arms round the knees of Helen; whereon her Phrygian servants started to their feet in wild alarm, each in his terror calling to his fellow, "Beware of treachery!" To some there seemed no cause, but others thought that the viper who had slain his mother, was entangling the daughter of Tyndareus in the toils of his snare.

Chorus And where wert thou the while? fled long before in terror?

Phrygian It happened that I, in Phrygian style, was wafting the breeze past Helen's curls with a round feather-fan, stationed before her face; and she the while, as eastern ladies use, was twisting flax on her distaff with her fingers, but letting her yarn fall on the floor, for she was minded to embroider purple raiment

as an offering from the Trojan spoils, a gift for Clytemnestra at her tomb.

Then to the Spartan maid Orestes spake, “Daughter of Zeus, quit thy chair and cross the floor to a seat at the old altar of Pelops, our ancestor, to hear something I have to say.” Therewith he led the way and she followed, little guessing his designs. Meantime his accomplice, the Phocian miscreant, was off on other business. “Out of my way! Well, Phrygians always were cowards.” So he shut them up in different parts of the house, some in the stables, others in private chambers, one here, one there, disposing of them severally at a distance from their mistress.

Chorus What happened next?

Phrygian Mother of Ida, mighty parent! Oh! the murderous scenes and lawless wickedness that I witnessed in the royal palace! They drew forth swords from under their purple cloaks, each darting his eye all round him in either direction to see that none was near, and then, like boars that range the hills, they stood at bay before her, crying, “Thou must die; it is thy craven husband that will slay thee, because he betrayed his brother’s son to death in Argos.” But she with piercing screams brought down her snow-white arm upon her bosom and loudly smote on her poor head; then turned her steps in flight, shod in her golden shoon; but Orestes, outstripping her slippered feet, clutched his fingers in her hair and bending back her neck on to her left shoulder was on the point of driving the grim steel into her throat.

Chorus Where were those Phrygians in the house to help her then?

Phrygian With a loud cry we battered down the doors and doorposts of the rooms we had been penned in, by means of bars, and ran to her assistance from every direction, one arming himself with stones, another with javelins, a third having a drawn sword; but Pylades came to meet us, all undaunted, like Hector of Troy or Ajax triple-plumed, as I saw him on the threshold of Priam’s palace; and we met point to point. But then it became most manifest how inferior we Phrygians were to the warriors of Hellas in martial prowess. There was one man flying, another slain, a third wounded, yet another craving mercy to stave off death; but we escaped under cover of the darkness: while some were falling, others staggering, and some laid low in death. And just as her unhappy mother sunk to the ground to die, came luckless Hermione to the palace; whereon those twain, like Bacchanals when they drop their wands and seize a mountain-cub,

rushed and seized her; then turned again to the daughter of Zeus to slay her; but lo! she had vanished from the room, passing right through the house by magic spells or wizards' arts or heavenly fraud; O Zeus and earth, O day and night!

What happened afterwards I know not, for I stole out of the palace and ran away. So Menelaus went through all his toil and trouble to recover his wife Helen from Troy to no purpose.

(Orestes comes out of the palace.)

Leader of the Chorus Behold another strange sight succeeding its predecessors; I see Orestes sword in hand before the palace, advancing with excited steps.

Orestes Where is he who fled from the palace to escape my sword?

Phrygian (falling at the feet Of Orestes) Before thee I prostrate myself, O prince, and do obeisance in my foreign way.

Orestes 'Tis not Ilium that is now the scene, but the land of Argos.

Phrygian No matter where, the wise love life more than death.

Orestes I suppose that shouting of thine was not for Menelaus to come to the rescue?

Phrygian Oh no! it was to help thee I called out, for thou art more deserving.

Orestes Was it a just fate that overtook the daughter of Tyndareus?

Phrygian Most just, though she had had throats to die with.

Orestes Thy cowardice makes thee glib; these are not thy real sentiments.

Phrygian Why, surely she deserved it for the havoc she made of Hellas as well as Troy?

Orestes Swear thou art not saying this to humour me, or I will slay thee.

Phrygian By my life I swear,-an oath likely to be true in my case.

Orestes Did every Phrygian in Troy show the same terror of steel as thou dost?

Phrygian Oh, take thy sword away! held so near it throws a horrid gleam of blood.

Orestes Art thou afraid of being turned to a stone, as if it were a Gorgon thou seest?

Phrygian To a stone, no! but to a corpse; that Gorgon's head is not within my ken.

Orestes A slave, and so fearful of death, which will release thee from trouble!

Phrygian Bond or free, every one is glad to gaze upon the light.

Orestes Well said! thy shrewdness saves thee; go within.

Phrygian Thou wilt not kill me after all?

Orestes Thou art spared!

Phrygian O gracious words!

Orestes Come, I shall change my mind-

Phrygian Ill-omened utterance!

Orestes Thou fool dost think I could endure to plunge my sword in throat of thine, thou that neither art woman nor amongst men hast any place? The reason I left the palace was to gag thy noisy tongue; for Argos is quickly roused, once it hears a cry to the rescue. As for Menelaus, we are not afraid of measuring swords with him; no! he may go upon his way proud of the golden ringlets on his shoulders; for if, to avenge the slaying of Helen, he gathers the Argives and leads them against the palace, refusing to attempt the rescue of me, my sister, and Pylades my fellow-conspirator, he shall have two corpses to behold, his daughter's as well as his wife's.

(The Phrygian departs as Orestes re-enters the palace.)

Chorus (singing) Ah! fortune, fortune! again and yet again the house is entering on a fearful contest for the race of Atreus.

First Semi-chorus (chanting) What are we to do? carry tidings to the town, or hold our peace?

Second Semi-chorus (chanting) It is safer to keep silence, friends.

First Semi-chorus (chanting) Look, look at that sudden rush of smoke to the

sky in front of the palace, telling its tale in advance!

Second Semi-chorus (chanting) They are kindling torches to fire the halls of Tantalus; they do not shrink even from murder.

Chorus (singing) God holds the issue in his hand, to give to mortal men what end he will. Some mighty power is his; it was through a vengeful fiend that this family started on its career of murder, by hurling Myrtilus from the chariot.

But lo! I see Menelaus approaching the palace in hot haste; no doubt he has heard what is happening here. What ho! within, descendants of Atreus, make haste and secure the doors with bars. A man in luck is a dangerous adversary for luckless wretches like thyself, Orestes.

(Orestes and Pylades appear on the roof, holding Hermione. Menelaus and his attendants enter.)

Menelaus Strange news of violent deeds done by a pair of savages,-men I do not call them,-has brought me hither. What I heard was that my wife was not killed after all, but had vanished out of sight,-an idle rumour doubtless, brought to me by some dupe of his own terror; a ruse perhaps of the matricide to turn the laugh against me.

Throw wide the palace doors! My orders to my servants are that they force the doors, that I may rescue my child at any rate from the hands of the murderers and recover my poor wife's corpse, that dear partner whose slayers must die with her by my arm.

Orestes (from the roof) Ho, fellow! Keep thy fingers off those bolts, thou Menelaus, who vauntest thyself so high; else will I tear off the ancient parapet, the work of masons, and shatter thy skull with this coping-stone. The doors are bolted and barred, which will prevent thy entrance to the palace and thy eagerness to bring aid.

Menelaus Ha! what now? I see a blaze of torches and men standing at bay on the house-top yonder, with a sword held at my daughter's throat.

Orestes Wouldst question me or hear me speak?

Menelaus Neither; but I suppose I must hear thee.

Orestes Well, if thou art anxious to know, I intend to slay thy daughter.

Menelaus After slaying Helen, art thou bent on adding another murder?

Orestes I would I had compassed that, instead of being duped by the gods!

Menelaus Dost thou deny having slain her, saying this out of wanton insult?

Orestes Yes, I do deny it to my sorrow. Would God-

Menelaus Would God-what? Thou provokest my fears.

Orestes I had hurled to Hades the pollution of Hellas!

Menelaus Surrender my wife's dead body, that I may bury her.

Orestes Ask the gods for her; but thy daughter I will slay.

Menelaus This matricide is bent on adding murder to murder.

Orestes This champion of his sire, betrayed by thee to death.

Menelaus Art thou not content with the stain of the mother's blood which is on thee?

Orestes I should not grow tired if I had these wicked women to slay for ever.

Menelaus Art thou too, Pylades, a partner in this bloody work?

Orestes His silence says he is; so my saying it will suffice.

Menelaus Not without thy ruing it, unless thou take wings and fly.

Orestes Fly we never will, but will fire the palace.

Menelaus What! wilt thou destroy the home of thy ancestors?

Orestes To prevent thee getting it I will, offering this maid in sacrifice upon its flames.

Menelaus Kill her, for thou wilt be punished by me for such a murder.

Orestes Agreed.

Menelaus No, no! refrain!

Orestes Silence! thy sufferings are just; endure them.

Menelaus Pray, is it just that thou shouldst live?

Orestes And rule a kingdom, yes.

Menelaus A kingdom-where?

Orestes Here in Pelasgian Argos.

Menelaus Thou art so well qualified to handle sacred water!

Orestes And, pray, why not?

Menelaus And to slay victims before battle!

Orestes Well, art thou?

Menelaus Yes, my hands are clean.

Orestes But not thy heart.

Menelaus Who would speak to thee?

Orestes Every man that loves his father.

Menelaus And the man who honours his mother?

Orestes He's a happy man.

Menelaus Thou didst not honour thine, at any rate.

Orestes No, for I delight not in your wicked women.

Menelaus Remove that sword from my daughter's throat.

Orestes Thou art wrong.

Menelaus What! wilt slay her?

Orestes Right once more.

Menelaus Ah me! what can I do?

Orestes Go to the Argives and persuade them-

Menelaus To what?

Orestes Entreat the city that we may not die.

Menelaus Otherwise, will ye slay my child?

Orestes That is the alternative.

Menelaus Alas for thee, Helen!

Orestes And is it not "alas!" for me?

Menelaus I brought her back from Troy only for thee to butcher.

Orestes Would I had!

Menelaus After troubles innumerable.

Orestes Except where I was concerned.

Menelaus Dread treatment mine!

Orestes The reason being thy refusal to help me then?

Menelaus Thou hast me.

Orestes Thy own cowardice has. (Calling from the roof to Electra) Ho there! fire the palace from beneath, Electra; and, Pylades, my trusty friend, kindle the parapet of yonder walls. (The palace is seen to be ablaze.)

Menelaus Help, help, ye Danai! gird on your harness and come, ye dwellers in knightly Argos! for here is a fellow trying to wrest his life from your whole city, though he has caused pollution by shedding his mother's blood.

(Apollo appears from above with Helen.)

Apollo Menelaus, calm thy excited mood; I am Phoebus, the son of Latona, who draw nigh to call thee by name, and thou no less, Orestes, who, sword in hand, art keeping guard on yonder maid, that thou mayst hear what have come to say. Helen, whom all thy eagerness failed to destroy, when thou wert seeking to anger Menelaus, is here as ye see in the enfolding air, rescued from death instead of slain by thee. 'Twas I that saved her and snatched her from beneath thy sword at the bidding of her father Zeus; for she his child must put on immortality, and take her place with Castor and Polydeuces in the bosom of the sky, a saviour to mariners. Choose thee then another bride and take her to thy home, for the gods by means of Helen's loveliness embroiled Troy and Hellas, causing death thereby, that they might lighten mother Earth of the outrage done her by the increase of man's number. Such is Helen's end.

But as for thee, Orestes, thou must cross the frontier of this land and dwell for one whole year on Parrhasian soil, which from thy flight thither shall be called the land of Orestes by Azanians and Arcadians; and when thou returnest thence to the

city of Athens, submit to be brought to trial by “the Avenging Three” for thy mother’s murder, for the gods will be umpires between you and will pass a most righteous sentence on thee upon the hill of Ares, where thou art to win thy case. Likewise, it is ordained, Orestes, that thou shalt wed Hermione, at whose neck thou art pointing thy sword; Neoptolemus shall never marry her, though he thinks he will; for his death is fated to o’ertake him by a Delphian sword, when he claims satisfaction of me for the death of his father Achilles. Bestow thy sister’s hand on Pylades, to whom thou didst formerly promise her; the life awaiting him henceforth is one of bliss.

Menelaus, leave Orestes to rule Argos; go thou and reign oer Sparta, keeping it as the dowry of a wife, who till this day ne’er ceased exposing thee to toils innumerable. Between Orestes and the citizens, I, who forced his mother’s murder on him, will bring about a reconciliation.

Orestes Hail to thee, prophetic Loxias, for these thy utterances! Thou art not a lying prophet after all, but a true seer; and yet there came a dreadful thought into my heart that it was some fiend I had listened to, when seemed to hear thy voice; but all is ending well, and I obey thy word. There! I release Hermione from a violent death and agree to make her my wife whenever her father gives consent.

Menelaus All hail, Helen, daughter of Zeus! I wish thee joy of thy home in heaven’s happy courts. To thee, Orestes, I betroth my daughter according to the word of Phoebus, and good luck attend thee, a noble wooer nobly wived, and me the parent of thy bride!

Apollo Repair each one to the place appointed by me; reconcile all strife.

Menelaus Obedience is a duty.

Orestes I think thus also, Menelaus; so here I make a truce with sorrow and with thy oracles, O Loxias.

Apollo (chanting) Go your ways, and honour Peace, most fair of goddesses; I, meantime, will escort Helen to the mansions of Zeus, soon as I reach the star-lit firmament. There, seated side by side with Hera and Hebe, the bride of Heracles, she shall be honoured by men with drink-offerings as a goddess for ever, sharing with those Zeus-born sons of Tyndareus their empire o’er the sea, for the good of mariners.

(Apollo and Helen vanish.)

Chorus (chanting) Hail! majestic Victory, still in thy keeping hold my life and  
ne'er withhold the crown!

**THE END**