Seven Tragedies of Sophocles

Electra

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Electra

(Dramatis Personae)

Paedagogus

Orestes

Electra

Chorus of Young Women of the Town

Chrysothemis

Clytemnestra

Aegisthus
Paedagogus

Your father Agamemnon lorded troops at Troy, Orestes, once, but only now you see what you have always hankered for - Argos, old as time, old in your heart's desires. Here is the grove of Io, Zeus ravaged child of Inachus - and jealous Hera's prey. Apollo's precinct there, his guise, Wolfslayer. Hera's famous temple ... yes, all Mycenae, rich in gold, is at your feet, your home, and there the house of Pelops rich in kindred blood.
They killed your father there. I rescued you, entrusted by your sister's hand, and kept you safe, until the time was ripe for vengeance. Think swiftly now to plan the necessary act, Orestes - Pylades, the closest of our friends will help. But sunlight stirs the clear voiced birds to morning song; already kindly night's protection fails with fading stars. We must unite and plan before the city stirs. This is the point of no return; we must not shirk our crisis now.

Orestes

I love you well, my friend and guide. Your noble loyalty to us is amply shown. Just as the well bred horse, despite its age, despises dangers, loses not its fire, but pricks its ears, so you inflame our hearts and are the foremost of our followers. Therefore, I will disclose my thoughts to you, while you pay keen attention to my words, correcting them, if I should miss the mark: these were Apollo's words of prophecy in answer to my question, how I might contrive just vengeance on my father's murderers. Alone, unarmed, with no great company of men just slaughter was my task by stealth and guile; this was the nature of the oracle. Go you then inside. Learn how things stand, that you may bring me clear intelligence. They will not recognise you, old as
you are, matured in years; they'll not suspect
at all. Your tale must be like this:
you are a friend from Phocis; Lord Phanoteus sent
you, greatest of their military friends.
Announce, on oath, Orestes' death by some
inevitable accident - hurled from
his speeding chariot in competition; that's
our plot. Meanwhile my father's tomb I'll crown
with offerings of wine, with fresh cut locks
of hair, fulfilling so Apollo's wish.
Then we'll return and, bearing in our hands
the brazen urn we hid among the bushes here,
we'll give them proof of our sweet news and show
them how my body's burned to dust and ashes.
Why should a rumoured death concern me, if
by such a death I win safe fame in fact?
No word that brings advantage can be bad.
For many times I've seen men counterfeit
their death, wise men who thereby won
the greater honour on their safe return.
Just so I trust I'll burst upon my foes;
as some avenging star they'll see me.
My native land and gods now grant
me welcome and success on my return.
Ancestral home, I come in justice from
the gods to clear away pollution. So send
me not away dishonoured from this land,
but rather let me found this house anew
and be the rightful wielder of its wealth.
Such is my plea.
So go, old man;
take care; fulfil your necessary part.
Come, Pylades. It is the hour of crisis, which
controls the fate of every enterprise of men.

El. No! No, no more pain!
Paid. I heard a cry from inside - it must
have been some slave, struck down with pain...

Or. Could it have been Electra? Such grief!
I'll stay and listen longer...
Paid. No! First we must attempt the tasks Apollo set,
make them our starting point and pour
the offerings for your father. Only so
will victory be ours and power for our enterprise.
El. Daylight pure, bright sky,  
Earth's coverlet, you are  
longstanding nightfade witnesses  
to my laments, rent  
from my chest, so bloodied now  
with self-struck blows, while, hated bed,  
you overhear my nightlong  
dirge, within this wretched house,  
for my poor father.  
Not for him the war-god's  
gracious welcome, underneath  
some foreign land.  
My mother and her new found man,  
Aegisthus, split his skull in two -  
they are all bloody -  
careless as the woodsmen  
lop an oak.  
And no one now shows pity here  
save me, my father, sadly dead  
and shamed.  
Yet I'll not stop my angry songs  
while still I see  
the faltering starlight, see  
the light of day. I'll sing  
the nightingale's infanticidal  
constant threnody before  
my father's doors - for all to hear.  
Mistress of Hell, Persephone;  
infernal escort of the dead,  
Lord Hermes - o Curse upon the house -  
and Furies,  
awesome children of the gods,  
whose care are those unjustly dead,  
whose care the stolen marriage bed,  
come to my aid, avenge  
my father's death and send  
to me my brother.  
For alone I cannot bear  
the overwhelming burden of my grief.

Chorus Electra, why pine so?  Why this  
incessant song of grief?  
Your mother is evil,  
but father Agamemnon is long dead.  
She deceived, ensnared, betrayed him.
I would the murderess might die, if I may ask that.

El. My friends, I know and understand that you have come in all nobility to comfort me. And yet I cannot wish myself to stop my song. I must lament my father. Respect our mutual, all-embracing love, I pray, and grant to me my suffering.

Ch. But neither will your prayers nor yet those songs of grief arouse your father from the crowded shores of Hell. Unending grief becomes an end itself. There's no escape. Why love your sorrow so?

El. A child must not betray its parent's sorry death. The bird that grieves for Itys ever Itys in bewilderment inspires my heart with sympathy, a messenger from Zeus. And Niobe, sent up within your rocky tomb, I call divine, forever weeping.

Ch. My child, this grief is shared, but you alone are overwhelmed. Compare your sisters, kin in blood; Chrysothemis survives, so too Iphianassa, while in his exiled youth of grief, your brother waits for welcome to Mycenae, happy that he has the will of Zeus to help him homeward bound, Orestes.

El. Tirelessly I wait for him, no child no husband to my name, a daily path of sorrow only; wet with tears I bear fate's endless burden. He forgets alike his sufferings and promises. Every word I hear deceives me. Always he wants to come, found wanting, never deigns to come.

Ch. Be brave, my child. Still great in heaven, Zeus sees, governs all.
Commit to him your quarrel, sharp as it is.
Do not forget the ones you hate, nor yet
waste hatred on them. In time
the gods will balance all.
Agamemnon's exiled son does not forget,
nor does the god who rules beneath by Acheron.

El.
But I have lived the best part
of my life in hopeless childlessness.
I have no strength, but fade away,
no loving man to help me;
but, like some worthless
foreign slave, I labour in my father's house,
my clothes are rags;
I stand to eat at empty tables.

Ch.
I pitied his scream,
homecome to death; the blow
I pitied, full-faced and brazen.
He was at peace at home at last.
Guile planned it,
lust killed him.
Twin parents of a thing unspeakable.
Was the agent man or god?

El.
That day's coming was
the bitterest of all by far
for me. That night, the horrors
of that feast - unspeakable.
My father saw their ruthless
hands of death, the hands
that took away my life,
betrayed it and destroyed it.
May the great Olympian god
bring just punishment upon
them, grant no joy in wealth
achieved by such a crime.

Ch.
I beg you, say no more.
Have you no sense of how
your present manner thrusts you
headlong into self-inflicted madness?
You simply win a richer crop
of grief, forever nourishing
those inner conflicts, which must not
be waged with those who rule.

El.
Madness faced with madness is necessity.
I know that I am mad.
But in the midst of madness I'll not check infatuation, while I live.
There is no word can comfort me.
No one could think so, thinking timely thoughts, my friends.
So leave me be, my comforters;
for I am inconsolable, will always be Unbounded in my threnody.

Ch. I speak from kindness, child, as might a loving mother.
Do not pile grief on endless grief.

El. What are the natural bounds of grief?
How is it good to be uncaring of the dead?
Is this instinct in anyone?
I'll not hear praise from any such, 220
nor live at ease with them,
nor clip the keening wings of lamentation's song,
dishonouring my father.
For if the helpless dead shall lie as dust and nothing more, while murderers, unpunished, pay no recompense, there'll be no honour, justice, on the earth with men.

Ch. I have come, my child, in eagerness to help us both. If my advice is bad, then have your way; for we will take your lead.

El. I'm sorry if, my friends, you think I show too much impatience in my many songs of grief. Compulsion forces me to act like this.
Forgive me! How could any woman, nobly born and witness to the horrors of her father's house do otherwise. I see them flourish day by day, by kindly night, a healthy crop. My mother hates me bitterly where she should love. Within my father's house I live with murderers, his murderers, am ruled by them, from their whim must win what needs I have or suffer deprivation.
You know the kind of life I daily lead, when on my father's throne I see Aegisthus sat in Agamemnon's robes and making sacrifice upon the altar where he cut him down, and when I see the ultimate disgrace,
when, in my father's bed, in arrogance
he lays his hand upon his victim's wife,
my mother, if such a term befits his whore.
She is so bold she lives with him, although
accursed, and fears no vengeful Fury in
her confidence of heart, but rather mocks
what's done and seeks the date on which
she killed my father - guilefully - to found
a festival of dance and sacrifice
in honour of the gods that keep her safe.
I watch within the house, quite helpless, quite
alone I weep and weep in anger at
this festival which celebrates my father's death.
And yet I cannot weep as I would like,
to ease my heart. This woman comes,
with noble sounding protestation interrupts
my grief,
"The gods despise and hate you, girl!
It's commonplace to lose a father. You're not unique
to feel this pain. To hell with you! And may
the gods of hell reward you with a grief
that truly knows no end!"
But, overhearing some
report about Orestes' coming home,
all arrogance is gone. Stark madness prompts
her fearful screams into my face,
"It's all your fault!
It's all your doing! You stole Orestes from my hands,
took him away. Be sure you'll pay a proper price!"
She yelps with rage and by her side
in concert that famous womaniser stands
who only joins in battle with a woman's help,
an utter, utter coward - while still I await
Orestes' coming, hoping he will stop these crimes.
Always on the point of something he destroys
my every hope, unreal and real. In such
a situation friends, it is not right
to exercise your pious moderation. Evil times
must force fresh evils - that is Necessity.

Ch. Come, tell me - do you say these things
to us because Aegisthus is away?

El. Yes - he's away. You must not think that I
would be so bold to come here otherwise.
If that is so, then may I question you more freely, child, with confidence?

Ask what you will since he has gone away.

Well then I will. Have you some word about Orestes? Is he on his way or yet to leave?

He promises, but promises mean nothing real.

Well may he hesitate to tackle such a task.

I did not shrink from saving him!

Take heart. He is by birth and nature good. He'll come.

I know. That is the reason I still live.

Say no more now. I see your sister, Chrysothemis, come from the house. Your parents were the same, but not your hearts. She bears gifts in hand such as are proper for the dead.

Why do you come once more to vent your grief, my sister, underneath the palace gates, in public view? You must surely see by now the uselessness of anger. I myself quite sympathise, feel upset at what is what. Had I the strength, I'd show them my opinion.

However, now I think it best to trim my sails. I'll not make ineffectual threats. I wish that you would take my lead. I know your choice is just, when I compare it with my words, but, if I am to live in freedom, I must heed the ones in power.

It's strange that, though you are his child you have no thought for Agamemnon, but 'heed' our mother's words. For all of your advice is learned from her. There's nothing of your own in this. The choice is yours, to act with honour or expediency, abandoning your friends.

You said just now, had you the strength, you'd show how much you hate my enemies, but, when I try to pay them back in full for father's death, you are no help, but rather twist aside my aim. You add the crime of cowardice to your family's sum of viciousness. So tell me; rather, learn from me - what shall I gain from ceasing my laments? I live in misery, but that suffices me; for I cause them annoyance, while I gratify the dead, if those below are to be gratified.
Your hatred of them is a thing of words alone. In fact, you have accommodated to our father's murderers. I could not descend to that, were I to win also the prizes that you flaunt. Keep rich tables, live with richness. My ambition is to keep my conscience clear. I do not want your marks of honour; nor would you were you in your right mind. You could be known as Agamemnon's child... well, be your mother's brat and demonstrate to all how you've betrayed your father and your friends.

Ch.
By all the gods, no more in anger! There is good for both in what is said, if only each would learn to profit from the other's words.

Chrys.
For my part, friends, I'm hardened to her taunts, would not have risked the subject, had I not learned about an awful danger coming down upon her finally to end her endless dirge.

El.
What is this 'awful' danger? If it's worse than what I suffer now, I'll not contradict you any more.

Chrys.
Well, I will tell you all I know: if you'll not freely end your song of woe, they do intend to send you where no more you'll see the sun's clear light, but pent alive inside a vaulted tomb, beyond this land you may chant there your everlasting catalogue of crimes. Consider this and in the future blame me not for ills that timely wisdom could avert.

El. So this is what they want to do to me?

Chrys. As soon as Lord Aegisthus comes back home.

El. If that is so, then let him come and quickly too!

Chrys. Poor fool! What is this prayer you make?

El. That he might come, if his intent is what you say.

Chrys. That you may suffer more. You must be mad!

El. That I may flee as far as may be from you all.

Chrys. Have you no concern at all for your life here?

El. It is, of course, so fine and wonderful.

Chrys. It could be, if you'd learn a little more sense.

El. Don't teach me to be hateful to the ones I love.

Chrys. Not that, but merely to obey the strong.

El. You play the fawning bitch; that's not my way.

Chrys. It does no good to fall through sheer stupidity.

El. I'll fall if I must for my poor father's sake.
Chrys. My father pardons me for this, I know.
El. These are excuses cowards use.
Chrys. You will not be persuaded by my sound advice?
El. Of course not! I would never be so shallow.
Chrys. Then I'll go upon the mission I was sent.
El. What mission? For whom do you bring those gifts?
Chrys. My mother sent me with these gifts for father's grave.
El. What's that? For the man she hated most in all the world?
Chrys. Yes, whom she killed. That's what you mean to say.
El. What friend advised her, thought that this was right?
Chrys. There was some terror in the night - I understand.
El. O gods of Argos - be with me now at last!
Chrys. You take encouragement from night-born fears?
El. Tell me what she saw; then I might know.
Chrys. I only know a small part of the dream.
El. Still tell it! Often brief reports have made or marred man's fortunes in the past.

Chrys. Word is she saw our father come once more into the light to join her, side by side, and then she saw him lift and plant his sceptre by the hearth, the sceptre which Aegisthus holds, which once was Agamemnon's. A thriving branch sprang from it, threw its shade across Mycenae's lands from end to end. Such is the tale I heard from one who heard her morning revelation of the dream.
El. She told the sun. I know no more, except she set me to this task through dread of it. By our ancestral gods, I beg you be advised, do not destroy yourself through foolishness.

El. But, sister, do not put the things you bear upon his tomb. It is not right.
Chrys. By any law, law human or divine, to bring these gifts from one who hated him, to make these offerings to our father. Bury them within the winds, within the secret earth where none of them might break our father's rest. Then, when she dies, she'll find them waiting for her, underneath the earth. For, were she not the most unfeeling woman ever born, she could not bring herself to crown with gifts the grave of him she killed. Consider if you think our father's ghost...
would welcome gifts like these upon his tomb from her that killed, dishonoured him, emasculated his corpse, as if he were an enemy, and wiped her hands, to clean away the blood, upon his hair. Can you believe this trash will wash away blood guilt like that? It cannot be. So throw these things away. Cut locks of hair from both your head and mine, poor offerings, but all I have, not even glossy - and my plain waistband. Then fall upon your knees and beg that he will rise in kindness from the earth to aid our struggle with his enemies, and pray his son Orestes lives to set his foot victorious upon them, that in the future we may decorate his tomb with richer hands than now we do. For I believe, I do believe that Agamemnon had a share in sending her these dreams. So, sister, do these services for my sake and your own and for the best, the dearest man, our father living with the dead.

Ch. She speaks with right and justice, lady. Share her thoughts, do as she asks - show justice.

Chrys. I will. When justice is at stake, we two must not be in dispute, but work with unity and haste. But keep your peace, while I attempt this task, my friends. For if my mother learns of this I'll bitterly regret this venture still.

Ch. Unless I am an utter fool, devoid of wisdom, no prophetess, then Justice, sender of these dreams will come, just strength her armament, will come, my child, with no delay. The knowledge of these dreams brings courage. The Lord of Greece, your father, he does not forget; nor does the double-bladed axe of bronze, that cut him cruelly down. She will come with many feet and many hands, with feet of bronze, in dreadful ambush clothed, the Fury, come against an eager lust for lawless wedlock stained with blood.
Convinced I am this dream portends no good
to them, the murderers - or else there is
no truth for man in prophecy from dreadful dreams,
nor in the words of gods,
unless this vision of the night proves true.
The chariot race of Pelops long ago
was filled with grief that lies persistently
upon this land, since Myrtilus was drowned
at sea, hurled from his chariot of gold
headlong by cruelty and guile,
this house was never free of violence.

Clytemnestra
I see you are at large again.
It's clear Aegisthus is away.
His constant task it is to keep you in,
to save our friends' embarrassment. But, when
he is away, you have no fear of me,
although I am the frequent target of
abuse. You claim my rule is quite devoid
of justice, I am proud, insulting you
and yours. Yet I am not proud, share not your arrogance;
I only counter your abuse. Your harping theme
is 'father', always 'father', how I slaughtered him.
Yes, I killed him. Why deny the fact
when I had justice on my side, she took
him. If you had sense you'd march
with her. It was your father, after all,
that you lament, who dared alone
of all the Greeks to sacrifice your sister to
the gods. He did not bear the pain
of childbirth, merely sowed the seed. I was
the mother. Tell me too - on whose behalf
he cut her throat? The Greeks? Perhaps.
They had no right to murder what was mine.
And, if he killed her for his brother Menelaus,
should he not pay me penalty for that?
Had not Menelaus children too
who might have with more justice died
than mine? The fleet was sailing for
their parents' sake. Did death conceive
a special taste for my offspring instead
of Helen's, or had my hateful husband lost
all natural affection for his own, transferring it
to Menelaus' kin? This was the choice of one
bereft of wisdom and humanity.
I know that you think differently from me,
but, could your dead sister speak, I know
she'd vote with me, I am not dismayed at what is done.
Were you in your right mind, you would ensure
the justice of your case before assailing me.

El. You shall not say that I began this brawl
today; for you it was that started it,
but, if you will give me leave, I'll speak for both
the dead, my father, sister - to set the record straight.

Clyt. I give you leave. If you would always start
a speech like that, you'd cause us no offence.

El. Hear me then. You say you killed my father! How can you
confess to such a thing, without a sense of shame?
Strict 'justice' is not relevant, although I say
this killing was not just; for he persuaded you,
that evil man with whom you live.
Ask Artemis, the huntress, why, for punishment,
she held in check the winds at Aulis. I'll
explain - you should not question her. My father once
in sport, I hear, within the goddess' grove
did startle with his foot a dappled stag.
He killed the antlered beast and boasted as
he shot it. Angered by this Artemis detained
the Greeks, until my father sacrificed
his daughter as a recompense. This was
the reason for her ritual death. There was
no other way to free the army homeward or
to Troy. This was the reason he was forced
to sacrifice his daughter, much against
his will, not for the sake of Menelaus!
But if - if I may plead your case -
he did this thing to gratify
his brother, was that any cause for you
to butcher him? By what law? You set
a precedent to bring harsh fate upon
yourself. For if we are to kill, spill blood
for blood, you first of all should die
as retribution for your crime of blood.
Consider your defence, how false it is.
Tell me why it is you live this life
of shame and procreation with the man
who killed my father, Agamemnon, your
own husband, sleep with the murderer, have sent away in exile and disowned the children of your former legal marriage with my father. How can I condone what you have done? Or do you say still you are extracting justice for a daughter's death? A poor excuse, if that's your claim. It is not right to bed an enemy in 'just' requital for a daughter's death. I waste my breath with this advice; you shriek that I abuse my mother - mother! Mistress more than mother. I live a life of misery because of you and your Aegisthus' slights. You forced another from this place, abroad to bitter exile then, a man who lives a life of constant deprivation, whom you claim I've raised to bring down vengeance on your head, - Orestes, and that I would have done and gladly, had I been able - know that well! Because of him denounce my name to all; say that I'm disloyal, if you will, or petulant, that I've no sense of shame. For, if a single word of this is true, I am a child that's worthy of its mother.

Ch. She breathes out rage. The justice of her case does not concern her any more.

Clyt. Should I then concern myself at all with one that hates, insults her mother, though she is no child. She has no sense of shame.

El. I have a sense of shame, a sense of shame at what I do, whatever you believe. I know I act disgracefully and do myself no credit. Your hatred of me, your crimes provoke me. Shame teaches shame, crime - I learn from you.

Clyt. You see her sense of shame? My life, my words, my actions are constantly the stuff of her harangues.

El. Of course! Why so surprised? The crime was yours. Your crimes speak for themselves.

Clyt. Now, by the goddess Artemis, you'll pay for this exhibition, when Aegisthus comes.

El. You see! You're angry now! Although you gave me leave to speak as I wished. You are intolerant.

Clyt. Now, at least, be silent and let me make my sacrifice. I granted you free speech.
El. Please, make your sacrifice - I'll say no more.  
I'll not provoke your censure, pray go on!

Clyt. You - you there! Raise the fruitful offerings 
that I may raise in turn my plea 
to Agamemnon for deliverance from 
my present dread - and you, Apollo, my 
defender, may you hear my covert prayer. 
I am not in the company of friends, 
nor is it right to bring all to the light 
while she stands by, in case she broadcasts some 
false tale throughout the state with hatred 
in her heart and on her clacking tongue. 
But hear me still and I will tell you what 
I saw, nocturnal visions, doubtful dreams... 
And if, Apollo, they bode well for me then bring 
them to fulfilment, if not, then bring them down 
upon my enemies - and should they wish 
to separate me from my present wealth 
by trickery, prevent them, keep me ever safe 
within the house of Atreus, the sceptre in 
my hand, or in my friend's, with whom I live 
in happiness and with those of my children who 
bring no bitterness and no ill-will against me. 
All else I leave to you to understand, 
you are the son of Zeus and can, 
of course, read every detail of my silent will.

Paid. Excuse me, ladies; could this palace be 
in fact the home of King Aegisthus?

Ch. It is indeed, my friend; you are quite right.

Paid. And may I assume this lady is his queen? 
She has a look of majesty about her.

Ch. Yes, that is so; it is the queen you see before you.

Paid. Hail, Queen! I come with happy news for you 
and for your husband, King Aegisthus.

Clyt. Your words assure your welcome. Tell me first, 
just who it was that sent you.


Clyt. What business, friend? I know Phanoteus is 
our friend and know, therefore, your news is good.

Paid. Orestes is dead. That is my news in brief.

El. No! No, no! I have died today!

Clyt. What’s that you say, my friend? Do not heed her!

Paid. I said and say again your son is dead.

El. My life is finished, done. I'll live no more.
Clyt. That is your concern. But tell me, friend, and truly all the details of his death.

Paid. To that end I was sent and can tell you all. He went to Delphi to the festival of games when he heard the herald's proclamation of the foot race, first event; he entered, won and was admired by all around the course for his skill and beauty as he gained victory. In short, although there's much to tell, I've never seen a man of such accomplishments and strength. And know this well - whatever competition was announced, the judges gave him victory. His reputation bloomed and men gave him congratulations as the son of Agamemnon, Lord of Argos, who marshalled once the famous men of Greece. And so it went on, but, when one of the gods becomes malevolent, no man, however strong can flee his fate. For there was another day set down to race the speeding chariots in the cool of the dawn. Orestes entered in the race along with many other charioteers from many lands. One was from Achaea, one from Sparta, two of the drivers came from Libya; then came Orestes, his team Thessalian mares at number five; the sixth, with chestnuts was Aetolian, the seventh from Magnesia, the eighth, with a team of greys, was from the south of Thessaly, an Athenian ninth, his town built by the gods - tenth in line a Theban came. They set their chariots to the starting gates appointed by the judges and the lot. They leapt from the gates at the sound of the brass trumpet, simultaneously urging their horses with cries of encouragement, shaking the reins in their hands and the whole of the course was filled with the thunder of wheels and the dust obscured the crowded chariots as each man plied his whip unsparingly to pass his rival's wheels and snorting steeds, while the foam of their horses' breath quite covered their backs and bespattered the wheels. Orestes shaved the turning posts on every pass by giving their heads to the outer pair and holding back tightly the inner. All...
the teams raced safely till the hard-mouthed south Thessalian colts bolted, broke formation, crossed the strip and smashed headlong into one of the teams from Libya. And from this one catastrophe there was a chain reaction of disaster, till the whole race track of Delphi was awash with wrecks of chariots, of horses. Cleverly the man from Athens pulled aside and reined his horses in, allowing the surging tide of chariots to pass him by in the mid-stream. Last of all Orestes drove, keeping in check his horses for a finishing dash. But, when he saw the sole survivor from Athens, he gave chase, screaming in his horses' ears shrill cries to speed them on - and the two surviving teams raced neck and neck, now one and now the other took the lead, but only by a neck at most. Orestes had in safety made his way through nearly all the circuits of the race and kept himself, and his chariot, upon an even keel. But then he eased the tension on the left hand pair, upon the turn and, unawares, struck hard against the turning post and smashed the axle-box in two, across the middle was hurled above the safety rail; involved among the leathern reins he fell among the hooves and scared his mares that scattered far and wide into the middle of the course. The host of people saw him fall and grieved at the young man's plight, who had done such deeds and suffered this reward. He bounced, now on the ground and now he showed his heels to heaven, until the stewards struggled to hold his mares in check and cut loose the blood-stained corpse. It was unrecognisable. Then those that loved him lit a pyre at once, committed him to the flames and chosen men from Phocis bring the ashes in an urn of bronze - a small container for a hero's frame. That is the essence of my tale, a tale of grief, but sadder still for those of us had eyes to see the greatest and most bitter stroke of fate.

Ch. Our royal race is finished, root and branch.
Clyt.  O Zeus, why this confusion? Is this good news? I am torn between grief and joy. For grief I feel, if such suffering alone can keep me safe.

Paid.  Why are you despondent, lady, at my news?

Clyt.  It is an awful thing to be a mother. It's hard To hate one's child, however much one is provoked.

Paid.  It looks as if my journey was in vain.

Clyt.  No! Not in vain! How can you say in vain? If you have come with certain proof of my son's death, my son who suckled here, flesh of my flesh, but yet was ripped away to exile and has never seen me since. He left this land, but ever charges me with the murder of his father, swears revenge - and so no sleep can bring sweet rest upon my eyes by night or day. There is instead the constant threat of death as time goes by... But now! By this day's news I am released from fear of him and of this daughter here.

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Paid.  It looks as if my journey was in vain.
Orestes and your death destroys all hope for me, the hope I nurtured in my heart that you would live to come someday, avenge our father's death and my distress. Where can I turn? I am done. For I have lost you both. Once more I must play the part of slave among the people I hate most in all the world, the killers of my father. All is very well with me. Yet for the rest of time I'll not go in to live with them, but at the very gates I'll lay me down - no friends - and waste away my life. And let them kill me if they take this hard. Death must be pleasant, if life means pain. I have no great desire to live.

Ch. Where are the thunderbolts of Zeus? Where is the bright revealing sun, if they see these things and shroud them in complicity?
El. Ah!!
Ch. Child, why keen so?
El. Ah!!
Ch. Child, you must not...
El. Do not destroy me more.
Ch. How?
El. By offering false hopes that they will come who now are dead and gone. You trample on my misery.
Ch. I know King Amphiareus was killed, ensnared by a golden chain, a necklace and a woman's guile, but now, beneath the earth...
El. Ah!
Ch. He rules among the dead.
El. Ah!
Ch. And the murderess... Was killed.
El. ...was killed.
Ch. I know, I know. A champion appeared, caring for the dead man. I have no one any more my champion was snatched away.
Ch. Your life is truly wretched.

ant. a I know that well, too well.
El. My life is an endless tide of grief, a river of pain. 820

Ch. I have seen it.
El. Do not then try to turn aside my stream of tears, when...

Ch. When?
El. when hope no more springs to comfort me, hopes for my noble brother.

ant. b Ch. All men by nature die.

El. But not among the tramp and crush of horses' hooves, embroiled in the whipping reins. 830

Ch. This death was cruel beyond belief.
El. Yes, yes! A stranger in a strange land he lies far from my loving hands.

Ch. Ah.
El. Buried with not one of us to stand in grief beside his tomb.

Chrys. My dearest sister, I have come in haste, regardless of propriety, and filled with joyful news to bring a joyful ending to those sorrows which you constantly lament. 840

El. And where could you find any help to ease the pains I feel. They are incurable.

Chrys. Orestes has come to us. I know this is the truth as you know that I am standing here.

El. Are you mad, poor girl, that you mock at this our common share of grief?

Chrys. By our father's hearth, I am not mocking you in this. Orestes has come home to us. 850

El. Poor girl; so credulous. Who told you this?

Chrys. I had the evidence first hand and did not have to trust another's word.

El. And what convinced you? What did you see? that inspires such fevered confidence.

Chrys. By all the gods, hear me! Then only judge whether or not I am in my right mind.

El. Speak, if to speak will give you special pleasure.
Chrys. I'll tell you everything that I have seen.
    For, when I came to our father's ancient tomb,
    I saw a spring of fresh poured milk flowed down
    from the top of the mound, and all about the tomb
    was garlanded with all the flowers that grow.
    I saw and was amazed and checked to see
    if anyone was there close by, but unobserved.
    And when I saw the place's calm was not disturbed,
    I crept up closer to the tomb and on
    the mound's edge saw a lock
    off hair. Immediately I saw it there, my soul
    was moved to think of our Orestes, loved
    so well by us - and that this was a sign
    from him. I took it in my hands, quite silently,
    and straightaway my eyes were filled with tears
    of joy. Both then and now I knew and know
    this tribute came from no one else but him.
    Who else would care save you and I?
    I did not do it, nor did you. How could
    you when you're not allowed to leave
    this prison house, not even if you wish to pray.
    It is not likely that our mother's heart
    would entertain such thoughts, nor could she have
done this without our knowing it. These gifts
have come from Orestes. Take courage from that fact,
Electra. No single fate perpetually will blight men's
lives. Ours was a gloomy fate before, but now,
perhaps this day will serve to bring much good.

El. You are so foolish that I pity you.

Chrys. What is it? You take no pleasure from my words?

El. You do not know how far you are astray.

Chrys. But how can I not know what I have clearly seen?

El. He's dead, my dear one. All hope of help from him
    has vanished. Look no more to our Orestes.

Chrys. He's dead? Who was it told you this?

El. <A man.> He was present when he died.

Chrys. And where is this man? My mind grows numb.

El. Inside the house. Our mother likes his company.

Chrys. But who in all the world would send
    such offerings and put them on our father's tomb?

El. No doubt someone who brought the gifts
    to honour dead Orestes' memory.

Chrys. I am a fool. I hurried here borne up
    with happy news and did not realise
my folly, while my arrival brings
me knowledge of both past and present ills.

El.
That is the way of it. But if you will obey
me, you will ease the burden of our present grief.

Chrys.
You mean that I will resurrect the dead?

El.
That is not what I said. I am not insane.

Chrys.
What would you have me do that I can do?

El.
You must be brave to do my bidding.

910

Chrys.
If we gain advantage I'll not hang back.

El.
You realise we will gain nothing without pain.

Chrys.
I realise that fact. I'll do what I can.

El.
Then listen how I wish to act in this.

You know we can expect no help from friends.

For death has robbed us of them all and we
are left alone, abandoned. So long as I heard
my brother was alive and well, I held
onto the hope that he would come to gain
requital for our father's murder, but now
he lives no more I look to you to join
with me your sister in the execution of
our father's murderer, Aegisthus. We must
not flinch from this and we must keep
no secrets from each other. How long can you
remain inactive? What other hope do we have?

You have a double loss to mourn, that of
your father's wealth and of your future happiness.
For you will live your life unwed until
the passing years bring you old age and death.

For you must entertain no hopes of wedded bliss,
Chrysothemis. Aegisthus is not so stupid that
he will allow us children to flourish as
a threat to his security. But if
you follow my advice you'll win just praise
both from your father in the world below
and from your sister and also you will gain
the freedom and the kind of marriage which
is your birthright. For your nobility
will draw the gaze of every man. Do you
not see the noble reputation you and I
will win if I can win you over by
my words. For every citizen or stranger in
the town will greet us with praise on their lips, 'see
these sisters, friends, who saved their father's house
and took their lives in their hands and brought
a vengeance of blood upon the murderers
despite their strength. They are worthy of our love
and of our total admiration, so that we
should celebrate their bravery throughout
the city with a general festival.'
This is the way that each and every man
will speak of us, so that our fame will last
through all our lives and even past our death.
Dear sister, listen to my words and work
with our father, our brother and work with your sister to
put an end to our suffering for both of us
in the knowledge that to live a life of shame
brings shame and disgrace upon those nobly born.

Ch. In situations such as these forethought
is useful to the speaker and the audience.
Chrys. If she had not been quite deranged before
she spoke, my friends, the caution which she should
have shown would have been more in evidence.
What reason could you have to arm yourself
with rashness such as this - and summon me
to help? You do not seem to see you have
been born a woman, not a man; your strength
is less by far than is your enemies'.
Fate smiles upon them. Day by day they prosper,
while our luck daily dwindles, comes to nought.
No man could hope to bring down such an enemy,
without great risk of pain and punishment.
Such boldness will increase our suffering,
if anyone should hear our plotting. To die
an ignominious death will seem but poor
reward for winning noble fame, will seem
inadequate relief - no profit there!
In fact, to die is not the bitterest of fates,
but rather to wish to die, and have that wish denied.
I beg you now before your family
is utterly destroyed, our race quite wiped
out, restrain your anger. I will keep my peace,
ensure your words remain mere words, without
effect. And you must learn good sense, as time
goes by, so that you don't in weakness challenge strength.

Ch. Mankind can have no better quality.
El. It's all in character. I knew well enough
you would reject all that I offered you.
So be it! I will do what must be done alone.
For I will not leave this thing unfinished.

Chrys. Ah!
I wish your thoughts had been like this upon
our father's death. Revenge would have been swift!

El. I was the same, but not so tempered by adversity.

Chrys. You should have stayed the same throughout your life.

El. Your words confirm you will not join with me in this.

Chrys. I think it likely you will meet defeat.

El. I envy your prudence; your cowardice I loathe.

Chrys. If you should praise me too, I'll remain unmoved.

El. But you will never hear my praises sung by me.

Chrys. The length of future time will be the judge of that.

El. Please go! You are no help to me in this.

Chrys. I could be - only you refuse to hear my words.

El. Go, now! Inform your mother of all this.

Chrys. I do not harbour such an enmity to you.

El. You know the depth of shame you lead me to?

Chrys. Not depth of shame; I'd lead you into sense!

El. And must I follow your own brand of justice?

Chrys. When you are wise then I will follow you.

El. It's sad that one so eloquent should be so wrong.

Chrys. You have described in fact your own malaise.

El. What's that? You really don't believe my words are just?

Chrys. It's possible that justice might bring trouble in its train.

El. I do not wish to live by rules like that.

Chrys. If you must do this, you'll sing my praises yet.

El. I am intent. You cannot frighten me!

Chrys. That may be so, but won't you reconsider?

El. There is no fouler thing than false advice.

Chrys. You are intent on total disagreement then?

El. My purpose is not new. My mind has long been fixed.

Chrys. Well, I shall go. For you cannot endure
my words nor I commend your conduct.

El. Then go inside. I will not follow you,
not even if it were your heart's desire.
Stupidity it is to chase such empty dreams.

Chrys. If you do believe your choice is right, then act
on it. For when you come at last into
disaster, you will praise my words of sense.

Ch. The birds of the air above,
we see them care most lovingly
for the ones that gave them life
and gave them nourishment. Why cannot we do the same? For by the thunderbolt of Zeus and by the universal laws of Justice, such neglect will soon be punished. Voice infernal, sing below a piteous cry to Agamemnon and his son - of foul dishonour.

Tell them there is a sickness on the house; the daughters strive in enmity, their loving kindness shattered. All alone Electra is betrayed, because she loves her father's memory and sings of it, a tireless nightingale of woe. Her own death is as nothing, if she can destroy those twin battering Furies, Aegisthus and his loving woman. Electra is the model of nobility.

None of the nobly born would wish to win a name of shame by living shamefully. So have you picked a life of grief and spurned dishonour and won the reputation of the best and noblest girl. So may you live in future days with wealth and power over those who daily humble you. For I have seen the life you lead in deep distress, although you win rewards, observing Zeus' most important laws.

Or. Excuse me, ladies, did we receive good information? Have we journeyed as we should and as we wanted? Ch. What is it that you want that you come here? Or. I am looking for the palace of Aegisthus. Ch. This is the house. Your information was correct. Or. Would one of you announce our presence here to those inside; we are, I think, expected.
Ch. She ought to do it, if the most concerned should tell.
Or. Young woman, tell your friends inside that men of Phocis have arrived and seek Aegisthus.
El. No, no! Don't say that you are bringing clear proof, evidence of the story we have just now heard.
Or. I know nothing of your 'story'. Old man Strophios has sent me bearing news about Orestes' fate.
El. What news friend? Fear assails my heart.
Or. We bring his meagre remains within this urn; for he is dead and this is all there is of him.
El. O gods! At last I see your grievous burden, clear proof, at last, of our Orestes' death.
Or. If it is for Orestes that you weep and his misfortunes, know this vessel holds his dust.
El. My friend, I pray you, give it to me to hold within my hands, if he lies here, that I may weep for him and for myself and all our clan - and grieve for his ashes here enclosed.
Or. Whoever she may be, give her the urn. Her request comes not from one who bears ill-will, but rather from some kinswoman or friend.
El. Are these the remains of Orestes, the sole surviving man of those I used to love? The hopes with which I sent out are dashed. To welcome you back home - like this! I sent you off in beauty my Orestes. Would that I had died, before I sent you to a foreign exile, rescued you from death. For then you would have died on that same day and shared your father's tomb with him. Now you have died in exile, a stranger's death, unfriended in a foreign land and parted from your sister. I could not even wash away the dirt with loving hands, nor lift this sad burden from the all-consuming funeral pyre; that was my task - but someone else's hands performed the final rites and so you come to us, a scattering of dust and ashes in a tiny urn. I grieve for all the care I wasted long ago, the care I lavished on you lovingly. You never were your mother's boy so much as mine. I was your nurse and no one else within the house. My name was always in your mouth; you called me, 'sister'. All this is gone inside a single day. For you have died
and like a passing whirlwind snatched it all away. My father too is dead and gone, and I am dead with you and him and you are dead and gone away. Our enemies exult. Our so-called Mother is quite delirious with joy - and you sent frequent word to me that you would come, in vengeance sent against her; but the curse upon our house has ruined all of that, the curse that sent you home to me like this - not in the form I longed for - just dust and a useless ghost. Ah! Ah!

O pitiful dust - Oh! Oh!
You have come on a dreadful journey,
destroyed me utterly.
You have destroyed me, brother, so welcome me accordingly to your own hiding place beneath the earth that I may live with you for ever there. My life is empty of meaning now.
And when you were alive I shared alike with you and now I wish to die and share your tomb as well - for evermore. The dead at least can suffer no more pain or grief.

Ch. You were born of man Electra. Think of this - so was Orestes. Therefore, do not grieve too much. Death is the common fate of all mankind.

Or. I have no words to speak that have a meaning here. My tongue is paralysed.
El. What pain should you feel?
Or. Are you Electra who once was famed for beauty?
El. I am Electra and very wretched is my plight.
Or. I grieve for you and all your wretchedness.
El. It is not proper, sir, for you to grieve for me!
Or. I pity you that have been so abused, despised.
El. Your words describe no other than myself.
Or. I pity you - without a man, with such a life...
El. Why do you look at me so sadly, stranger?
Or. I did not realise what cause I had for grief.
El. I cannot see what makes you think like this.
Or. It's seeing you decked out with pain and grief.
El. And yet you do not see the half of it.
Or. You mean that there is worse than what I see?
El. Oh yes! I share my home with murderers.
Or. Whose murderers? What is this guilt you indicate?
El. My father's murderers. And I must be their slave.
Or. Who forces you to live a life of slavery?
El. My mother - in name alone; she does not act like one.
Or. What does she do? Does she use force or deprivation?
El. She beats me, starves me, generally abuses me.
Or. There is no one to help you or to hinder her?
El. Not one! My only hope's reduced to ashes here.
Or. Poor girl. I see you, and feel pity for your life.
El. You are the only man who pities me.
Or. I am the only man to come and share your pain.
El. It could not be you are some distant relative?
Or. I would answer, if I felt that I could trust....
El. You can trust them. Speak as if to trusted friends.
Or. Give back this urn that you may learn it all.
El. No! Please don't take this thing away from me.
Or. Trust what I say, and you'll make no mistake.
El. I pray you; do not take away my darling.
Or. You must not keep it
El. Please! Oh, please!
Orestes, I must be the one to bury you.
Or. You must not say that. You have no need to weep.
El. Shall I not have the right to grieve a brother's death?
Or. To speak like that is quite unnecessary now.
El. And does Orestes have so little love for me?
Or. He loves you well, but grief is not your role.
El. Not even when I hold his ashes close?
Or. This is not Orestes, except in trickery and guile.
El. Where is my brother's tomb? Where does he lie?
Or. He has no tomb. The living need no tomb.
El. My brother lives?
Or. If I have life in me.
El. Are you Orestes?
Or. I have this ring. It was our father's once.
Accept this proof of my identity.
El. This is the day...
Or. The day we yearned to see.
El. Yours is the voice...
Or. The voice you longed to hear.
El. And can I hold you by the hand?
Or. For evermore, my sister.
El. Friends, friends and fellow-citizens, for now
I am a citizen again - you see Orestes come
to life, his death an empty mockery,
a trick, no more, to bring him safely home.
Ch. We see him and are glad at heart, my child, so that the tears of joy escape my eyes.

El. Son of Agamemnon, str.
son of him I loved the best,
you have come at last,
are found, have come to see your love. 1210
El. We are together, but should hold our peace.
Or. Why so?
El. Better to be silent, should they hear inside.
Or. By the ever-virgin Artemis
El. I shall never think it right
to tremble at women, useless
burdens on the ground inside the home!
El. Yet you of all should know the power of war
inhabits women's hearts. For you have proof of that.
El. Ah! Ah! Ah! 1220
You bring to mind
my sorrow, by its nature
unforgettable and fixed.
Or. I know it, but, when the time demands
our work, we will remember what was done.
El. Time present and all time ant.
to come could justly echo my
complaints. Freedom won is hard to gag.
Or. I know - so keep your new-won freedom safe.
El. What should I do? 1230
Or. Restrain your tongue, until the time is ripe.
El. But you have shown yourself!
How can I keep silence?
I never thought to see you come,
beyond all hope...
Or. Well you have seen me now.
The gods ordained the time to come.
El. But if some god has brought you here, your coming is
beyond all present hopes of joy. 1240
I must give thanks...
Or. I do not wish to curb your joy, and yet
I fear excess of it will bring defeat.
El. Orestes, now that you have shown ep.
your face, have thought to make
this journey here at last, at last...
and seen my sufferings, I pray you, do not
Or.  Do not?
El.  Do not rob me of the comfort of your face!
     Do not!
1250
Or.  No one shall move me from your side
     and go unpunished.
El.  You grant my wish?
Or.  Of course.
El.  My friends, I have heard
     the voice I never hoped to hear,
     nor could I check my feelings
     when I heard it, nor my cry of joy.
     For now I have Orestes,
     clear before me.
     With the face that I could not forget,
     the one I loved through all my pain.
1260
Or.  Save time and words, Electra. Do not tell
     how bad our mother is and was or how
     Aegisthus drains our father's wealth
     and squanders it in aimless luxury.
     For such a tale would need more time
     than we can spare. Far rather tell me what
     I need to know, at this present point in time,
     where we may hide or show ourselves to stop
     our happy enemies upon their present course.
     Be sure our mother does not realise -
     because you look so happy that we two
     are come against the house, but grieve as if
     heartbroken by this story of disaster. When
     we have won will be the time to laugh in liberty.
1270
El.  Dear brother, I shall do exactly as you wish.
     You are the only source of all my joy
     and I would not consent to cause
     the smallest harm to you to benefit myself.
     Not so would I show proper gratitude
     to our protective deity. You know
     the situation here, I have no doubt.
     You've heard Aegisthus is away, but that
     our mother is inside the house. Do not be
     afraid that she will see me with a smiling face,
     all radiant. My hate for her has long
     since scarred my face, while your arrival fills
     my eyes with tears - of joy. My tears
     are uncontrollable for you have come
     back from the dead upon the very day
I heard you died. I am bemused by you and even if my father were to come, alive once more, I would believe the miracle and trust my sight. But you have truly come! Command me as you will; for left alone I faced but two alternatives, to save myself or meet a noble death in the attempt.

Or. Hush!
El. I hear the sound of someone from the house.

Paid. You stupid, stupid children, do you hold your lives of no account? Have you no native wit, that you don't understand how you are set about with deadly dangers? Had I not kept close watch on you from by the doorway, word of what you planned would have anticipated your arrival in the house. I took good care that that should be avoided. Go in now! Enough of long drawn cries of joy, insatiate, useless conversations. In such affairs delay is dangerous. We must act now.

Or. How will things stand, when I go in the house?
Paid. Well. You will not be known by anyone.
Or. I imagine you have said that I am dead.
Paid. Yes: those inside now count you with the dead.
Or. And are they glad at this? What do they say?
Paid. I will tell you when it's done. Their present state bodes well for us, especially their unholy joy.
El. Who is this man, Orestes? I want to know.
Or. Why, don't you know him?
El. No, no; I cannot tell.
Or. Don't you know the man, into whose hands you gave me once, to keep me safe?
El. Into whose hands... What do you mean?
Or. Under whose care, thanks to you, I was smuggled out, into the land of Phocis.
El. This is the only man, of all the house, that I could trust upon my father's death?
Or. This is the man, but no more questions now.
El. Gods, bless this day! Sole saviour of the house of Agamemnon, have you returned at last?
Are you the man who saved me and my brother from so many dangers?
Are these the hands, are these the feet that did such loving service for us? I do not understand how you could have deceived me with your fictions, though your mission was most dear to me! I greet you, father; for I see you as my father, greetings! How I have hated you and loved you, both to distraction, on this single day.

Paid. That is enough, my child. What happened in the years between will be the story of so many days and nights to come, Electra; you'll tell us everything.
Meanwhile, my friends, now is the crucial time to act! For Clytemnestra is alone.
There are no men inside. If you delay, your fight will be with men more skilled in arms and far more numerous than you.

Or. This is not the time, friend Pylades, for lengthy speeches, but for action. Let us then go in and quickly, pausing but to honour here the shrines of my ancestral gods before the palace gates.

El. My lord Apollo, hear their words with favour. Hear also me. For I have often come to you with offerings devoutly in my hands. And now, Wolfslayer, lord Apollo - with all my heart, I beg and pray and supplicate your help... and be our kindly friend, abet our plans and show to all mankind the punishments gods grant for dire impiety.

Ch. See where the lord of war breathes blood, advances on the house, is now beneath the roof, the hounds of hell are with him, that none can outrun, the vengeful ones.
My dream is soon fulfilled.
Stealthily he enters the house, vengeful Orestes, his
palace old in gold and blood,
bearing new-honed death
in his hands and armed
with guile; for Hermes cloaks
his path towards the imminent end.

El. Beloved friends, the men will soon have done
what must be done; but wait, be calm.

Ch. What are they doing now?

El. The woman decks the urn for burial.
Our friends stand by her side.

Ch. Why did you hurry from the scene?

El. In case Aegisthus comes upon us unawares.

Clyt. Ah!
My home is reft of friends!
Is filled with murderers.

El. Did you hear that scream? Listen! Listen!

Ch. I heard a cry should not be heard.
I shudder.

Clyt. Ah!
Aegisthus! Aegisthus! Where are you?

El. Listen! Listen! Yet again!
My son! My son!
For pity's sake...

El. And did you pity him,
or pity Agamemnon?

Ch. City! City! Ill-starred race of Pelops,
day by day your fate corrupts you.

Clyt. I am cut!

El. Again, again! Another cut!

Clyt. Again?

El. Again - for Aegisthus too!

Ch. The curse is at work.
The dead are born again.
Blood flows for blood.
And those long dead
can satisfy their thirst.

They come. Their hands drip blood.
The sacrifice to Ares is complete.
I cannot find fault.

El. All is well?

Or. All is well inside the house,
if Apollo's oracle was well.

El. The bitch is dead?
Or. Fear no more that you will suffer harm from her proud spirit.

Ch. Stop! Aegisthus is coming. I see him coming, joy on his face.

El. Go back inside and quickly now.

Or. And can you see him too?

El. Yes. He comes from the country with joy on his face.

Ch. Quickly now - inside the gates! And win yet more success.

Or. Have no fear.

El. Quickly, follow your plan.

Or. We will.

El. Leave everything out here to me.

Ch. It would be advantageous first to lull his ears with words of mock humility and so entice Aegisthus swiftly to his just punishment.

Aeg. Does any of you know where I might find the strangers from the land of Phocis, those who brought us news about Orestes' death? In some catastrophe of chariots? You! You, I mean! Yes, you!! What's happened to your former boldness? Since it affects you most you should be able best to tell me this.

El. I know what I know. How could I be unaware of what has happened to the closest of my kin?

Aeg. Where, then, are these men? Tell me that, at once.

El. Within. They have reached their hostess' inmost part.

Aeg. And is it true? They have described his death?

Electra Not just described. They brought the corpse to prove their tale.

Aeg. I may then look upon the body, if I wish?

El. You may indeed. It is not a pretty sight.

Aeg. It's not like you to give such joyful news.

El. I wish you joy, if this it is that gives it you.

Aeg. Enough! Throw wide the gates and show to all Mycenae and the men of Argos - should they have entertained vain hopes in former days, based on this man - yes, show them his corpse let them accept my government, my hand upon the reins, that they might have no need to feel my anger's force against their foolishness.

El. Already I have played my part. For time has taught me prudence and to yield to those in power.
Aeg. By Zeus, I hear your words and they have heaven's blessing - but, if that is tempting fate, I'll say no more. Unveil the face so that our kin may hear a suitable lament from me.

Or. You lift the covering. This is your task not mine, to look upon, address this corpse - with love.

Aeg. That's good advice; I'll follow it. You there! call Clytemnestra from within the house.

Or. She is already closer than you think. You need not look elsewhere.

Aeg. What is this?

Or. Are you afraid? You do not recognise it?

Aeg. Who are you that you have me snared and fallen in your trap?

Or. Don't you see that those whom you call dead are still alive, while those you thought yet lived...

Aeg. Are dead. I see it now. You are Orestes - you, the one that speaks to me.

Or. I am surprised your wit was fooled so long.

Aeg. And you have quite destroyed me. A word, perhaps?

El. By all the gods, not one word, Orestes, please!! No more talk! What possible advantage can he gain by this delay, when he has so embroiled himself in evil? Kill him now! And when he's dead toss out his corpse to feed the carrion birds and dogs that are his kin. For only so will I win vengeance for what's past.

Or. You will go inside and quickly; the issue now is not of words, but rather is of your life.

Aeg. Why take me inside? If your plans are noble, what need of darkness? For I am ready to hand for slaughter.

Or. Don't give me orders! Go inside that you may die upon the very spot you cut my father down.

Aeg. And must this house see all the ills of Pelops' line, both of the past and time to come?

Or. Yours, at least, Aegisthus; in this I am true prophet.

Aeg. Your father couldn't make a matching claim.

Or. You're full of answers. Time drags. Follow me.

Aeg. After you, boy.

Or. You must go first.

Aeg. You think I'll run away.

Or. No. But you must have no say in how you die.
Your death must be as bitter as I can make it. Instant death should be the penalty for those who break our laws. There would not then be so much wickedness.

Ch. O house of Atreus.
You have suffered much.
At last you walk in freedom.
This day's work assures it.