

MURDER IN ARGOS

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Murder in Argos

This is not an ancient play in modern dress. It is a timeless trial, presented to a modern jury.

SCENES	Act I.		Outside Agamemnon's Palace.
	Act II.	Scene 1	The same. A minute later.
		Scene 2	Agamemnon's grave. Some time later. Transformation to the Palace.
	Act III.	Scene 1	The same. A few hours later.
		Scene 2	Apollo's Temple. Sometime later.
		Scene 3	Athene's High Court. Sometime later. Transformation to the present.

PERMANENT SET A curved colonnade, back-stage, with shallow steps. The spaces show sky, stonework or doors, as convenient. Statues of Athene, Apollo, Hermes.

COSTUMES Clytemnestra is magnificently dressed. Agamemnon is somewhat battleworn. The chorus wear cloaks and tunics, suited to their status, for the main part of the action. The main interest should be in grouping of colours. After the transformation in Act III they appear in modern dress. A few suggestions are shown in brackets on the list of characters.

The Man with No Name wears black tights and singlet. The only change he makes for the last scene is to take off the top half.

CHARACTERS in order of speaking

DEINO	A merchant. Fat and middle-ages, with a cheerful, confident manner that breaks down easily when he is frightened or puzzled. (Business suit)
ZETHUS	A retired teacher. Old and rather doddering, and only intermittently confident in the reflective habit and authoritative manner of his youth. (Professorial tweed jacket with leather elbows)
A MAN WITH NO NAME	The anti-hero. He is somewhere between thirty and forty-five, a thin tired man who has always resisted self-knowledge but is never quite convincing in representing himself as the innocent victims of others.
GORTYS	A night-watchman. An elderly man with a peasant's simplicity and humour. (Overalls, ragged cardigan)
CLYTEMNESTRA	The queen.
MALIS	A servant at the palace. Middle-aged, practical, quick-tempered. (Blouse, skirt and overall - all different colours)
PHILYRA	Her friend. A young girl, dreamy and sentimental. (Cheap, light dress, sling-back sandals)
OEONUS	A soldier. An ordinary young man, seasoned by his military service. (Battle dress)
AGAMEMNON	The king.
CASSANDRA	A Trojan princess, now prisoner-of-war. She is roughly dressed but maintains her royal bearing. Even in her madness, she has nothing in common with Renaissance witches, but acts mainly in a mood of psychotic calm. (Simple clothes, clearly very expensive)
ELECTRA	Younger daughter of Agamemnon and Clytemnestra. Her resolute nature sometimes sorts oddly with the manner of a shy and lonely girl. (Slightly out-of-date country clothes)

CHARACTERS (continued)

AEGISTHUS	Agamemnon's cousin, Clytemnestra's lover. A second-rate man whose attempts to show himself off to better advantage usually come to grief. (Well-chosen, well-kept clothes - for somebody slightly younger)
ORESTES	The heir apparent. (Young executive's white shirt)
PYLADES	His cousin and friend. A young man of strong and simple feelings. Preferably very handsome. (Roll-neck sweater, generally athletic look)
CILISSA	Electra's nurse. An old but active woman. (Sunday-best clothes. Hat with roses)
THEBE	A medium. First, as a Trojan slave, drawn only by pity into the Argive horrors. Later, possessed by the furies).
PRIESTESS	Serving at Apollo's temple.
APOLLO ATHENE	The Gods are either masked or wear a stiffish make-up which makes them rather like their own statues.
VOICES	From microphones dispersed round the auditorium.

ACT I. Agamemnon's palace. Sunlight. The man with no name (ANON) runs on panting, from the wings.

ANON: Yes, I'm coming. I came as fast as I could. But it was all uphill.

(Looks up) Haven't you anything to say to me, now I'm here? All right. I could do with a rest. (Sits on the palace steps and sorts out his haversack). A piece of cheese. A photo. One sock. (Listens). Leave me alone, can't you? You made me swim for it this time. Give me a chance to dry out. A postage stamp, Lichtenstein, unused. There was a time when I wrote letters.

(To the audience). Do you ever hear voices? No, of course not. The doctor in my last place told me not to mention them. No one else hears them, he said, and if you go along with the rest it makes a better impression.

Listen? Oh, all right. But it's not just talk. It's those voices keep me on the move. I've been through five wars, in different places. It's not right. I only wanted a bit of peace; followed the others as best I could, hoping to keep out of sight. But that doesn't work either. Some of you said I was letting down my friends. Well, there was pressure. And what difference did it make? The others are dead too.

(Re-packs his things). I had some good times. Different girls. Lovely girls, some of them. But since my marriage broke up, I never like to be tied down. It's only natural.

(Listens). Leave me alone, can't you? Pick on somebody else. I'm nobody. Just one of the crowd. That's where I belong. Up at the back where I won't be noticed. (He runs off the stage and into the auditorium).

(The stage darkens. As the first announcement is made a spotlight moves over the audience and comes to rest on Deino and Zethus who appear to be walking to seats in the front row).

VOICE: Silence in Court. Silence in Court. The accused are summoned to show their case and you are here to pass judgement.

DEINO: What, me? Is he speaking to me?

ZETHUS: Be careful what you say. It may be one of them.

DEINO: They don't speak to ordinary people like us.

ZETHUS: These are not ordinary times.

DEINO: The priests are supposed to deal with all that sort of thing.

ZETHUS: But when the priesthood is corrupt

(The front of the stage lights up. The statues of the Gods are visible as in moonlight)

VOICE: The High Court is in session. Silence in Court.

ZETHUS: They are speaking to us, Deino. The Gods are calling on all men of good-will.

DEINO: We'll see about that. You take too much on trust. (He moves on stage and inspects the statues). No. It's all right. The same as usual. They haven't moved. They haven't come alive.

ZETHUS: These images were made by man. The Gods have chosen to speak in their own voices.

VOICE: Silence in Court. Is the jury now assembled?

VOICES: (From microphones dispersed through the auditorium). Present. I'm here all right. Yes, here I am. Here. Right. Just made it. Reporting for duty. Here. Present please.

DEINO: They all sound like foreigners. What's going on?

ZETHUS: Hush.

VOICE: Silence in Court. Three members have not yet answered. Zethus, retired teacher, pensioner of the royal family.

ZETHUS: I am here.

VOICE: Deino, merchant, purveyor to the royal palace.

DEINO: (Falls on his knees). Of, God, I'm sorry I spoke. I'm here, here on my knees, yours to command. I've always tried to run my little business honestly and I've never asked more than forty per cent. At least, not lately.

VOICE: (From various directions. Deino gets up and gawps). Silence in Court. A man with no name. A displaced person. Nationality unknown. Place of residence unknown. Date of birth unknown.

DEINO: Well. He won't find it easy to give an account of himself.

ZETHUS: If he's here.

DEINO: I've never seen him about. At least, not to recognise. And sooner or later, all the travellers find their way to my shop, down by the bridge.

VOICE: A man with no name. Displaced person.

DEINO: The foreigners too.

VOICE: Silence in Court. Where is the man with no name?

ANON'S VOICE: I am here. But I ask to be excused.

VOICE: Come forward, man with no name. Make your statement to the Court.

ANON: (Enters). I've had enough trouble. I want to be left in peace.

ZETHUS: Your presence is required, stranger

ANON: Who are you? What do you want?

DEINO: A fine question, from a man with no credentials. My friend and I have a position here. We're both well-known citizens, owners of property.

ZETHUS: And the Gods have honoured us. They have summoned us to some great task.

ANON: What do you mean? Have you been listening to my voices?

ZETHUS: It was the voice of God spoke to us.

ANON: I have no God.

DEINO: I knew he was a barbarian.

ANON: Are you in it too? What's the game? What are you going to do to me - you and your Gods?

ZETHUS: You have nothing to fear from us. Here there is a God who protects the human family; and stands surety for the trust between host and guest.

DEINO: Travellers Always speak well of us. We're good, honest people.

- ANON: I never saw much difference between good and bad. When you're dying by inches, the bad ones come round to watch - they can't miss the pleasure. But the good ones go away. They can't stand the pain . Makes no difference to me.
- ZETHUS: We can treat you better here. We have our troubles, like everyone else, but at heart we are law-abiding people.
- ANON: The law's worst of all. Make a mistake, and the law's got you. You're forbidden to have a nose of the wrong shape, or a skin of the wrong colour. It's against the law. And don't try blaming your parents. That proves it. If they ask you a question, don't answer. Whatever you say, it's against the law. An you mustn't think too much. It shows in your face and any sort of expression is against the law.
- DEINO: Where can he come from? I never heard of a country with no law; and no religion.
- ANON: I have no country. They took it away, by laws. And religion's out of date. It makes no sense. I don't want to join anything. Give me something to eat and a mug of wine - or water would do - and I'll be on my way. Don't tell me what's going on here. If I once get involved, I'll be in trouble again.
- ZETHUS: But we offer a welcome, to you and to your friends.
- ANON: (Glancing at the audience). They are no friends of mine. I know them well. There's nothing but trouble over there. War, revolution, cruelty, injustice. That was what drove me away. Give me a chance. I'm only looking for a quiet place
- VOICE: Members of the jury. We are considering a crime. As witnesses, you have a part in the action.
- ANON: Then all of them must be counted out. They only came to watch. And count me out too. I haven't done anything.
- VOICE: And as agents, in your time, you have an interest in the judgement. We rely on your intelligence and your natural sympathies.
- ANON: They don't give you much option.
- DEINO: It's inconvenient, of course, particularly for me.
- ZETHUS: Please. You have been asked to give the whole of your attention.
- VOICE: Close the doors of the courtroom. The evidence will be presented. The town is waking.

(A starlit sky appears back-stage. Gortys stands immobile on a low platform as the three other characters group themselves at the side of the stage. This is the chorus position - for them and others. But any member of the chorus who is taking part in the action moves about quite freely).

GORTYS: You're up early. Did you come along to help me count stars? I've been at it ten years now - a watch-dog chained to my post. You'd never think it, but those stars are all moving. They go round and round, following the season. Winter swallows up summer. Spring tramples down winter. I kept expecting something new. But every year they repeat the same arrangement; and that's life. The same thing happens in families. My father wanted me to learn a trade. But here I am an unskilled labourer like him.

I've got good eyes, you see. That's why the queen picked on me to watch out for the beacon. After ten years of it, my head's aching. I'll be glad when it's over. I mean, you begin to wonder. What's your opinion, Sir. Is this war going to go on for ever?

ZETHU: The queen speaks with confidence.

GORTYS: Clytemnestra? Yes, it does you good to hear her talk. Some of them call her the regent. That's a man's name. But you can understand a man. But when I'm by myself I get down-hearted. Sometimes I walk up and down. Sometimes I snatch a bit of sleep. Only when there's a war on, you get strange dreams. I'm afraid to shut my eyes.

We were better off when we had a proper king. I was thinking about it last night. There was a heavy dew and I was cold and wet. I'm still cold and wet.

ZETHUS: One day, the king will come back and warm our hearts.

GORTYS: I've almost given up hoping. But I pray sometimes. (Prays quite seriously). Oh, God, please send us the fire in the sky and put us out of our misery. (Stops praying). The fact is, I'm fed up with waiting for the bloody beacon. (Moves off along his platform).

ZETHUS: (To Anon). The king has been away at the war for ten years, with his brother Menelaus and all the other Greek kings.

DEINO: It's all very well for the watchman to grumble. Everyone has had to make sacrifices. There's a war on.

ZETHUS: All the young men were drafted. We meant to go, too.

GORTYS: They wouldn't have us. Too old for campaigning, they said.

- ANON: You were lucky.
- DEINO: Someone had to keep things going on the home front.
- ZETHUS: And this is an unusual war. The civilians have suffered too.
- GORTYS: (Shouts) Hullo, there. The signal. They've lit the beacon. (Jumps from the platform). Look, out there on the island. Can't you see it? And there's another. Just across the bay. Wake up everyone. Rouse the palace. Call Clytemnestra. Tell her we've won the war. (Lights go up in the palace, etc).
- DEINO: Victory at last.
- GORTYS: With the God's help, my master has triumphed.
- ZETHUS: May the Gods bring him safely home.
- GORTYS: Come home, Agamemnon. Home, where your palace walls guard their secrets in silence. It's not my place to speak, but if you know what I know, you'll understand. The king is coming Long live the king. (Runs into the palace).
- ZETHUS: This should mean peace, with honour.
- ANON: That's never as good as it looks.
- ZETHUS: At least we have done our duty. We resisted aggression.
- ANON: That's what everyone says - when they send out an expeditionary force.
- DEINO: The Trojans began it. Everyone knows that.
- ZETHUS: It was a just war. We just pray for a holy peace.
- DEINO: There you can trust Clytemnestra. She understands the importance of religious ceremonies. Look, she is coming herself to make the sacrifices. Whatever anyone says, she never fails to rise to the great occasions.
(Clytemnestra comes out of the palace and ceremoniously prays before the statues during the following speeches).
- ANON: I've seen all this before. But what good does it do? The enemy prays too. He says the same prayers in the same words.

- ZETHUS: But his guilt stands between him and his Gods. The Trojans were guilty and the Gods cannot accept the sacrifice of those who have given them offence.
- DEINO: Even the smell disgusts them. The Trojans were wasting their money.
- ANON: And you?
- ZETHUS: God was on our side.
- DEINO: Though we did have some trouble at the start. I didn't like it.
- ZETHUS: The Gods demanded the sacrifice of Agamemnon's daughter.
- DEINO: Clytemnestra's daughter too. She didn't like it either. I wish she'd tell us what's actually going on. We sent out a thousand ships. I want to know how many are still afloat.
- ANON: In the finish, nobody wins a war.
- ZETHUS: Keep your doubts to yourself. The queen is celebrating a Victory.
- ANON: Seems quite a big celebration. They've got fires going all over the town.
- DEINO: He's right, Zethus. Now why should she do that? It's not like her to be more generous than necessary.
- ZETHUS: She has ordered a general sacrifice to the Gods of life and of death and to the lesser Gods who watch our daily actions.
- DEINO: She thinks of everything of course. But what's the hurry? Why hasn't she made an announcement.
- ANON: You could ask her.
- ZETHUS: She chooses her own time.
- ANON: They always keep you on edge for the official statement. It's no use worrying.
- ZETHUS: Because we have known evil, we fear evil.
- ANON: I see what you mean.
- DEINO: And she must know what it is we have to fear. Queen Clytemnestra! We are your loyal subjects

ZETHUS: We serve you in love and honour. Set our minds at rest, if you can.
Tell us the news from Troy.

CLYTEMNESTRA: (Turns and comes forward). Joy comes with the morning.

ANON: Well?

CLYTEMNESTRA: In plain words, Troy is ours.

ZETHUS: I could cry like a child, for joy.

CLYTEMNESTRA: These tears prove your loyalty.

DEINO: Is the news confirmed?

CLYTEMNESTRA: Unless the Gods deceive me.

ZETHUS: The Gods give us dreams.

CLYTEMNESTRA: Do you think me a dreamer?

DEINO: When was Troy taken?

CLYTEMNESTRA: This very night, night of a splendid dawn.

ZETHUS: How can you know?

CLYTEMNESTRA: My messenger stood ready. The God of fire, leaping
from peak to peak, set his lightening first on Mount Ida. Then on
the Island of Lemnos, or Mount Athos, Messapius, Cithaeron.
Do you see it now, ablaze on the summit of Arachne? That is
Agamemnon's signal.

DEINO: But what exactly does it mean?

CLYTEMNESTRA: They are shouting in the streets of Troy. Within the uproar
you can hear two sounds, distinct as oil and water. The Greek cry of
triumph, the Trojan scream of despair. We have fought like eagles.
Our victims lie where they fell. Mothers and wives cling sobbing to
their dead. The old men mourn the flower of their city's youth; and
weep for their own captivity.

Our men have spent the night fighting, looting, annexing the best
billets, rifling the stores. They are the guests of dead men. They can
do as they like, each man for himself. No discipline, no parades - but a
dry bed, a warm blanket, and the sound sleep of the just.

Will they wake to remember there were Gods, once living here? Even a captured city has its holy places. Restrain yourselves from sacrilege, you Greek heroes! You have forgotten the dead, but their vengeance is sudden. On the stormy seas, a good conscience will serve you better than plunder.

(Her exalted mood passes as she remembers her audience). Like other women, I ask only domestic happiness. May good come out of evil. I have suffered greatly. I await the hour of release. (Exit to the palace).

ZETHUS: The heart of a woman; the authority of a man. The Gods have been kind to us. They have brought down the mighty.

DEINO: And once the king comes home, we can get back to normal. Just a matter of waiting a week or two.

(The three men settle at the side of stage R. Malis and Philyra come in L. Malis is carrying a bundle of washing, which she rests on the ground as she talks. Bits fall out sometimes and Philyra puts them back).

MALIS: I enjoyed the holiday, but it's time I did some work. Look how the washing's piled up.

PHILYRA: I said I'd give you a hand.

MALIS: Well, don't chatter all the time. We've won the war. All right. They got what they deserved. All right. The king's on his way home. That should be all right.

PHILYRA: I saw Paris once. He was very handsome.

MALIS: You can't call a man handsome when he's dead of gangrened wounds. You rot first and die later. Well, he got what he deserved. Adultery's one thing but the way he went on was something else again. It's not proper to eat a man's dinner and then make off with his wife.

PHILYRA: One of the girls told me he made love to her all through the state banquet. At first, she pretended not to notice.

MALIS: Quite right too.

PHILYRA: Then he spilt some wine on the table and wrote a message with his finger. 'I love you, I want you'. There's something very

attractive about that sort of man.

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MALIS: If you like impudence. I'd smack his face for it. Come to that, there are half-a-dozen pious faces in this town had the mark of my hand on them, once upon a time.

PHILYRA: 'I love you, I want you'. It's good. Original too. Most men don't say a word. They just do it.

MALIS: Then at least you know where you are. It's the good talkers you have to watch like conjurors. 'It's here It's here it's gone'. But of course everyone knows the Trojans haven't any morals. It's because they live in the East. The good, solid people are all Westerners, like us.

PHILYRA: All the same, it's dull.

MALIS: Better safe than sorry. And mind how you talk about Paris to the other women. He did us all a bad turn. And think of poor Menelaus, with no wife in his bed. Only his dreams to keep him warm.

PHILYRA: At least he had his memories. The things that happen to me aren't worth putting in a dream.

MALIS: If you want romance, you've got to be rich. The working classes get the other end of it. Helen gets her romance - and my neighbour loses a husband and three sons. If she's lucky, some pal of theirs will bring back a few ashes, shaking about in an old pot. She puts a good face on it. 'He died like a soldier,' she says. She says it every time. 'A good death,' she keeps on saying. 'What's good' I tell her, 'about dying for another man's wife'.

PHILYRA: But they all say it was a great victory.

MALIS: The kings can have their victory. Conquered territory - with our men under it.

ANON: That's the spirit. The young lady has - a lot to learn.

MALIS: Were you addressing us? Don't pay any attention, dear. We don't know him.

ANON: I am a wanderer, rejected by Gods and men, but you you

(Philyra gazes at him with rapture. Malis intervenes).

MALIS: Come along. We've got work. (They go out).

DEINO: We got the news quickly. But it takes a long time to repatriate an army. Give me a call when anything happens. (Retreats to the chorus position.)

ANON: Don't worry. That's the time when they always tell you to move on. (Retreats to the chorus position).

(The lights go down and up, Time has passed)

ZETHUS: (Formally, in the middle of the stage). Since the signal first came from Agamemnon, public opinion has changed. The gods have not yet spoken, but the people, secretly or openly, condemn the action which entailed very heavy losses.

(Malis and Philyra come on as before).

MALIS: It must be weeks now since we started preparing the reception. This is the first chance I've had to get on with my own work. Look how it's piled up.

PHILYRA: I'll give you a hand. There's nothing else going on.

MALIS: You're very quiet these days. What's on your mind?

PHILYRA: It's so dull waiting. There's nothing to do - until the soldiers get back.

MALIS: I've been kept busy. New carpets, new curtains, dying and weaving against time. Gold thread on crimson, the royal crimson they make from the sea-beasts with the blue blood. No expense spared. 'My Lord and Master deserves only the best,' she keeps on saying.

PHILYRA: How lovely it's going to look. I hope I have a chance to see it.

MALIS: You'd be sorry to see some things. We've got the princess working along with us. Electra. Poor girl, she's still a child and her mother treats her like a slave. She ought to have gone with her brother.

PHILYRA: But why doesn't he come home, now the war's over?

MALIS: Don't ask me. If the queen finds it convenient, he'll be back. If not, not. She's one of those women, her children don't come first, apart from the eldest girl that's been dead ten years. She doted on her. A lovely girl, too. This one's the spitting image, though it hasn't done her any good, same hair, same voice, and now she's just the age her sister was when they fetched her away to be married. That was what they said. Poor young thing, she was laughing and crying with

excitement. Well, there you are. It's not often things turn out the way you'd expect. But everyone said she acted like a real princess, when they'd got her there on the altar, and the king stood over her, ready to strike. She just said the one word - 'Father.

PHILYRA: Iphignia died for her country.

MALIS: I'd sooner have a man to keep me warm at night. Any sort of man, let alone a prince and a hero. I don't envy our royal family. Apart from the work and responsibility, it's a risk. You might say, poor people like us are better off. The big men ask for it. Look at our kings. They expect the Gods to take notice of them; and they can't move head or foot without getting into trouble. 'Father' she said. And they all thought, when they saw his face, he'd never have the heart to do it.

PHILYRA: But then he killed her.

MALIS: There was a war on.

PHILYRA: And now the war's over. Everything's going to be different. They are all sailing safely home across the sea.

MALIS: Fool! What makes you think they're safe. Come on. We've a lot of work.

ANON: Look! There's someone coming up from the beach.

PHILYRA: It's a man!

MALIS: What's he got in his hand?

ZETHUS: An olive branch. Deino! The Herald of Peace.

PHILYRA: And look over there. There are soldiers. All marching this way.

DEINO: At last! Something more substantial than a bonfire.

MALIS: It does begin to look like it.

ZETHUS: Thank God.

ANON: That's right. You say your prayers. But don't forget, there's always someone else asking for more trouble. Your God, whoever he is, should put a stop to it.

(Enter Oeonus).

OEONUS: So here I am, after ten years, home. Everything else went wrong, but this isn't a dream. I'm one of the lucky ones. I've come back alive.

God bless our country, land of hope and glory, by the mercy of Almighty Zeus our Ruler and Defender. (Bows to the statues of the Gods). I salute you, lady, daughter of his wisdom and power. O glorious Athene, now that our madness has passed, put us back in our right minds. And you too, Apollo, if you've finished killing us off, help us to get well. And to you, Hermes, patron of my own trade, fraternal greetings from one Herald to another.

Well, friends, you saw us go - now you see some of us come back. Agamemnon's done you proud. The Trojans are finished. No buildings left in the town, no crops on the scorched earth. What more could you want from a victory? And mind you give the commander-in-chief a big welcome. He expects it.

ZETHUS: Welcome, Oeonus.

OEONUS: Greetings, my old friend. For ten years, I've been worried about getting killed. Now that I'm back in my own place, I'll die happy.

PHILYRA: Were you very homesick?

OEONUS: Horribly. Now that the load's off my mind, I'd like to burst into tears.

ZETHUS: There is grief in every joy. Your home-coming, soldier, may prove more bitter than your exile.

OEONUS: What's going on?

DEINO: We had our troubles too. And our strong men were overseas.

OEONUS: What ? Was there fighting here?

ZETHUS: No open war. But, as you say yourself, Death could be sweet.

OEONUS: Did I say that? After all I've been through, I'd sooner a bit of life.

PHILYRA: Did you have a lot of adventures?

OEONUS: You might call them that. Fagged and dirty, sleeping in a dug-out? No sleep at sea, under a rag of blanket on a bare plank? Your stomach heaving - like the sea. Well, we did our best to grin and bear it. And the camp was worse. On swamp, in contact with the enemy, the air as wet as the ground, mildew on our clothes and fever in our blood, hair caked with mud. In winter, the wind came

straight off the snow-fields. The birds in the trees froze solid. We knocked them off with an axe. In summer, it was like a baker's oven. The air was too heavy to move - even the waves were crushed flat. Well, we mustn't grumble. It's over.

MALIS: All over for some of them.

OEONUS: Oh, forget it. We only live once. Why waste time picking over the past? No need to make too much of it either way.

ZETHUS: You have played your part in the greatest was of history.

OEONUS: Very likely. And the war to end wars. And they told us what we were fighting for. But none of that matters. We went on fighting because we were a fine army, led by a great general. But whoever you are, God gives the victory. Make no mistake about that.

MALIS: That's the best way to look at it.

ZETHUS: The only safe way.

(Enter Clytemnestra)

CLYTEMNESTRA: Well? So these sceptics have given you a welcome? I hope it was hearty. They showed less confidence in me. I have done what was necessary, without their support. Up and down the country your victory, and mine, has been celebrated.

But your story must wait. The king will tell me himself. It is a great day for any wife when she flings open the doors for the returning warrior. And you can take him this message. Tell him to be quick. We are all sick with longing. He will find here a woman whose constancy has never failed, a good and faithful steward serving no interest but his. All his possessions are safe. I have slept alone. What man could give me the natural pleasure of women? I'd as soon be a slave in the smithy, forging a bright sword. (She goes into the palace).

OEONUS: That's a strange way of talking. I never heard a respectable woman put it so bluntly.

ZETHUS: She always speaks, like the poets, ambiguously.

DEINO: You have to get used to it. Seen in the right light, her statements are generally correct.

MALIS: She is only thinking of her own man. What happened to the rest?

PHILYRA: Where's Helen?

OEONUS: Helen? Helen?? Nobody knows.

MALIS: Isn't she with her husband?

OEONUS: I saw Megelaus take her. She's with him all right. Somewhere. His ship was lost. Our whole fleet scattered in a storm. Waves as high as mountains, a wind to tear you apart, ice-cold rain - and a black night. We were all out of control, a flock of sheep driven by a mad shepherd. We rammed one old hulk. Ripped the side off. It was all over in a couple of minutes.

When the sun rose the storm had blown itself out. Not a single ship was in sight. The sky was blue and the sea was like a green pasture, with flowers.

PHILYRA: Flowers?

OEONUS: The faces of the dead men. Well, we'd been spared. The wrath of the Gods had passed up by.

ZETHUS: They are gorging themselves on vengeance.

MALIS: All our ships but one. When is it going to end?

OEONUS: Your guess is as good as mine. That's my story. The longest battle in history - over a girl. (He goes out).

MALIS: She should never have been called Helen. You can tell it's a devilish name. A bad start for anyone. I wouldn't think of running away from a rich house and a warm bed. And I can't see the attraction of a long sea voyage.

PHILYRA: It was love. And they had a wonderful wedding, with singing and speeches. Some people have all the luck.

MALIS: Those Trojans can be trusted to do themselves well. But soon enough they were singing a different tune. There's something about good luck always makes it turn sour.

DEINO: Pride goes before a fall.

ANON: And power corrupts.

MALIS: It makes you think.

ANON: But there's nothing anyone can do.

ZETHUS: We are all small people. We must take what life sends. But great men make choices. The king chose to buy a fair wind with his daughter's life.

PHILYRA: And now he has the world at his feet.

ZETHUS: He has proved his greatness and can yet show his wisdom. He can choose to lay his power and glory at the feet of the Gods. He] is coming to meet the fate he has chosen as his own.

(Noise of brass, and shouts. Gortys runs on)

GORTYS: The King!

(Agamemnon enters, with entourage. Cassandra is there with Thebe, but not prominent).

ZETHUS: Greetings, Agamemnon.

DEINO: From your loyal subjects and true friends.

ZETHUS: Friendship deals in plain words. Our praise is free from flattery.

DEINO: We are the people you can trust.

MALIS: Not like some, all smiles and compliments. Watch out for them. it's unlucky to have too much of a good thing.

ZETHUS: Some of us voted against the wear. We all deplored the sacrifices you made. But we are glad to see you and wish you a happy homecoming.

AGAMEMNON: First, greetings to my country and to my country's Gods. The victory was mine but I give the glory to them. Your warning, friends, runs with my own instinct. I take no special pride in my success and have no wish to excite the envy of disappointed men. Remember that I have had a great deal of experience. I am not easily deceived by fine words or dismayed by blunt speaking.

In due course, our public business will be deal with, democratically, at a public meeting. I value my people's advice and rely on their support if we find evidence of conspiracy. The punishment will be severe; the means will be discussed at leisure. First, I must visit my household. I must wash off the dust of travel - and the guilt of blood. Then I can offer the customary prayers to the Gods of our great nation. They blessed my mission and now bless my return. May the God of Victories prove steadfast, now and for ever.

Ask the queen if she is ready to receive me.

GORTYS: She is coming.

MALIS: It's all arranged. She wants to meet you here.

AGAMEMNON: Well, I suppose it is a ceremonial occasion. A royal occasion, one might say. But, believe me, there are moments when I wish I was an ordinary man, a man who can walk into his own house in the ordinary way.

(Enter Clytemnestra, attended by Cilissa)

CLYTEMNESTRA: We meet in public, Agamemnon. I am not ashamed to appear, before my people, with a loving greeting for my husband. Youth may blush. I have grown old in his absence. We know his ordeal - held for ten years outside the walls of Troy. Now he must hear mine.

I can only speak simply and objectively. I have lived ten years a widow, grieving in an empty house, rumour my daily bread. We had news only of disaster. Again and again, we heard he was wounded. We began to think he was riddled with gaping wounds, like a net held up to the light. Several people had actually seen him die. They reported the details. He was buried, under three feet of earth, here, there, and anywhere. In moments of blackest despair, I found a rope for my own neck. But I was caught in the act. I was made to live, by force.

This is only by way of explanation. We have a son, Orestes, heir to your wealth and power. I sent him to stay with your sister until the cessation of hostilities. As her husband said, your life was in peril abroad and factions at home were awaiting their opportunity. I hope you feel I was right to take his advice. My own feelings hardly counted. What is one mere drop in the sea of grief?

I have wept for you, Agamemnon, through the long nights. I have watched for you with aching eyes. In snatches of sleep I dreamed I saw you dying - horribly, unnaturally. Through it all I kept my light burning - the light to welcome you home.

How sweet the day after a night of storm. My sufferings are past. My cup of happiness is full. Welcome, husband, guardian of our common good, anchor of our hopes and pillar of this royal house. I have thirsted for you, as a parched traveller thirsts for spring water.

Spread out the red carpet - the royal crimson, here, for your master's feet. (To Agamemnon). I am well aware that the Gods grudge us happiness. Weak men, for this reason, shrink from public honours. But, I have no misgivings. I have suffered enough. And you know in your heart that I give you no more than your due. You are a hero now, raised above the common clay. Come. All is ready. The just Gods brought you home and will deal justly with you.

AGAMEMNON: Greetings, Clytemnestra, wife and regent. It was a long campaign - and a long speech. I'm only a simple soldier, unused to effeminate touches, and I can't allow you to behave like a Persian slave. You and I can afford to wait for the praise that will come from outside the family. My position is assured - no need to parade it. In all modesty, I accept my unique place among men. But I am not going to be tempted by the splendours that belong to the Gods. Let the Gods, if they choose, receive me as one of themselves. Whatever their intention, I must enter their presence as a suppliant. They have shown their good-will by giving me riches and power. I beg them for one more gift - peace of mind.

CLYTEMNESTRA: We are not beggars. Our resources are inexhaustible. You have waded in blood, but that crimson is finite. The sea, cradle of our race, yields its stains for ever. I have acted royally, and spared neither trouble nor expense. I know very well the cost of a fair wind and a successful voyage. Now your journey is accomplished, you have reached port. This is your resting place after the heat of the day. You will sleep well through the long, long, cooling night.

A VOICE: Father?

AGAMEMNON: Whose voice was that?

A VOICE: Your daughter's

AGAMEMNON: (Alarmed). I had a daughter once. . . .

CLYTEMNESTRA: Tell them we are not to be disturbed.
(Exit Cilissa).

MALIS: They never allow the princess in front of the house.

DEINO: Electra is just the age of the daughter that died.

ZETHUS: And they all have too much of a family likeness.

AGAMEMNON: (Recovering). It was fate made me a man of war. Let fate receive me as a man of peace.

CLYTEMNESTRA: (Formally). May your prayers be granted. (In her usual style).
And mine. I am asking only a very small thing.

AGAMEMNON: There are questions of principle involved.

CLYTEMNESTRA: And something has frightened you perhaps?

AGAMEMNON: Wise men are acquainted with fear. I know too much. There
is blood on my hands.

CLYTEMNESTRA: Yes.

AGAMEMNON: The blood of battle. Let me first wash it away, as the Gods
command, in holy water.

CLYTEMNESTRA: Imagine King Priam in your place. What would he do?

AGAMEMNON: Oh, they revel in luxury, His people expect it.

CLYTEMNESTRA: And you, too, are the prisoner of popular opinion?

AGAMEMNON: I have a great respect for the common man.

CLYTEMNESTRA: A dangerous doctrine. Small men envy greatness. Teach
them at least to respect it. Show your strength.

AGAMEMNON: Must I fight another battle?

CLYTEMNESTRA: Your victories are legion. Grant me this one. Come.
I have made my dispositions. The sacred bath is ready.

AGAMEMNON: Remember you are a woman, not a general.

CLYTEMNESTRA: You are a hero. Why do you act like a tyrant?

AGAMEMNON: You misjudge me. I know well enough that the power of
command rests on the art of compromise. The end can justify the
means; and if it's a matter of supreme importance to you
(To Gortys). Here, get these boots off. I can spend the rest of
my life showing the Gods that I know how to practice humility;
and this at least is a token of my respect. Besides, I don't like
spoiling your expensive things. (To the chorus). You see that
girl? Look after her. I am proud of the way we treat our prisoners
of war. After all, as I tell my troops, they are human and have
human feelings. And the High Command voted me the best of the
bunch.

Now I am ready to come in.

CLYTEMNESTRA: (As he enters the palace). This is our triumph.

DEINO: No doubt about it, he won this war.

PHILYRA: So they gave him the King's daughter.

MALIS: She doesn't know her own luck. Looked after by the top dog.

CLYTEMNESTRA: God, I thank you. Let fate take its course. (Exit).

MALIS: It all sounds all right. But there's something gives me the creeps. (To Zethus). Just try arguing me out of it. You're clever. The trouble is, all the good arguments cut both ways. In the finish, there's nothing for it but to trust your instinct.

PHILYRA: I've never seen such lovely rugs.

ZETHUS: Be careful. It is consecrated ground.

MALIS: They come from the Temple.

ZETHUS: Dedicated to the Gods, and to the sacrifices they have accepted.

PHILYRA: I thought it was all splendid. I don't understand what she says, but she talks beautifully. It makes you feel something important is happening. I don't see what could go wrong now.

ZETHUS: The Gods are just.

MALIS: Do the right thing by them, I always say, and they'll do the right thing by you.

ANON: Does anyone ever agree what the right thing is?

MALIS: Most of us manage. Apart from the ones who think the world of themselves.

ZETHUS: Good men find ways and means.

MALIS: There's always a chance, up to the last minute. But you can't bring back the dead. That's final.

PHILYRA: But what about us? Are we supposed to do something?

ANON: Drift with the tide, my dear, it's no use kicking.

(Clytemnestra comes out of the palace).

CLYTEMNESTRA: Come in, Cassandra. No one bears you any malice. On the contrary, I have arranged for you to join the other household slaves and play a suitable part in the rites of expiation. You would be well advised to take this unusual opportunity. I can see you are proud of your royal blood, but remember, the divine Hercules was a slave once. These things happen and you are very fortunate to find yourself in a noble household. The so-called merchant princes have no idea how to treat their inferiors. Here tradition is observed, and in a generous spirit. (Cassandra makes no response).

MALIS: The queen is speaking to you.

ZETHUS: She is waiting for an answer.

PHILYRA: You must do what she says.

DEINO: We all have to be realists.

ANON: She has chosen the weapon of the oppressed - silence.

CLYTEMNESTRA: Is she mad enough to oppose me? Or is it possible that human speech is unknown in her country?

PHILYRA: Say something.

DEINO: It's the best offer you'll get.

MALIS: Don't just stand there.

DEINO: Go on in, like a good girl.

CLYTEMNESTRA: I seem to be wasting my time. The fire on the alter is slight and the last rites of sacrifice are still to be completed. If you understand me, come at once. If not . . . one of you try making signs. (Deino makes signs, to which Cassandra pays no attention whatever).

MALIS: She certainly looks like a foreigner.

PHILYRA: Almost like an animal.

ANON: A tortured face is inhuman

CLYTEMNESTRA: Did she lose her wits when she saw Troy in ruins? She seems quite inaccessible. Perhaps it's some kind of fit and she will come to her senses in due course. I have tried to reason with her, as you see, but the time is running out. (She goes into the palace).

MALIS: I feel quite sorry for the poor young thing.

DEINO: Come along, girl. Life's hard, but you can't alter it.

CASSANDRA: (Takes a faltering step). This is dry land. And this
(She sees the statue of Apollo). No.

DEINO: Now what's wrong?

CASSANDRA: Take him away.

MALIS: What an idea!

DEINO: Blasphemy!

ZETHUS: It is the God of the morning. You should hide your face. What can he know of the black night of despair.

CASSANDRA: I can recognise Apollo. It is he brought me to this place, and to this condition. He is planning to destroy me.

MALIS: They told us she had the gift.

PHILYRA: Does it still work, with slaves?

CASSANDRA: You are the God of journeys. Why did you bring me here? This is the house of death.

DEINO: Nonsense! It's Agamemnon's palace. Didn't your God tell you?

CASSANDRA: I believe what I see. These stones have marks of blood on them; the blood of little children.

PHILYRA: But that's true in a way.

DEINO: It's common knowledge. She could have heard it anywhere.

MALIS: Ask her how she found out what Agamemnon's father did to his brother's boys.

CASSANDRA: If you have eyes to see you can read it here. The whole story. One of the boys was spared. He lived. He planned. He made a long journey. And to what end? A crime even more horrible, more unnatural. And there's his victim. Why doesn't he defend himself? Draw your sword! Call the son of the house!

DEINO: This is too deep for me. Besides

CASSANDRA: Yes, I know he can't hear. He's too far away. And have you noticed that all religious services are rather alike? For the expiation of sin, a man bathes in water, a bullock drowns in its own blood. But the same ritual does for man and beast. At funerals, too (Screams). Look at her!

PHILYRA: I don't see anything.

CASSANDRA: The hunt is up! She stalks her quarry with a net. (Quietly). They say man and wife are one flesh. And that leeches drink blood.

PHILYRA: What does she see?:

MALIS: She's white as a ghost.

DEINO: Can't get her breath.

CASSANDRA: (Formally). The ceremonial bath is of course an essential feature.

PHILYRA: I don't understand.

CASSANDRA: Help, help! There's too much water. Drag him out. She's got him tied and bound. Watch. She strikes. Did you hear that splash? There's treachery.

PHILYRA: She's trying to frighten us.

DEINO: These fortune tellers never deal in anything except disaster. They only want to make an impression.

CASSANDRA: You see the woman with him? Do you know who she is? Yes, of course you know. Come and ask Apollo why I must be in at the death.

DEINO: This is crazy.

CASSANDRA: (Calm once more). My brother Paris made a disastrous marriage.

DEINO: Of course.

CASSANDRA: But have you ever thought about rivers? Scamander was the river I loved when I was a child. And there are rivers in hell too. My father was a great man. But all his sons are dead and as for his daughter

ZETHUS: The Gods show her no mercy. She foresees some horrible fate for herself.

CASSANDRA: I would like you to understand me. Let me prove my good faith. This royal line breeds guilty men in every generation. Their spirits haunt the house, and they are rejoicing now in a new crime. He lived, he planned, he made a long journey. He was spared. Spared for an adulterous passion, spared to live a traitor. Am I right?

DEINO: You know more than you should.

CASSANDRA: And I envy your ignorance. But the gift was a love-token from the God Apollo. I am condemned to see the truth - and to be branded as a liar.

DEINO: There's something in what she says.

CASSANDRA: Then listen. Your master is mine, too. I have no other protector. I love him, as you do, for his greatness and his humanity; but not blindly. A hero whose innocence has never ripened in experience. A lion among men, yet avid for greater fame, a child in the hands of fate. You yourselves heard the cry of triumph. Take warning. You will see your king, Agamemnon, dead at your feet.

DEINO: But this is going too far.

PHILYRA: Make her keep quiet.

ZETHUS: These are dangerous thoughts. You must try to control them.

MALIS: You'll bring us bad luck.

CASSANDRA: The truth stands. I have no power over it.

DEINO: Oh, God, please bless us all

CASSANDRA: It's too late for praying. Someone's ready to kill.

ZETHUS: What is his name?

CASSANDRA: Idiot!

ZETHUS: I hear what you say, of course, but

CASSANDRA: Do you think, like to queen, that I don't understand words. You will find that I use them very exactly.

DEINO: Just like to Delphic oracle. You can see what it means, afterwards.

CASSANDRA: Have pity on me, Apollo. Death is waiting for me. The lioness couples with the jackal; and the king of beasts must pay with his blood, and mine.

You made me a prophet. Here I resign my office - a prophet without honour, wandering gipsy, court fool - no loss to me. Take back your gifts. Soon death takes all.

There is a God who watches over us all. Though I fall to the ground. I shall never be forgotten. This crime will be expiated. Then - I see nothing.

Weep no more. Death, I salute you. Take me with one swift stroke; and let me sleep. (She goes up to the door of the palace).

PHILYRA: Come back!

ZETHUS: Make use of your gift. Avoid what you see.

CASSANDRA: You have been my good friends. But I must keep my appointment.

PHILYRA: Put it off, for a little while.

CASSANDRA: Death has summoned me; and I am ready.

ZETHUS: Fate itself is honoured by your courage.

CASSANDRA: You give me high praise, yet it marks the depth of my misfortune.

ZETHUS: You have chosen to die nobly.

CASSANDRA: So did my father and my brothers. (But, as she sees through the door, she recoils).

ZETHUS: What is it?

PHILYRA: She's choking.

MALIS: When you're sick at heart, the best thing is to vomit.

CASSANDRA: Murder! I smell murder.

DEINO: The beasts are all ready for the sacrifice.

CASSANDRA: This is the smell of doomed man.

ZETHUS: The queen loves exotic incense.

CASSANDRA: Look, I am shaking. But I have never been frightened of shadows. You will know what I have seen when all is over for me. Then, be my witnesses. I would like to be remembered as someone who told the truth.

PHILYRA: It's so sad to be dead.

ZETHUS: Sadder still, to see yourself dying.

CASSANDRA: This is sunlight. I am seeing the God of the day for the last time. What can I tell you? Are you happy? Then I am sorry for you, because you will lose your happiness. But I am not sorry for myself. (Enters the palace).

PHILYRA: I don't understand. Everyone wants to be happy.

MALIS: And the ones who get all the luck never know where to stop.

ANON: Success is really a kind of addiction.

MALIS: Still, say what you like, our kings bring it off.

DEINO: Sooner or later the Gods make up the accounts.

ZETHUS: Death pays all debts.

DEINO: The murdered man pays. The murderer lives a debtor.

MALIS: And what's done can't be undone.

PHILYRA: Do you think any harm is going to come to us?

ANON: Nobody's safe.

PHILYRA: But we haven't done anything. Why can't we be happy?

ZETHUS: We none of us have a legal title to happiness. Our birthright is to serve justice.

PHILYRA: That seems very unfair - if you can't count on getting it.

AN OBSCURE CRY FROM THE PALACE: Help?

PHILYRA: What was that!

VOICE: Help! Murder!

ZETHUS: The king!

PHILYRA: Oh, quick, do something.

DEINO: Stop them! Where's the guard.

MALIS: Come on.

DEINO: We need some witnesses.

ZETHUS: We must act. But how?

ANON: Are you frightened of a woman?

ZETHUS: She is not alone.

DEINO: Those two always meant to come out on top.

MALIS: And keep everyone else down.

DEINO: We were free men yesterday. Now we are slaves.

ZETHUS: We are still free to choose death.

ANON: You think so. But think carefully. When it comes to the point, you don't feel so sure.

(The lights within the palace doors go on. Cassandra is in the act of falling on the dead body of Agamemnon. Clytemnestra lowers her sword. A general sigh of horror. Clytemnestra turns and regards the chorus. Daring them to move or speak. Utter silence as the stage lights go out).

ACT II Scene 1. The same. A few minutes after. The two dead bodies are decently disposed and Thebe kneels mourning by them. Clytemnestra has come forward and Aegisthus stands behind her. The chorus are standing exactly where they were in the last act - as if they have spent the interval completely stunned.

CLYTEMNESTRA: First, I admit that I lied to you - without remorse. The occasion required it. My enemy feigned friendship and I met him in fair fight. His weapon was treachery, mine was deceit. Over the years, my plans have been maturing. Now you see them perfected. His mind was at ease as he rose from the sacred water. My net was at hand. I swaddled him in fold after fold. He could neither fight nor fly. Then I struck him, once, twice. You heard two cries. The third time he was silent. That was my revenge, my thank-offering to the God of Justice, my tribute to the God of the dead; As you see, I was splattered by his blood; and I glory in it. This is the wintry storm that feeds the new life of spring.

Now you know the truth. Will you share my triumph? (Nobody moves or speaks). Do as you like. I rejoice. This man's crimes were stored in his own household like poisoned wine. He has come home to drink it.

PHILYRA: He was your husband!

CLYTEMNESTRA: And who are you? A little girl, giving advice to young brides? I know what I am doing and I am not afraid. This dead man was my husband. This skilled hand was the divine instrument of justice.

ZETHUS: You were born a human being. What made you a monster?

MALIS: I've heard of magic drugs that change men and women into ravening beasts.

DEINO: The country won't stand for it. She'll be driven out, with curses.

CLYTEMNESTRA: So you are my judges? You condemn me to public disgrace? To exile? Have you forgotten the other occasion when you failed to invoke justice? You saw this man's crime and became, by your silence, his accessories. Judge him now - a man who killed his own child, just as they slaughter sheep.

DEINO: There was a war on.

CLYTEMNESTRA: Yes. His war. His fleet was landlocked by contrary winds. He was having trouble with his allies. He was losing his hold on his troops. A big demonstration was needed, to boost morale. So he

made that monstrous sacrifice.

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ZETHUS: He was the servant of the Gods.

CLYTEMNESTRA: A man's answer, logical, pious - and false. You are lying to yourself, as he did. His ambition came first. To advance it, he bargained with the Gods and paid their price - the daughter I loved, the first child of my pain. You never condemned him. Yet now you have the audacity to judge me. What are your sanctions? What forces do you command? Fight, if you must. Destroy me, if you can. But remember, old man, it is not too late for me to teach you your place.

ANON: She's clever.

ZETHUS: Her crime, too, has its price.

DEINO: And in the end, all debts have to be paid.

CLYTEMNESTRA: You are talking like tradesmen. I deal in a higher justice. I have avenged a crisis against nature. I have killed my treacherous husband. And I choose now as my royal consort our true friend Aegisthus, protector of my household and my country. Serve him well. My power is vested in him. (Murmurs of discontent).

AEGISTHUS: Citizens, on this great day (The murmurs become hisses).

CLYTEMNESTRA: (Furious). He is your master now. Your old master, my adulterous husband, this great lover of women, lies now for the last time with the gipsy slut he shared with his own troops. They have got what they wanted - the girl whose body served both Gods and men, and the man who scorned the marriage bed and lusted for extraordinary pleasures. There they are, together. This consummation gives a zest to my triumph.

ZETHUS: I should have died with the master I loved.

PHILYRA: I want to cry.

DEINO: He was a great king and a fine general.

ANON: He fought for a woman. Now it's a woman kills him!

MALIS: It was all Helen's fault in the first place. You can't count the men she killed.

ZETHUS: And the tale is not yet complete.

CLYTEMNESTRA: You must learn to live in the present. The time is past for putting all the blame on Helen.

- ZETHUS: We shall never be free from the curse of her beauty. The divine beauty that led all her lovers to destruction.
- CLYTEMNESTRA: You make too much of it. Poor, silly Helen, They desired her because she was lovely. They loved her because she was theirs. They laid down their lives for their rights - property owners to the last.
- ANON: It's quite true, nobody dies for love. All the large-scale battles are about ideas, generally someone else's
- MALIS: My neighbour lost a husband and three boys. And what business was it of hers?
- DEINO: They died for their country and their king.
- ZETHUS: A king whose royal blood was tainted with the ancient curse - the murderous hatred that lives on from one generation to another.
- CLYTEMNESTRA: Now you are beginning to see reason. Hatred breeds hatred. We have thirsted for murder.
- ZETHUS: What end is there? Does God sanction undying hatred?
- MALIS: Well, he didn't stop it.
- ZETHUS: We loved our king.
- CLYTEMNESTRA: Your guilty king, heir to his father's guilt.
- ZETHUS: Still, we loved him.
- CLYTEMNESTRA: And do you think I have never known love? You see me as I am, hardened and embittered by experience. You say I am no longer a woman, but I was a woman once. A girl, playing with her first baby, in love with her young husband, this prince who seemed as honest as the day, and steadfast as the stars. Then a woman weak with love as she sees the beauty of her eldest daughter, makes her ready for her wedding, prays for her eternal happiness
- I was nicely caught. He killed her. Treacherously, as I killed him.
- ZETHUS: This is beyond all reason. The mind trembles.
- MALIS: You simply don't know what to think.
- ANON: It's no good trying to sort out right from wrong.

ZETHUS: Time will show.

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PHILYRA: It's terrible. Nothing will ever be the same again.

ZEWTHUS: We have lived to see the destruction of all we loved. Our dead king lies there, unburied, unmourned

CLYTEMNESTRA: You have no responsibility for it. I killed him, and I will see that the remains are suitably disposed of. And his daughter, no doubt, will give him a suitable welcome in the next world.

ZETHUS: We know God's law. The wages of sin is death.

CLYTEMNESTRA: Yes. I have served the law, according to my lights. Now my rage is spent, and I make a new covenant with God. Let the past be buried. I have no other ambition. I am content, now, to live in obscurity, at peace with myself.

AEGISTHUS: (Coming forward). I have been a silent witness of this moment of truth. Justice has triumphed and confirmed my faith in the God who takes pity on human suffering. My cousin there has paid for his sins and for the sin of his father - your king who brutally destroyed his brother and his brother's seed. Of those innocent children, I alone was spared. I took up the feud. Laid my plans abroad and came home to see them accomplished.

ZETHUS: We do you this justice, Aegisthus, you have not insulted our dead.

DEINO: He claims he planned the murder. Then he shares the guilt.

AEGISTHUS: I am master now in the ship of state. Your place is below. Old as you are, you sea-lawyers will find yourselves under strict discipline. You had better respect your new government.

ZETHUS: Your government?

ANON: I've met your sort. Chair-borne brigadiers.

MALIS: Mucking about with other men's wives.

PHILYRA: The real men who've got what it takes. They do the fighting while you stay safe at home.

DEINO: Ready with a knife for their backs.

AEGISTHUS: It was not my war. And I advise you to forget past injuries and behave in a proper way to those who are set in authority over you. If you prefer to act like naughty children, I shall know how to correct you.

ZETHUS: What is your authority?

MALIS: A man who hides behind a woman. Why did she do all the dirty work?

AEGISTHUS: She played her woman's part in our joint campaign. I was suspect, because of my father's wrongs. Now I have reoccupied his territory, with all its vast resources, I intend to administer them, for the benefit of all good citizens.

DEINO: The king is dead.

MALIS: Long live the king.

ZEWTHUS: The king over the water

PHILYRA: Orestes!

AEGISTHUS: Treason! Call out the guard.

CLYTEMNESTRA: Stop! We have seen enough bloodshed. Citizens, go quickly to your homes; and you, Aegisthus, my dear king and husband, put up your sword. You must accept your fate, friends, as I have accepted mine. I can understand how jealously you guard your rights and privileges. But remember, they are the benefits that come to you as members of society

PHILYRA: Where is Orestes?

AEGISTHUS: He is dying, somewhere, of a mortal sickness - hope deferred.

CLYTEMNESTRA: Leave them alone, my darling. Our task is to govern, not to fight. They will learn. In time. We have a common interest - peace and prosperity. I count on your support, citizens.
(Exit Clytemnestra and Aegisthus).

ANON: Speaking for myself, I never went in for politics. And we none of us like doing the dirty work. We need a strong government, that's not afraid of it. We're not responsible, after all. What do you say?

MALIS: Well, I've got to consider my job.

DEINO: And I've got my business.

ZETHUS: Collaboration, on purely civil affairs, is sometimes the right course.

ANON: Right or wrong - why not give it a try?

PHILYRA: I want to wait for Orestes.

MALIS: Don't be silly.

(They all stream into the palace. Thebe speaks for the first time.)

THEBE: The free men have chosen. They prostrate themselves before the God of Expediency. I am a captive and a slave, bound to obedience. I await the commands of greater Gods.

(CURTAIN)

ACT II. Scene 2. Some time later. Agamemnon's tomb. The grave is marked by a crude statue of Hermes. The place is either hidden, or removed to a distance by grass which vaguely suggests foliage. The time is early morning.

(Enter Orestes and Pylades).

ORESTES: Look, Pylades, my father is not alone. Here is Hermes, who cares for the souls of the dead. Be my ally, Oh son of Almighty Zeus, Present my case in the courts of heaven and fight for my cause, here on my native earth. I need your help. I am not long past boyhood - a banished son come back to claim his birthright.

Keep watch, friend, while I speak to my father. Agamemnon king father I was a child when they murdered you. I was far away. Too late, I present to you, as a sign of grief, something of my own. This lock of hair. Listen to me, father. Hear me and less my desperate undertaking.

PYLADES: Hst. Someone's coming.

ORESTES: Women, dressed as mourners. The girl leads. Is it my little sister.

PYLADES: She looks like you

ORESTES: Keep back in the shadows. We must see what they are doing.

(Enter Electra, Cilissa and Thebe. They carry offerings to the grave and set them down).

ELECTRA: Well, we have carried out the orders. I am only an agent. We are all slaves.

CILISSA: But our tears are our own. Though the years pass, my sorrow is still fresh.

THEBE: The queen weeps only for fear. She wakes from sleep in terror - because of her dreams.

ELECTRA: These formalities are supposed to put everything right.

THEBE: They can never reach the depths of the past - or the depths of the living souls.

CILISSA: I remember the old days. We trusted our king then. We obeyed him because we loved him. Now everyone's afraid. No manners, no

principles, no faith. They're all out for their own pleasure, like dogs after a bitch.

THEBE: God's justice works slowly.

CILISSA: But murder will out. A man's life must be paid for. Once you've taken it away, you can't put it back - like virtue.

THEBE: I am not one of you. I come from Troy, where thought was free. Now I think like a slave, circumspectly. But I weep, sometimes, for the sorrows of mankind.

ELECTRA: You are my servants but you are older than I am. I need your advice. What can I say when I pour the libation? My mother's words were 'for my well-beloved husband', but that's false. And the usual form 'remember the donor' goes too near the truth. She gave him his death.

Shall I say nothing, and match dishonour with contempt? Help me to decide, as you help me to hear the daily burden of resistance. You can speak safely - to me. Tell me what I am to do.

CILISSA: Outside the palace walls, I can give you an honest answer. As you pour your libation, pray for all who love Agamemnon.

ELECTRA: All? Nobody loves him now.

CILISSA: You love him - and so do the enemies of Aegisthus.

ELECTRA: You and I. Who else? All my friends are here.

CILISSA: You must pray for the wanderer too. Pray for Orestes.

ELECTRA: Ah, yes.

CILISSA: And then pray for the murderers.

ELECTRA: How can I?

CILISSA: Ask for a judgement on them.

ELECTRA: Do I pray for justice? or for retribution?

CILISSA: The simple words are best, 'Death to the murderers'.

ELECTRA: Life and death are in the hands of the Gods. Dare I ask for death?

CILISSA: Why not? It is God's law.

ELECTRA: Hermes! You are the interpreter between God and man. You know the roads down to the kingdom of the dead. Take my message to the Gods who rule there, over the frozen past; and to our great mother the earth, who guards in secret the seed of a new spring.

Tell them I want to speak to my loving father, the king, Agamemnon.

(She pours her libation). Father, your children have no home. Our mother took Aegisthus; and we were abandoned. My brother Orestes was outlawed. I was kept. They wanted me on their side. But they are murderers and adulterers, and I told them so. Now they have made me a slave. I am not the daughter of the house. I have no hope of marriage.

This is my prayer. I want to be the opposite of my mother. I want to be good. Then I want my brother to come back, and then I want vengeance. Let them see that I can curse too, but with righteous curses.

Last, I want you to bless us both, my brother Orestes and me. In the name of the heaven, and of the earth, and of victorious justice. Amen.

CILISSA: Listen, Agamemnon. We are here to mourn our loss. But faith endures. We know our deliverer will come. The kingdom will be restored to its rightful heirs.

ELECTRA: The earth is drinking. My father has received our gifts. And look, here is another - a lock of bright hair.

CILISSA: Whose?

ELECTRA: Oh, look at it.

CILISSA: What can it mean?

ELECTRA: Feel it. Look at the colour and the way it lies. You have seen it before.

CILISSA: It is like yours; and your mother's

ELECTRA: In our family, we all look alike. But my mother never did this. It's not hers. It's not mine. It's not my sister's.

CILISSA: Are you thinking of your brother.

ELECTRA: Yes. This is Orestes' hair. He is alive. He found some way of sending it. He is thinking of us.

CILISSA: When I remember that Orestes can never come back, my heart bleeds.

ELECTRA: Mine bursts with anger. I weep only for rage. But can I hope, too? This signal should tell me something. And look, here is another. Footprints. When we were children, my footprint fitted his. And so it does still. But this one is different.

(Orestes and Pylades come forward).

PYLADES: Your prayers are powerful. They are answered.

ELECTRA: When? How?

PYLADES: Through the years, you have prayed for one man.

ELECTRA: How do you know? Who?

PYLADES: Orestes.

ELECTRA: Then . . . they have not been answered.

ORESTES: Look at me.

ELECTRA: I am afraid of being disappointed.

PYLADES: You have nothing to fear.

ELECTRA: You are mocking my misery.

PYLADES: No. We share it.

ELECTRAS: My brother was a boy when I saw him last. Is one of you really Orestes?

ORESTES: You know my footprints, and the lock of hair. Is the whole man so strange? (He takes her hand). Look, this is where the hair was cut - you could fit it back. And this is the first piece of cloth you ever wove. Don't you remember these wild beasts?

(Electra embraces him with passion).

CILISSA: The royal son and heir. Now we are saved. Our kingdom will be restored.

ELECTRA: My dear, dear brother. All my love is yours. The daughter's love I gave to my dead father - and will never give my mother. A sister's love, too, for the sister I hardly knew. And then I love you for yourself. My life has been abject. But when my spirit was breaking, the

thought of you saved me from despair. May the God of justice uphold you and give you strength.

ORESTES: Oh, God, we have a great task before us. We are very young, orphaned and exiled. But, in our misery, we honour you. Let us live to honour you in triumph.

CILISSA: Be careful, children. Someone may hear and betray you to the queen.

ORESTES: I am acting as Apollo directed. He has shown me my duty - and my only hope of happiness. Invisible forces are present in this visible world. A crime against their nature sets the whole earth quaking. Pestilence rots man's flesh and eats into his bones.

That crime was committed here; and I am heir to it. No penance can free me and no offering. So long as the murderers live, I am guilty too. As I inherited the crime, so I inherit the penalty.

I fear my inheritance. I fear madness. A mind groping through dread, the natural senses mocked by apparitions. Guilt and remorse visible, dreaming and waking. The life-blood running with venom, a body fouled and denied the means of cleansing. A thing of disgust no living man can receive under his roof or welcome at his table. Alienated from myself, outlawed from human friendship, forbidden the service of the Gods, I shall know life in death.

My father must be avenged. The command of the God compels me; so do his threats. Then, my own grief seeks action and the political position requires it. I have lost my birthright and have come to make good my claim. I call on my father's people to pass judgement on the murderers.

CILISSA: This law of heaven forbids murder. They must pay the penalty.

ELECTRA: But the courts of earth are corrupt. Our men are no longer free to speak the truth.

ORESTES: They know right from wrong. My father trusted them.

ELECTRA: While he lived, they were his friends. They complained openly of my mother's tyranny and licence. But now he is dead they are silent - slaves to Aegisthus.

CILISSA: Oh, God of nature, give us our heart's desire. Oh, spirit of our great king, rouse your people to acclaim the royal prince.

ORESTES: He should have died in battle, nobly, honoured by all men living.

CILISSA: And received with honour by the dead.

ELECTRA: While they died dishonoured.

CILISSA: Their fate is to come. And you are it's chosen agents.

ORESTES: I have never needed a father as I need him now.

CILISSA: Call him!

ORESTES: Can he still hear me?

CILISSA: His body was burned with fire but his spirit is not consumed. His power lives on in his name. Call him! His spirit will come back. His anger will pursue the murderers. He will give you his courage.

ELECTRA: Father, we are helpless. What shall we do?

ORESTES: Father, we have been wronged.

ELECTRA: By our own mother.

ORESTES: Who wronged you.

ELECTRA: With an unnatural death - and a shameful burial.

CILISSA: Dishonoured, mutilated

ELECTRA: Your royal line cursed by your own wife.

ORESTES: But we have kept faith with you.

ELECTRA: She has forgotten that her own savage blood runs in our veins.

CILLISA: And that God himself protects a father's rights.

ORESTES: Oh, God, receive our supplication.

ELECTRA: Oh, father, give us your courage.

ORESTES: Your only son needs help.

ELECTRA: Your only daughter pleads for it.

CILISSA: Come back to us, royal spirit. Come back.

ORESTES: Give us your strength, father. Give us your authority.

CILISSA: The invocation is working. The king's spirit is with you.

ORESTES: I feel a new strength. My father will guide my sword.

ELECTRA: We shall prevail. Nature and Fate rise to defend our weakness.

ORESTES: We ask for justice, father.

ELECTRA: And for the power to enforce it.

CILISSA: You are well prepared. Now is the time for action.

ORESTES: Yes. I must act. But first, I should make sure of my ground. Why is she suddenly making this attempt - too little and too late - to atone for her crime?

CILISSA: She knows well enough that this is not the way to pay for a man's life.

ORESTES: Yet if she attempts it . . . that's pitiful.

ELECTRA: How can you weaken now?

ORESTES: Must strength be merciless? Dare I ignore the moment when her soul thirsts for expiation? I am her son. I have prayed for strength, but I should have prayed for eloquence. Her lover planned the murder - let him pay. Let her present him to my father's people. Let them judge where justice lies.

ELECTRA: You are dreaming, Orestes. You are seeing a world of your own. It can never exist here.

CILISSA: The queen has chosen her consort.

ORESTES: But she remembers her husband. These are her gifts to him.

ELECTRA: Small gifts - from a great fortune. Our father's fortune - ours - given grudgingly.

CILISSA: It was not remorse moved her.

ORESTES: What then?

THEBE: It was fear.

CILLISA: She is well content with her inheritance - but for her dreams.

THEBE: Last night she woke screaming.

CILISSA: Shouting for lights.

THEBE: To dispel her soul's darkness.

- ELECTRA: And for the same reason, she sent these trivial offerings.
- THEBE: When she had given the order, she was a little calmer. We were there, members of the daylight world, with our skilful hands and our dumb, servile faces. She told us her dream.
- CILISSA: We were all silent. She was talking to herself. The palace was blazing with lights, but she saw nothing. Her eyes were fixed on the distance.
- THEBE: On the unseen, on the shadows behind the torches.
- ORESTES: Tell me her dream.
- THEBE: 'I dreamed' she said 'that I was delivered of a monster, a fanged serpent. I held it in my arms and rocked it like a new-born baby. Then I saw in my dream that my baby was crying for food and I gave it my breast'.
- ORESTES: (Groans).
- CILISSA: Its sharp teeth met in her nipple. Her milk was flowing - and her blood. She woke in terror.
- ORESTES: I have lived in that dream. I was once held at her breast.
- ELECTRA: She has cast you off now. Aegisthus enjoys her.
- ORESTES: Then I I am that monster. I sucked her milk, now I must draw her blood.
- THEBE: It was her dream, Orestes. Must you make it yours?
- ORESTES: She is beyond redemption, beyond the reach of pity. I can never present her case to the justice of men. I am her executioner.
- CILISSA: That is the right decision - the only decision. Tell us how we can help you.
- ORESTES: (Very practical now he's made up his mind).
We are a very small force. We must rely on treachery, as she did. Electra, you must go back to the palace and behave as usual, as if nothing had happened. You and I, Pylades, must present ourselves at the door, as strangers, travellers
- PYLADES: We can both speak in patois, like the shepherds of Parnassus.
- ORESTES: And we'll say we're wool merchants from Phocis.

THEBE: You will find the household distraught. The queen has not been able to forget her dream. No one will answer when you knock as the palace gates.

ORESTES: All the better. We are guests. The master of the house owes us hospitality. Aegisthus will do himself no good by keeping us waiting. His credit will suffer; and he'll have no time for excuses when I see him sitting on my father's throne. Before he can say who are you?' he's a dead man.

ELECTRA: I shall see that you get to the right place at the right time.

ORESTES: Good, And the rest of you, use your judgement. But be careful not to betray your thoughts.

Hermes, give your blessing to my good sword. Watch what I do and testify what I have achieved. Come.

(They all go out. Malis and Philyra walk across the stage. Malis is carrying one very small, very white garment).

MALIS: Everyone has some different ideas about how to get things white. I swear by running water. But it's a long walk to the river.

PHILYRA: Well, I kept you company.

MALIS: And you're better off with me than with some others I could mention. It's no use looking impudent. You should put a proper expression on your face when you pass by a grave.

PHILYRA: To someone buried under there?

MALIS: Certainly. That's where the old king, the queen's first husband, was laid to rest. Well, rest people call it but he must be turning in his grave to see what goes on now.

PHILYRA: At least there's some excitement sometime. They've doubled the guard and given them new uniforms. And I always like men in uniforms.

MALIS: I thought you had a young man.

PHILYRA: I did. But he got a job as the king's personal servant. And it doesn't leave him much time. He's always at the palace.

MALIS: I should be there too. Come on. I'd like to drop in on my neighbour. She never gets her things as white as this. She has a lot of washing

- three babies by her second husband, two of them twins. But she swears by sunlight. I swear by running water. . . (Exeunt)

(Enter Zethus and Deino).

DEINO: When it suits you, do call at my little shop by the bridge. I've a few little things from Egypt - less austere than our traditional taste, but very charming and well in keeping with contemporary trends. You might find a pleasing addition to your famous collection.

ZETHUS: You are flattering my bits and pieces. As I get older, and take less interest in public life, I do find a great satisfaction in contemplating objects of beauty. And, as you know, I'm not likely to grudge the price of something that really appeals to me.

DEINO: You are one of my most generous customers. And I'm happy to say that trade in general is brisk. We are living in an expanding economy and the palace has given a useful lead. They do understand how to create confidence - and that's what counts. Money, I sometimes think, is only a symbol.

ZETHUS: They've worked wonders, certainly. And when you consider how poorly they were supported I myself regretted the absence of the heir apparent.

DEINO: Hush. You have a pension, just as I have a business. Neither of us can afford to take sides.

ZETHUS: I would rather think that age had given me a more balanced judgement. There is always a great deal to be said on all sides, but to tell you the truth I am not anxious to hear it. There was a time when the princess brought me her troubles; but I had to discourage her. There was nothing I could do for the unfortunate girl. She was simply upsetting herself by brooding on her wrongs and preparing indignant speeches she was never going to make.

DEINO: She should have been married. That's the best way of keeping a woman quiet.

ZETHUS: She said they forbade her to marry. But I can understand her mother's difficulty. It's not easy to find a husband for a woman whose bitterness shows on her face.

DEINO: And not so young as she was. Like the rest of us.

ZETHUS: God willing, we still have a few more years to enjoy this period of stability.

DEINO: And it's pleasant to feel that it's going to last our time. (Exeunt).

(Anon and Philyra come on from opposite sides).

PHILYRA: You! I'd almost forgotten you.

ANON: You'll remember. (He hugs her).

PHILYRA: I've missed you.

ANON: I've been working. The king keeps you at it.

PHILYRA: You look a bit tired and cross.

ANON: I was up before dawn. We had a lot of excitement. But by and large, it's a good place, with pickings.

PHILYRA: Are the girls nicer than me?

ANON: Some of them. (Hugs).

PHILYRA: Do you ever see the princess?

ANON: Sometimes. (Hugs).

PHILYRA: Is she prettier than me?

ANON: Yes. And she doesn't talk so much.

PHILYRA: But why don't you ever talk to me?

ANON: Hush, Isn't this what you wanted?

PHILYRA: (Breaking right away). I only want to be loved.

ANON: Thank God I work for a man. You can't please women. There's always something you want, and if you don't get it you turn nasty.

PHILYRA: Everyone thought we were going to get married.

ANON: I'm not a marrying man. I told you. What do I want with a woman always at my elbow? You're too clever at finding a man's weak spot. You let out the fire at his hearth, you take away his manhood, one way or another you finish him off. It's against nature. A man's got to live - and you'd think he might be allowed a little enjoyment.

PHILYRA: I've always been kind to you.

ANON: So what do I owe you? You enjoy it, don't you. (They hug in the usual desperate style. Sounds of knocking and shouting).

PHILYRA: What's that?

ANON: Forget it.

PHILYRA: What's going on at the palace?

ANON: They're all crazy today. I've been on the run long enough. Let them knock. (Hugs).

ORESTES: (From darkness backstage). Hullo, there, open up. (Knocks). Are you all deaf? (Knocks). Open the door. Is this the way Aegisthus treats his guests? (Rain of knocks).

PHILYRA: I think you ought to go.

ANON: You want to get me back to my slave's work?

PHILYRA: What else can you do?

ANON: I was born a man. It's life that has made me a slave. There was a time, girl, when the Gods spoke to me. They wanted me, they said, for some important job. But the days run on, one thing leads to another, and I seem to have forgotten what I was supposed to do.

PHILYRA: I'm sorry.

ANON: Sorry? When it's all your fault. You should have left me alone. (He waves her one way and runs off the other. The lights in the palace go up. Orestes and Pylades are waiting at the door. Zethus and Deino come in and stand at the side by Philyra. The door is opened by Gortys.)

GORTYS: What's all this?

ORESTES: We are waiting to be let in.

GORTYS: Who are you? Where do you come from? What shall I say?

PYLADES: Tell them we are travellers, bringing important news.

ORESTES: We hoped to be welcomed as guests. Night is falling.

PYLADES: Fetch the lady of the house.

ORESTES: Whoever is in charge. Your master, if you have one. There is

man's work to be done. (Enter Clytemnestra, with Cilissa, Thebe and Electra in attendance).

CLYTEMNESTRA: Welcome strangers. I am sorry we kept you waiting, but we can offer you royal entertainment. As for your business, it is for you to choose when you wish to discuss it.

PYLADES: We are merchants from Parnassus. We have wool to sell. But that's not the point. On our way, we fell in with a man who asked us to pass on a message. 'If you're going there,' he said, 'tell them their son's dead: Orestes, the name was'

CLYTEMNESTRA: Orestes. I am overwhelmed. So sudden. So unexpected. Are you certain of the facts?

ORESTES: The authorities there are waiting to hear what his parents wish them to do with the ashes.

PYLADES: They've got them in a fine bronze casket. They've always felt, they say, that Orestes was one of themselves. And he would be welcome there, in death as in life. But they'd like to consider the feelings of his own people.

ORESTES: Do you happen to know what their attitude is? Would they like the ashes returned to the place where he passed the first few years of his childhood.

CLYTEMNESTRA: I am his mother. Forgive me, friends, this news It is not the first time I have lost one who was dear to me. And each loss leaves one more cruelly bereft.

ORESTES: I am sorry. You must regret that he died so far from home.

CLYTEMNESTRA: It was not necessary. The choice was his. I sent him out of harm's way. But, since the danger passed, I have begged my child to come back.

ORESTES: He was not the child you remember.

PYLADES: But you can still receive him - as he is.

ORESTES: We have given you grievous news. Your offer of hospitality was generous, but we are reluctant to abuse it.

PYLADES: Though we are told that Hercules was royally received of Admetus on the very day of his bereavement.

CLYTEMNESTRA: Why do you remind me of Hercules, who brought back the dead? I have no wish to grudge you your night's lodging. A messenger is rewarded even for news of disaster. (To Electra). Will you take our distinguished visitors to the guest rooms and see that they are well looked after? I must discuss with my husband what we should do now. (Electra and the two young men go out, followed by Clytemnestra, Gortys, Cilissa).

ZETHUS: I have prayed for detachment, but this strikes me to the heart.

THEBE: You remember Orestes as a child. I never saw him.

ZETHUS: Child or man, he had little to hope for on earth. May the Gods receive him with kindness.

CILISSA: (Enters). Have you warned them to be silent?

THEBE: They need no warning. They have no suspicions. And who heeds warnings? (Exit).

PHILYRA: What has happened? What is it you are keeping to yourselves?

DEINO: When the women start whispering, sensible men go about their business. I might take some bales of wool myself. The young men looked honest.

ZETHUS: We should have looked more closely. I almost thought I had seen one of them before

PHILYRA: Orestes would have been just about that age.

ZETHUS: (Beginning to suspect). Oh, God, free us from our past.

CILISSA: Only death does that.

DEINO: Well, one regrets the death of a young man - naturally. But, while he lived, he was a threat to our security.

ZETHUS: We are not safe yet.

MALIS: (Runs out of the palace). Oh, such shocking news. Where's Aegisthus? The Queen wants him. Orestes is dead.

ZETHUS: We saw the young man. We heard what they said. What does the Queen say now?

- MALIS: She had tears on her cheeks and she said - what a mother should say. But nobody knows what she thinks. The poor young prince, how it all comes back to me. So handsome he looked, playing with his father's sword; and him hardly big enough to lift it up off the ground. And now they're both dead and I'm running errands for the queen. She wants Aegisthus - and we're not supposed to remember that it's all his fault.
- CILISSA: What message are you giving him?
- MALIS: He's to come at once.
- ZETHUS: With his armed guard in attendance?
- MALIS: I suppose so.
- ZETHUS: That's a mistake.
- MALIS: No. The queen made quite a point of the fact that it's a formal occasion. She'll want him to look dignified.
- ZETHUS: When the message is ill-advised, a clever go-between alters it. And the people who matter are grateful. Tell Aegisthus to come alone.
- MALIS: I don't like to disobey the queen.
- ZETHUS: You will have a new ruler one day.
- MALIS: When dead men walk (Exit).
- DEINO: This is all most disturbing.
- PHILYRA: But what? What is it you all know - except me?
- DEINO: I think I know, now.
- ZETHUS: We cherished our security, but it was false. We shall see true peace when the royal house is restored.
- PHILYRA: Orestes is alive!
- ZETHUS: He has come to claim his own.
- CILISSA: He called on the Gods, and they have favoured him. They have submitted the queen to his judgement.
- PHILYRA: Oh, it's terrible. I want to cry.

CILISSA: It's strength we want now. Orestes is filled with the power of the God. He has taken upon himself his dead father's valour. He needs his people too.

ZETHUS: Whatever I have is his.

DEINO: If the plot miscarried, we are lost. I wish him good courage.

AEGISTHUS: (Enters). So they say my stepson is dead? I came as fast as I could. My place is with the queen to offer her - what consolation I can. I see you are all distressed. I, too, if the travellers' tales are to be believed. These things are often very much exaggerated. And And it's absurd to suggest that no one in this family ever dies a natural death. Do any of you know anything?

ZETHUS: We can only repeat what we heard. The men who talked to us are there. They will give you first-hand information.

AEGISTHUS: I'll have a word with them. If they saw it for themselves, I'll believe it. But they may be exploiting some vague rumour, to make an impression on the women. Well. We'll see how they get on with a shrewd, experienced man. (Exit).

PHILYRA: Oo. . . .h.

ZETHUS: When the mind baulks, we should pray.

DEINO: To what God?

CILISSA: All the Gods are with us. Orestes will rule on the throne of Agamemnon.

(A shriek from within).

DEINO: Whose voice was that? They were only two - and the whole palace guard against them.

PHILYRA: It's all over.

ZETHUS: Pray God the right has triumphed.

DEINO: Wait. Be careful. We don't want to be caught on the wrong foot.

(Anon runs out of the palace).

ANON: Help! They've killed my master. Aegisthus is dead. Help! Help!

But it's too late. He's dead. Where's the queen? Find Clytemnestra. Tell her she's in mortal danger. The two of them are searching the palace, with drawn swords in their hands.

CLYTEMNESTRA: (Enters). What is it? Why are you shouting?

ANON: The dead have come back.

CLYTEMNESTRA: Whose dead?

ANON: Yours! The son of Agamemnon has risen from the grave.

CLYTEMNESTRA: Oh, treachery.

ANON: They have killed Aegisthus.

CLYTEMNESTRA: So. Get me my sword. Now you will see truth. We have all been wronged. Who will cut the knot and establish the right?

(Orestes enters with a blood-stained sword, followed by Pylades).

ORESTES: Mother! He is dead. And I have come to find you.

CLYTEMNESTRA: You have killed my dear husband?

ORESTES: So you loved him? Then lie with him. For ever.

CLYTEMNESTRA: My dear child, put that sword down. Forgive me, I forgot for a moment that you are a man now. You were once under my authority. Now I commit myself to yours. You have slept on this breast. I can still feel your lips as they drew from me the milk of life.

ORESTES: Must I kill her, Pylades? Is it possible to kill one's own mother?

PYLADES: Remember your oath to Apollo. Though all living men condemn you, you are serving the justice of the Gods.

CLYTEMNESTRA: Spare my life, Orestes. I gave you yours.

ORESTES: You killed my father. He, too, lives in me.

CLYTEMNESTRA: I was more sinned against than sinning.

ORESTES: You were false to my father.

CLYTEMNESTRA: My son loved me once.

ORESTES: Yes. I loved you.

CLYTEMNESTRA: Then you still fear my curses. The undying curses that feed on lost love.

ORESTES: Yes. I am afraid.

CILISSA: You must do it quickly.

ORESTES: Help me, father. In your name

CLYTEMNESTRA: You have sworn the Gods an oath. But you owe a last duty to me. I have a husband. Let me go to the bed I must share with Aegisthus. (She sweeps out)

ORESTES: I am my father's son. She invites her death. Her hand reaches for it - but mine must deal the blow. Father, I am coming. (He follows her).

PYLADES: I know some of you are loyal. This is your victory. But if any of you hold to the queen's faction, I give you this warning. Her time has come - and yours.

ZETHUS: Orestes has taken on himself a fearful responsibility.

PYLADES: He accepts it, as the price of your freedom. This course of justice lies through blood and tears.

THEBE: (Comes out of the palace). Oh, Nature, have pity on us. The prince has driven his sword through his mother's heart.

PYLADES: So is justice served.

THEBE: And all creation weeps.

GORTYS: (Runs out in terror). The Queen! The Queen!

CLYTEMNESTRA: (Appears at the palace door, very stiff. Orestes behind her). Who are you? My friends? My enemies? Neighbours and kinsmen, you have failed me. Tell me, you who come from a far country, are such things possible?

ANON: Anything is possible.

CLYTEMNESTRA: How can men live?

THEBE: We live, as we can, in the presence of the unseen.

CLYTEMNESTRA: My son has given me a mortal wound. (She opens her arms and reveals a bleeding gash). I give you my death, Orestes. This is your inheritance. (She falls, dead, in Orestes' arms). (CURTAIN)

ACT III Scene 1. Outside the Palace. Zethus, Deino, Philyra, Anon, Malis.

ZETHUS: This is a great day. The dictators are destroyed, and Orestes has already announced that he means to restore democratic government.

PHILYRA: What does that mean?

ANON: A new master.

DEINO: An honest master. Did you hear how they'd been misappropriating public funds? All this time - and I was taken in by it myself.

MALIS: Orestes was a fine boy. And what a man! It makes you feel better just to look at him.

PHILYRA: His friend's nice too. They say even the princess likes him. And she never used to like anyone.

ZETHUS: We have all been set free from a great moral burden.

PHILYRA: I don't understand religion any better than politics. But I can see that everything suddenly looks new and fresh.

ZETHUS: Orestes has taken the guilt upon himself.

DEINO: It's fortunate he's under the protection of Apollo. And the God never allows his servants to suffer.

ZETHUS: There are no other Gods. And Orestes is not deaf to the voice of remorse.

PHILYRA: Oh, don't. Just when we've found a real excuse for being happy.

ANON: He's better learn that this life doesn't allow for finer feelings. There was a time when I had them myself. But they get beaten out of you. All I want is a place where you can feel settled; and I hope he'll let me have it. Then a mug of wine, a bit of something to eat, and a girl now and again - in that order.

MALIS: You men! You always want to spoil things. (To Zethus). And you're the worst. We all know he spits in the eye of any woman who's kind to him; but you make a misery of everything. That's a man all over. If we have an accident we mop it up. If you do, there's a world war. That's what comes of giving moral lectures.

ZETHUS: We are moral beings. We act according to our lights.

MALIS: Whatever it costs. I know. And who pays?

ZETHUS: Orestes

(Orestes comes out of the palace, attended by Pylades, Electra, Cilissa, Thebe and Gortys).

ORESTES: I have summoned you to my council because, as your king, I am also your servant. I am my father's son and he believed that justice is not a matter of private judgement. We have given names to the Gods who pronounce the laws of human society and each of us interprets these laws according to his understanding. Life and death are in the hands of the Gods, but we are their appointed agents.

I am asking you to ratify the sentence of death. My mother killed my father, and I can submit the evidence for it. As you know, the murder was committed in the course of a religious ceremonial. My father, with clean hands and a pure heart, stood waiting for his wife to put on him the sacred vestments before he approached the altar. She had made them herself. Here they are. A net? A strait-jacket? Swaddling clothes? A shroud? How would you describe it? At any rate, it was in this device that she tied him up. Then she killed him.

ZETHUS: I weep for my dead king.

THEBE: And I weep - for all who deal in death.

ELECTRA: My brother has rooted up the rotten tree.

ZETHUS: And now he has plucked the fruit.

ORESTES: I am asking you for a verdict. Was she guilty? Look. This is my father's blood. It has sunk into the stuff. It might be a part of the pattern. And my father's death, too, has become the stuff of our lives.

ZETHUS: We grieve for you, Orestes, but we are not your judges. You stand before the Gods.

PYLADES: You are his countrymen. You can acquit him.

THEBE: He pays the penalty of greatness. On earth, he has no peers. Let the Gods judge you, Orestes.

ORESTES: I am awaiting their judgement. I have only a little time left and I want you to understand that I did what I had to do. Even now, I am finding it difficult to speak quite reasonably. And you will turn against me too when you see me as I shall become. I can grasp that. My mind is still partly sound. The courts regard me as competent

to swear an oath. And you shall hear it. I swear I am not at fault. My mother let out this blood. I claimed hers. And I was not responsible. I was possessed by the God. Apollo took my mind in his. He said, no one could blame me.

THEBE: No one does blame you, Orestes, except yourself. Except yourself.

DISPERSED VOICES: Except yourself. Except yourself. Except yourself.

ORESTES: I know there are vengeful spirits, phantoms called up by my mother's curse as she felt the teeth of my rage draw blood from her false heart. But Apollo has promised to absolve me. And he has given me a weapon. Look, here is a whip, for frightening phantoms.

MALIS: You are not guilty, Orestes. (He is listening to something else). Come on. Don't add to his troubles. Say something.

DEINO: Not guilty.

ZETHUS AND PHILYRA: Not guilty.

ELECTRA: You have saved us all. You are not guilty.

PYLADES: I am your friend, Orestes, now and for ever. You are not guilty.

DISPERSED ECHOES: Guilty guilty guilty.

ELECTRA: Orestes, I am your sister. Speak to me.

ECHOES: Orestes. Orestes. Orestes. He killed his mother his mother. Yes. Yes. He killed her.

VOICE: (Laughing). He bit off her nipples.

VOICE: And killed her.

ORESTES: Who said that? You? You? (To Electra). It was you.

ELECTRA: Orestes!

ORESTES: Take your filthy hands off me. Hands? Those are serpents. Keep off. You are fouling me with poisoned slime. Pylades!

PYLADES: Friend

ORESTES: You too? Are these my friends?

THEBE: Orestes! King's son! I am neither your friend nor your enemy. Look at me.

ORESTES: I can see some truth in you, but how will it serve me now? The monsters within gibber and chatter with the monsters without. I have seen them before. And you are one of them. (He lashes at her with his whip).

PHILYRA: Oh! There is blood dripping from his hands.

ZETHUS: His frenzy will never abate until he has washed it off.

ORESTES: Down! Down! Keep off.

ZETHUS: Go quickly to Apollo's temple. He has promised to release you.

ORESTES: One two three four five.
They come singly at first. (To the audience).
There comes the full pack. (Pants). I'm spent. But I'll give you a good run yet. (Runs off).

ZETHUS: How long, O Lord, How long?

ACT III Scene 2 Apollo's temple precinct. Apollo stands beside the doorway to the sanctuary. Enter Electra, Pylades, Cilissa, Thebe, Malis.

ELECTA: Is this Apollo's temple?

CILISSA: A living likeness of the God guards the door.

PYLADES: Orestes fled with all speed, driven by his frenzy. We shall find him here.

THEBE: Will the God open his eyes? Will he see us as we are?

PRIESTESS: (Enters from the wings). Who are you strangers? Why have you travelled through the night - and come to wake the God before the first light of dawn.

ELECTRA: My brother has taken sanctuary in the temple. We have followed him. We have come to help him - though he is beyond our help. He needs us - yet he sees in our faces all his fears.

PRIESTESS: This is a holy place. Here, from the beginning of time, men have sought enlightenment. Through the changing scenes of history, they have made their own terms with the indifferent forces of nature, with the authority of their chosen Gods, and with the bonds of their own condition. We have been able to help them. To you also, and your brother, we extend our welcome. You will ask the questions that have been asked by all men, at all times. But none of you have the right to expect the same answer. By coming here, you are giving yourselves to strange experience. Await the outcome with reverence. I cannot tell you where you will find your truth.

Wait here, now, while I go to your brother. Sleep if you can. You will need strength.
(Exit to the temple).

MALIS: Well, she seems to know her business. Orestes should be all right.

THEBE: I was once a servant to my country's Gods. I can hear more than her words. The Gods are present. They are making some great demand of us.

PYLADES: And I am ready - to lay down my life for my friend.

MALIS: I say, no more dying.

CILISSA: You've been quick about making yourself comfortable. Let me have

the shawl for my young lady's head. Come here, Electra, you're worn out. There, lean on me.

PYLADES: May I sleep here, Electra? I have been with you all night. Shall we see the sun rise together?

CILISSA: These are the sacred precincts. Let the women sleep here in peace.

ELECTRA: Good-night, Pylades.

PYLADES: Must we say good-night?

CILISSA: Not much night left. No harm in parting for a couple of hours. Look, she's almost asleep.

PYLADES: Good-night, Electra. (Exit).

THEBE: I am afraid to sleep - here.

CILISSA: Hush. (She hums, and rocks Electra, while Thebe, unwillingly, approaches Apollo).

THEBE: O, Apollo, yours is the voice that testified to the unknown in the language of man's intelligence. Grant us strength and wisdom to interpret aright the language of the heart and of the belly and of the genitals. We are born of mixed seed. We stand between night and day, between the unfathomed waters and the invisible dust. When will man heal the schisms in his own family, and in his own soul? When will he learn to live in peace and honour with his friends? How can he resist his enemies without destroying himself? Show us our path, Apollo. Guide us on the short hard journey we are all making alone. (She is now clinging to the God's knees. The priestess comes out of the temple).

PRIESTESS: A doomed man lies before the altar. Blood on his sword, and on his hands, makes a charnel-house of this consecrated ground. I have seen strange sights, but none more horrible than this. He seems to be sleeping. Yet his eyes are open, staring at a nightmare dream.

I know his dream. He is one of the great men required by their fate to make an impossible choice. He chose his action - and its consequence. He has done an ill deed and his damaged mind conjures up its spectre, hideous as the deed itself, a crime of incestuous passion, an offence against his origin, an outrage to the living stuff of which he is made.

You can save him, Apollo. You know the powers that confront a guilty man - ancient powers, deaf to all reason, merciless, voracious. They possess him, soul and body. Release him, Apollo. Cleanse him.

Make him whole.

APOLLO: (Lifts his hand). Orestes! (Lays his hand on Thebe's head). The priestess opens the temple and discovers Orestes. He is wearing an open-eyed life mask).

PRIESTESS: Pray to the God, Orestes. Apollo is ready to receive your prayer.

ORESTES: I sought sanctuary with him. But he has received my enemies.

APOLLO: I have not forsaken you, Orestes. I have put them to sleep. You have been my obedient servant. You have come to me for deliverance and you shall be saved. I can wash off the mark of blood that sets you apart from your fellow-creatures. I can free them from the fear of your unholy presence. And I can give you back your friends.

ORESTES: My friends are gone. Those are my sworn enemies. Ready to wake.

APOLLO: This thing of darkness that you must acknowledge is not mine. I direct the political virtues and the civil arts and sciences. I can promise you some humble contacts with your own kind and I can set you right with the Gods of daylight. But I cannot set you right with yourself. I cannot restore your kingdom.

PYLADES: (Enters). Who called?

APOLLO: Here is your friend, Orestes. I appoint him your guide on the long journey you still have to make. Look at him. You can see him as he is. You will be able to trust him.

ORESTES: At last! A human face.

PYLADES: And a true blade.

ORESTES: Defend me, Pylades. I have forgotten how to defend myself.

PRIESTESS: The fight is finished. You must fly. Between cock-crow and sunrise your sleeping furies wake. Go quickly.

APOLLO: They are resolute in pursuit. You must be resolute, as season follows season, to endure your sufferings nobly. When the time is ripe, you will come home. The Goddess Athene will receive you and judge your case; and I will be your witness and sponsor. (A cock crows. Electra stirs. Cilissa groans.).

ORESTES: They are howling in their sleep. They are waking. They smell my blood. Pylades, take me away. (Exit Orestes and Pylades.).

THEBE: You have shown him mercy, Apollo. Show mercy to me. Deliver me from the spirits that walk between cock-crow and sunrise.

APOLLO: I have completed my task. Yours is to come. There are other Gods working in the soul of man. You know who they are. When they call, you will answer. Look! (Enter Clytemnestra).

CLYTEMNESTRA: Empty. Empty. Empty. He is gone. I was his mother. Orestes killed his mother. Are you sleeping, hounds of heaven? I am speaking for your rulers, the Gods that I too know and serve in your kingdom of darkness. You have neglected your duty to them and I am sent to correct you. Do you remember me?

THEBE: Yes. (This is the first over-eager stage of a hypnotic trance).

CLYTEMNESTRA: Do you see this wound?

THEBE: Yes. (There is a wound).

CLYTEMNESTRA: Do you see this sword, driven into my heart?

THEBE: Yes. (There is no sword. The trance is deeper).

CLYTEMNESTRA: Whose sword is it?

THEBE: Orestes!

CLYTEMNESTRA: And you sleep and dream, while he springs the trap. You have let him go.

THEBE: I have let him go. Orestes, who killed his mother.

CLYTEMNESTRA: I have suffered, and I suffer still. He must pay the penalty, in suffering.

THEBE: Yes, he must suffer.

CLYTEMNESTRA: You are his shadow, his dark conscience. You must be his punishment.

THEBE: Yes. I am his punishment.

CLYTEMNESTRA: Pursue him. Run him down, Kill him. (Exit).

THEBE: Wake! Orestes has escaped. We have slept too long. And you, Apollo, I accuse you of sheltering a fugitive from justice

PRIESTESS: The God has withdrawn.

THEBE: Then I shall call to high heaven. Listen, you Olympian Gods, you have lied to us all. You are the heirs of the primeval powers but you have not destroyed them. I am here to prove it.

We live still. We are real. We have our place. We demand our rights. We pursue our sacred duties. (Exit).

ELECTRA: (Wakes). Where is my brother?

PRIESTESS: He is gone.

ACT III. Scene 3. Athene's temple and High Court of Justice. Apollo and Athene, in person, take the places of their statues. The jury, as they come in arrange themselves on the steps, in some memorable grouping which they get back to just before the vote is taken. The dock is at the back, centre. When the curtain rises, Electra and Cilissa are already sitting on the steps. Philyra and Anon come in at opposite sides.

PHILYRA: Who called me?

ANON: God knows.

PHILYRA: It wasn't you?

ANON: No, not me.

(Enter Malis, with washing, and Gortys).

MALIS: There's no end to the interruptions. Something important, they said.

GORTYS: Well, they asked me. That means it's unskilled work.

CILISSA: They don't give us all the same jobs. I'm looking after my young lady.

ZETHUS: (Enters). At last we are in sight of a decision.

ELECTRA: And I shall see my brother.

(Oeonus and Deino enter).

PHILYRA: Here comes the army.

OEONUS: I was told to parade. But where's the sergeant?

DEINO: Do you happen to know if they are giving us any compensation? I had to close my shop.

ATHENE: Welcome, jurymen. You have attended the first hearing. You are now asked to take part in the formal proceedings. Please take your seats. The accused is about to appear before the court.

(Orestes enters, between Pylades and Thebe).

PYLADES: With respect, Athene, I present my cousin Orestes.

THEBE: And I accuse him.

ORESTES: I am unfit to plead. My friend here can testify that the balance of my mind is disturbed

THEBE: He killed his mother.

DISPERSED VOICES: His name is Orestes. He killed his mother. Yes. Yes. He killed her. Orestes killed his mother.

ATHENE: If these interruptions continue I shall have to clear the court. The speech for the prosecution must be made at the proper time and in the proper form. I will not allow the accused to be subject to undue pressures. At the same time I must ask him to conduct himself correctly. The plea of unfitness is not accepted in this court.

Pylades, please take your seat with the jury. A special summons has been issued for two other members. Cassandra!

CASSANDRA: (Enters). I obey you, Athene, but reluctantly, I chose death.

ATHENE: You died honourably. But you are not asked to give this young man the fate you chose for yourself. You are asked to decide on the fate which is appropriate for him. Aegisthus!

AEGISTHUS: (Enters). I have no objection to discharging a public duty. But, as you know, I'm prejudiced. After all, he killed me. However, these things shouldn't be taken too seriously. I myself once planned a murder and I was surprised by the ill-feeling it caused. I don't regard myself as a murderer. I'm an administrator. My wife and I made a very effective team. She was a wonderful public speaker and I had certain talents as a power behind a throne. It's true that the budget included an expense account for myself. But did you ever know any thriving concern that was run in any other way? Nobody complained at the time. They thought up moral objections when the take-over bid was made public.

ATHENE: Aegisthus, you were known in life for making inopportune speeches. This is a court of justice, not a street corner. Take your seat. You are not disqualified by your personal interest in the case. Indeed, we hold the view that a man is disqualified only when such interest is lacking. We advise you not to address the court ironically. Try to be simple. We respect your simplicity and deplore your attempts to cover it up. We know who you are - a capable second-in-command. It is quite useless to represent yourself as a man of ideas.

AEGISTHUS: That's true, of course. We all had the same idea. Orestes, there in the dock, had it too.

ORESTES: Gracious Athene, I am not as bad as I look.

THEBE: He is still polluted. I could follow his track, because it smelt of blood.

ORESTES: Yes. Yes. Orestes killed his mother. They are coming closer, Athene. Save me. Drive them away.

ATHENE: We are doing all we can for you, Orestes. You have shown self-control in the past. Please help us now. We ask for silence. We wish to instruct the Court.

I am representing my father. You all - with one possible exception - recognise him as the supreme being whose authority is final. He now proposes to vest in you certain of his powers. This honour you cannot refuse. We hope you will accept it with reverence; and discharge your great task humbly, honestly and diligently.

ZETHUS: I have always honoured the Gods; and I hope I have preserved my personal integrity.

ATHENE: We have before us a very grave case. The accused has endured great sufferings. They are the result of his own choice. But you must remember that his choice - and this is usual - was restricted. Look at him. For this young man, your decision is of great moment.

PHILYRA: I can't look at him. This is dreadful. We must let him off.

ATHENE: Many of you will hope to reconcile justice with mercy. A noble ambition. You cannot expect to achieve it easily. You must now allow yourselves to be influenced by sentiment. Our present duty is to the society in which we live. But we have a further duty to the future. You are about to establish an important precedent. Our code of law does not allow for all possible human situations. Perhaps it never will. We are asked to contribute to the common law of tradition.

In the course of time, no doubt, the law relating to personal violence will be clarified. But it will always be difficult, and perhaps impossible, to adapt the same code to the acts of aggression committed on a larger scale - by family groups, local or commercial associations, assemblies of devout persons practising an exclusive cult or proselytising on behalf of a particular culture. Like private judgement, national sovereignty acts in a restricted field. In that far-off future, good and wise men, entrusted with temporal power, will think it their duty to take the law into

their own hands. I understand their position. They are right in thinking that, without law, human society crumbles. But I would remind them that justice is poorly served by men who have accustomed themselves to judging their own case.

GORTYS: Does she mean we mustn't have any more wars?

OEONUS: Well, war's my trade, but I can't say I very much liked it.

DEINO: This is going very far afield. There always are wars.

ZETHUS: A time may come when the world remembers them with horror - and with amazement.

ATHENE: I have spoken at length under this head because you should know that your decisions here will have far-reaching repercussions. We cannot directly advise the children of a future age but our records will be available. They can use them as they think fit.

Men learn from the experience of history; and their Gods, too, grow in wisdom. You are serving your kind by taking a new responsibility upon yourselves. We, on our side, are glad to give you this measure of autonomy. As you are aware, the courts of heaven are quite competent to deal with any case that arises. But you are no longer in your infancy and we prefer you to take some part in managing your own affairs. We have not been indifferent to your devotion but we crave the love of responsible and independent creatures. This court is now established, for all time, in the sight of heaven. You are expected to form your own judgement. But remember, now and always that you are in the presence of the unknown. You must beware of indifference - and of pride. The ordeal of Orestes is yours. By accepting it, you will grow in stature. You will help your children to establish, and maintain, justice on earth.

DEINO: It's a big order.

ZETHUS: A high privilege.

ANON: Bound to be a catch in it somewhere.

ATHENE: You were asked to observe the first hearings with close attention. Some of you were able to comply more effectively than others. The court is prepared to be indulgent on this count. We know that you are inexperienced and some of you are lacking in natural gifts. We do not blame you. But we insist, now on a stricter intellectual discipline and a more generous moral effort.

- PHILYRA: He's not guilty. Look at him. He couldn't be guilty. He's just miserable - like everyone else.
- ATHENE: Please. The jury will consider their verdict in due course. First, we must call the witnesses for the prosecution and the advocate for the defence. Who brings the charge? They have prepared their case. Let them present it.
- THEBE: My case needs no preparation. It is as old as time, born of man's natural passions, among the savage herds of the primeval forest. This darkness is my natural home; and the ancestral home of all men born under the Olympian sun.
- ATHENE: The court recognises your authority. Your names are legion.,
- ORESTES: These are the devils that possess me. The Gods of heaven cast me out. Torture me no more.
- MALIS: I can't stand it. The poor young man wants to be looked after. Justice is all very well - but he's in no state for it.
- ZETHUS: Justice is his only hope.
- ANON: Not much of a hope is it?
- OEONUS: Well, it wasn't right what he did. Killing's a soldier's job.
- PYLADES: May I have permission of the court to stand - as I have done throughout the years - at my friend's side?
- ELECTRA: I am his sister. I am seeing him for the first time after an agony of absence. Spare him. Or let me share his sufferings.
- ATHENE: The court respects your sympathies. But, in the best interests of the accused, you are recommended to conduct yourselves according to protocol. You have seen the accused, at the moment of choice, hesitating between rival claims. They were legitimate claims and you should not lightly read his hesitation as weakness. As his endurance shows, he is not a weak man. And, if he is now at the end of his endurance, you should recall that the strongest men are habitually required to meet the critical challenge in a moment of weakness.
- ANON: Oh, come on. Let's get down to it.
- DEINO: I have sacrificed my private interests to public duty. But I should be glad to know how long the proceedings are likely to last.
- CASSANDRA: There is no end to these proceedings. If you are a man, take

your place among men. If not, go back to your miserable business.

ATHENE: The court is enquiring into the charge. What specific crime is the basis of the action?

THEBE: Murder.

PYLADES: On a point of procedure. My friend was acting under orders. It is not appropriate to charge him with murder.

ATHENE: That point will be taken into consideration. Who was it incited him?

CILISSA: We all thought it was the right thing to do.

DEINO: Speak for yourself.

GORTYS: No one ever told me anything.

OEONUS: Not until after it was all over.

APOLLO: As the accused's advocate, I reserve my defence until the court calls for it.

THEBE: Let him speak. It was he persuaded Orestes to kill his mother.

APOLLO: I had a duty to the father.

THEBE: You exceeded your duty. You have given protection to the murderer.

APOLLOI: I have advised him, certainly, as occasion arose. You have never let him alone. It has become a continuous persecution. If I may say so, your very presence here is unseemly. You have no right to exploit the liberality of the newer regime.

ATHENE: The court is aware that all who appear before it will seek, by choice or by chance, to identify the eternal principles of justice with their own immediate appetites. We are not dismayed. The living truth is neither neutral nor abstract and the cool, objective mind is often incapable of seeing it. We prefer the brave and honest people who use, as scrupulously as they can, their own faulty insight and wayward hearts. Let the prosecution speak.

THEBE: The court has reminded the defence that I am appearing here to discharge a duty. The prisoner

APOLLO: Objection. The accused.

ATHENE: The objection is sustained.

THEBE: The accused committed matricide. If this crime goes unpunished, all human society is in jeopardy, now and for ever. Society protects itself, wisely, by making the murderer an outlaw. But this man, with the support of his accessory who now appears as his advocate, has persuaded some impressionable people to give him hospitality. The great powers, his own among them, have shown more discretion. They have not recognised him, yet. But the trend of popular opinion, and I think the feeling of court, appears to be moving towards appeasement.

ATHENE: I must interrupt you to say that we are concerned, individually, with every member of human society. In primitive times, the interests of the group, struggling to extract a precarious living from forests and swamps, came first. Of necessity, the interests of single men and women were subordinate. At the other extreme, men and women can make the mistake of living too much for themselves, indifferent to their fellows and unaware of the universes, visible and invisible, in which they might have played a more distinguished part.

We believe, however, unlikely it seems, that these claims can be reconciled. But we do not suggest that the task can be accomplished quickly or easily. We ask your patience.

DEINO: Twenty minutes gone already. We'll be here for the rest of our lives.

ZETHUS: Will a lifetime be enough?

ANON: We need eternity. When the world comes to an end, they'll still be praying for patience.

ATHENE: Your comments, valuable in themselves, are delaying our business. I have a question to ask the prosecution.

ORESTES: I killed her. Finish it. Kill me.

ATHENE: The accused has raised the point I had in mind. I see the force of your argument. But what are your proposals? What is society to do with the men who threaten its very existence?

THEBE: The question, with respect, has already been decided. Difficulties have arisen only because of the suggestion, supported by the court, that the decision should be rescinded. We are not asking for a death sentence. We are perfectly satisfied with the original arrangements. If the guilty man knows he is alone, we can punish him quite satisfactorily.

APOLLO: An objection. This assumption of guilt is highly improper.

ORESTES: I am guilty guilty guilty.

AEGISTHUS: I am sorry for his advocate. A most awkward client.

CASSANDRA: A legal training has its disadvantages. You may win a case but you can never reach an understanding.

MALIS: I wish they wouldn't all talk so much. I'd sooner trust my instinct.

APOLLO: May I speak now?

ATHENE: Silence in court. I call on the accused.

ORESTES: I plead guilty. I have always known I was guilty.

ATHENE:L We are asking you to give an account of your actions. Did you kill your mother?

ORESTES: Yes.

THEBE: You see? He admits it.

ATHENE: How did you kill her?

ORESTES: I drove a sword through her heart.

ATHENE: Was it done on impulse? or deliberately? Had you laid your plans beforehand?

THEBE: He convicts himself. He knew what he was doing. He knew it was wrong.

ORESTES: Apollo approved my purpose. He told me

ATHENE: He is here to speak for himself. Why did you kill her?

ORESTES: She murdered her husband, my father.

ATHENE: And she is dead now. Death was her punishment.

ORESTES: And my death lives with me. Hers was swift, easy. The Gods were kind. But you have given me to the devils. They have followed me, Athene, into your own court. But they spared my mother.

THEBE: She killed the husband who wronged her. It was an honest crime. This man loathes his own flesh. And he knows that his loathing is the other face of his love.

ORESTES: Can you still see the blood on my hands? The blood of my mother, the blood that gave me life. By moonlight, it's not visible. And some people are kind, they say it's gone for good. I am grateful to them, because they wish me well. But I can still see it myself.

THEBE: He is lost.

ATHENE: You must keep your comments until the case is concluded.

THEBE: If this man goes free, all humanity will suffer.

ORESTES: The God who instructed me is still my advocate.

THEBE: You will be sorry for it - when the just verdict is delivered.

ORESTES: Then give me my sentence. Let me die too.

ANON: I have seen people tortured. There's a point where they all pray for death, whoever they are.

ZETHUS: Try to keep your mind on matters of importance.

OEONUS: In the army, there's always someone to tell you what's important and what isn't.

MALIS: I know by instinct, but nobody listens.

ELECTRA: Don't you see my brother is ill?

PYLADES: We would like to ask for an adjournment.

DEINO: As a matter of fact, I have some customers waiting.

ATHENE: This court is not constituted to allow adjournments. We will hear the speech for the defence.

APOLLO: I am distressed by the vindictive atmosphere that hangs over these proceedings. I have a great respect for the prosecution. Indeed I agree with them on many points of substance. They have over-stated their case but that is a familiar fault, among those unfortunates who know that their great days are over.

My client is accused of murder. He is guilty of murder. Or rather - if the court will allow me to put the facts correctly - he is responsible for an execution. The actual murderer was his mother. Out of respect for the court, I forbear to cite her accomplice, now serving on the jury. It is doubtful, in any case, if his contribution was significant.

AEGISTHUS: I object.

ATHENE: Objection sustained.

APOLLO: Accept my apologies. We have here, serving on the jury, a man who has committed the foulest crime in history - outdone only by his paramour, the Queen Clytemnestra, who murdered her husband by craft, at the very moment when he was engaged in a solemn religious ceremonial. The facts are not disputed. But the prosecution, now charging my client with murder, makes a curious distinction between the action of the mother and the re-action, if I may call it that, of the son.

I am really not certain if I have followed their reasoning. They seem to claim, and I am sure they will correct me if I am wrong, that the murder of a spouse is a natural act, inconvenient perhaps but in no way reprehensible, while the murder of a mother is an inhuman perversity, deserving the harshest penalties.

It is absurd of course. But a poor argument can carry great weight if it is repeated often enough, in a loud voice. This is the weakness of democratic procedures; and I hope the jury are aware of it.

They will sympathise, as I do myself, with the prosecution's anxiety to preserve the family. I have less sympathy with the supporting arguments. According to them, no one is safe if children are allowed - they say encouraged - to kill their parents. This very specious reasoning has been heard before, to establish all kinds of paradoxical conclusions. The simple fact is that most of us have no occasion to kill our parents, no opportunity, no interest. The statistics are available and it is quite clear that very few people have the slightest wish to kill anyone. I believe I caught also a suggestion, perhaps a threat, that the prosecution would themselves incite humanity to murderous hatred, should it happen that the verdict goes against them. I need not comment. This court is well equipped to deal with impudence.

All of us here wish to safeguard the family - instituted by God himself as a protection for his lonely creatures and a symbol, within the comprehension of all, of a bold invention he has not yet perfected - a united family of all mankind. As the president of the court tells you he invites you to have a hand in his invention. I hope you will fit yourselves for it by treating my client as you would treat a brother.

ELECTRA: I think it's looking more hopeful.

PYLADES: I never thought the outcome was in any doubt.

APOLLO: Unlike my learned friend, I regard marriage as the basis of the family. Civil life owes its existence to the principal of the contract, the expression and the assurance, of mutual trust. And marriage is, of all contracts, the noblest, the most permanent and the most fruitful. What is to come of humanity if they lose the foundation on which their life rests? What is to come of children whose parents murder each other. The prosecution makes great play with the fact that a child is born of its mother's body. That is so. But the man's seed must first be planted there. Only the most primitive people, now, believe that the mother is solely responsible. Physically, a child's inheritance comes from both parents. Materially, as we know, it comes from the father almost exclusively. My client here inherited a kingdom. Let him enjoy his kingdom.

You have invoked natural law. The succession of the seasons is its first and most obvious manifestation. The old tree dies. The young shoot flourishes. This young man, broken as he is, can be restored. His country needs a king. This king. This child who is like his father - a man who cares, to his own cost, for moral and natural law. I call upon you to ratify his terrible decision. He is not guilty.

ATHENE: Citizens, before I ask you to vote, have you anything to say?

ELECTRA: Of course I'm on his side. I hated my mother.

PYLADES: I have never doubted him.

GORTYS: All the same, however much you argue, it wasn't right.

MALIS: In the working classes, we just have to make the best of a bad job.

AEGISTHUS: I would like to show my magnanimity.

CILISSA: When he was a baby, he looked so innocent. Well, he is innocent.

OEONUS: I served under King Agamemnon. They shouldn't have killed him. And this lad's the spit of his father. I'm for him.

ZETHUS: I am very sorry for the young man. And I have never approved of capital punishment. At the same time, I have scruples about acquitting him. Will you bear with me if I tell you my reasons?

PHILYRA: I think he's not guilty. I didn't know we were supposed to tell you why. But I have a reason, too, a very good reason.

DEINO: I'm a business man. I believe in cutting the cackle and closing the deal. Any verdict is better than none, and I'm quite prepared to go along with the general sense of the meeting.

APOLLO: President of the court, may we proceed to the voting?

THEBE: These are the preliminaries. The jury have in no sense considered their verdict.

ORESTES: I am beginning to see you more clearly. I can hear what you say. I pleaded for mercy and I am grateful to those of you who can show mercy. But I support the prosecution. You defend me for frivolous reasons. I ask to be set free by people who know what they are doing.

CASSANDRA: You are asking too much.

OEONUS: He's hopeless. No one will ever be able to live with a man like that. We'd better say guilty.

ZETHUS: I agree with the last speaker. The question of who is to blame is not our sole concern. We have to live with the results of our decision. Orestes has inherited the violent spirit of his family. No fault of his. It lies in the seed. Can we let this seed live? A strain which produces, in every generation, criminals and madmen? Orestes is a young man. He will be expected to marry. He will wish to marry. And evil strains are fertile. His children will rise up against him and against society.

ORESTES: It was my crime, not theirs. You are condemning my heirs, without a hearing. Condemn me, but let me live for my children's sake.

PHILYRA: He'll have my vote. I'll tell you why. I'm having a baby of my own.

ANON: If it's mine

PHILYRA: I don't know. This baby won't have a father. Maybe he's lucky. I'm not rich, and I'm not clever. I won't be able to do a great deal for him. But I want him to be happy. I want him to be good. I want him to grow up with people who know how to forgive.

AEGISTHUS: We are getting more and more high-minded. Perhaps I over reached myself. He's obviously guilty - as I know to my cost.

ZETHUS: I think I am safe in saying that I have not been influenced by personal considerations. If anything, the contrary is true.

CASSANDRA: We are still a long way from the truth. Tell me, Orestes, what do you really want? You have said a number of things that don't hang together and the jury have received, I think, only a general impression of changing moods. But I am a poet and a mystic and I have trained myself to hear what the words actually say. You say you support the

prosecution. You refuse to accept acquittal except on terms which are, to say the least, unlikely. You ask to be saved and in the same breath, to be executed. You dwell on the thought of murder. I begin to think you are one of those people who cherish their remorse because it reminds them of the greatest moment in their lives, when their dreams were manifest in action. If you are such a man, then I would let you die. You have no other future.

ANON: She's right. There are some people who past never leaves them. I have run through five continents. I have been silent, sceptical, uncommitted. I have changed my trade, my friends and my character. I have forgotten who I betrayed and where I was hunted. But I shall never regain my lost innocence.

THEBE: Let the jurymen vote, Athene.

ATHENE: Have you made up your minds? Are you ready? And you, Orestes, are you satisfied with the conduct of your case and with the time we have allowed it?

ORESTES: Yes, I am satisfied. I have been told the truth. It is true that my deed was evil. It is true that I have longed for death as desperately as I longed for salvation. It is true that I have learned to love my sufferings. As a prince, I was set apart from my fellow men. If I am not a prince, then I must be an outcast.

The decision rests with you. Yet, on the threshold between life and death, I still have one choice. There is still one question - who am I? Crime follows crime, and my children, they say, will be forced to tread in the blood-stained footprints of their forbears. If you kill me, I shall have no children. If you spare me, they shall know that their father refrained from the final infamy. I am aware of my sin and I take responsibility for it. But I shall not die a cripple. I commit myself now to the healing powers whose plenty saves a man from his fear, his hatred and his self-abuse.

ATHENE: You have chosen life, Orestes. I commend your choice. But it may be that you have only a short time to enjoy it.

ORESTES: I am in your hands. If I live, I shall ask my people to receive me as their king. If I die, I shall soon be able to ask my mother to forgive me.

ATHENE: The hearing is concluded. The voting is by secret ballot. A black stone signifies guilty, a white stone, not guilty.

(Electra, Zethus, Pylades and Cilissa pick a stone from one vessel and drop it into another. Then go off the stage forward.)

OEONUS: Apollo almost persuaded me. But all the same, I don't know.

CASSANDRA: I have heard him speak before. I find his style less convincing each time. We must make up our own minds.

MALIS: If Orestes gets off, will they really take it out on us?

ANON: I very much doubt it. Her bark's worse than her bite.

PHILYRA: You're going to vote with us, aren't you?

ANON: Don't bully me.

GORTYS: Well, here goes. (Gortys, Philyra, Malis vote and exit forward).

OEONUS: I've changed my mind once. I don't suppose there's any objection to my changing it again.

AEGISTHUS: You'll be in good company. (Aegisthus and Oeonus vote and exit).

DEINO: Did I hear someone say that the authorities may refuse to accept an acquittal?

CASSANDRA: That's a risk we have to take. (Cassandra and Deino vote and exit).

ANON: I'm the last, am I? Well, I've always had to do things on my own (Votes).

ATHENE: The twelfth juryman will count the votes.

ANON: What me?

ATHENE: Yes, stranger. You have visited our world. You have heard our evidence. You have exercised your judgement. We wish you to know what you have done.

ANON: I haven't done anything. There's six of one here and half a dozen of the other.

ATHENE: The casting vote is mine. I say, not guilty. Orestes is acquitted.

(Shouts and cheers from audience microphones).

ATHENE: The jury is dismissed. The Court

THEBE: I appeal. (Anon stops on his way off stage). There has been a gross miscarriage of justice. You, Goddess, born of the intelligence not of the bleeding flesh, have made a mockery of our proceedings. In the light of your presence, this court has chosen reason, liberty and brotherhood. But, in the caves and forests, in the liquid chaos of man's soul, your day has not yet dawned. Nature is hungry, Athene. Our hungers must be satisfied. You have stolen our victim, denied us our rights, challenged our very existence. We demand restitution.

Give us a living sacrifice. There are other men here who have done wrong, men whose guilt stands by them like their own shadow, sits at their hearth and lies with them in the still night. Such men please us. You have saved one. Give us leave to feast on another.

ATHENE: You are asking the impossible. I have no power to give you your opportunities. Your victims choose themselves. They please you because they carry the sign of their choice like a mark on their foreheads.

THEBE: Who shall I take? Who? You? You? You? Ah, I see him. Let me have him. Here is the man.

ATHENE: (While she speaks the stage lights go out. The final sentence is spoken in total darkness). Recall the jury. An unexpected crisis has arisen and demands their instant attention. Orestes is free. And I can, in my own time and place, appoint the prosecution to an honourable post, where their energies will work for good. But they have asked for the possession of a man whose fate does not lie within my jurisdiction. I commit him to the men and women of his own time and to the Gods they have chosen to preside over their Higher Courts.

(The lights go up. The statues of the Gods have crumbled. One is knocked over. One has lost its head. The jury is sitting exactly as it was before, except that Orestes is among them. All are in modern dress. The man with no name is in the dock.)

ANON: So they've got me at last.

THEBE: At last.

ANON: I'm afraid. I'm no hero. Of course, I must plead guilty. But I never did anything big. And you can see I'm not strong. And my nerves are bad. I get blackouts. I can't stand very much.

THEBE: You will suffer, as you have lived, according to your capacity.

- ANON: Well, I can explain. It all started when I was just a kid. I never had much love. Mum and Dad didn't get on. I remember as if it was yesterday
- AEGISTHUS: This is going to last all night. Why don't they call him to order?
- DEINO: I don't see anyone in charge.
- MALIS: I know men. Now he's started talking about himself, he won't stop.
- OEONUS: It's awkward. I've only got forty-eight hours.
- DEINO: I had to close my shop - by the bridge you know - and I'm losing a lot of custom. They're supposed to pay you a pound for jury service. It's not much. And as they seem to be defaulting, I feel we're entitled to leave. (Exit Oeonus and Deino).
- MALIS: And I'm all behind. There was a queue at the launderette. (Exit).
- ZETHUS: I used to take a great interest in public life. I never dodged my duties as a citizen. But I'm getting old. (Exit).
- PHILYRA: Oh, I'm so sorry. Let me pass, please. I think the baby's coming.
- AEGISTHUS: That's the one thing we haven't had.
- ELECTRA: Pylades.
- PYLADES: Electra.
- ELECTRA: I have waited so long.
- PYLADES: Now I have come to claim you. (Exit both).
- CILISSA: It makes a lot of work, but I always enjoy getting things ready for a wedding. (Exit).
- AEGISTHUS: I was her lover. You were his. We should get together sometime.
- CASSANDRA: Vulgarian. (Exit Aegisthus).
- ORESTES: I wish I could help you; but I have other grave responsibilities. Things have piled up, after a long absence. (To Cassandra). I am most concerned about all these distressed persons and, by the look of him, this is a serious case. Is it any use telling him, do you think, that he need not worry about the girl? She is just someone who used to work for my mother.

Perhaps it's better not. I don't want to start something I can't finish. In the life of any public servant there comes a time when he has to limit his commitments. (Exit).

CASSANDRA: We are all alone. (Exit).

ANON: I appeal. I appeal to the Gods. I appeal to humanity.

THEBE: (To the audience). You hear him. I am discharged. And I entrust my task to you. Here is this man. Life has damaged him. He has been taught mistrust, greed, cruelty. He is not a hero or a genius. He is not likely to do you any credit. He is going to ask of you more than you can give; repay generosity with ingratitude, love with contempt. He will cry to you like a child - and cling to your back like the old man of the sea. If you value your freedom, condemn him. He is yours. (Exit).

ANON: (To the audience). So it is to you that I must give an account of myself. Well, you heard what the lady said, I don't amount to much. But I never started anything. I just happened to be there when they piled living flesh into the fiery furnaces and let loose the seeds of death on the warm wind. I was never to blame - unless you think I could have stopped it. But I wasn't that kind of person. And I don't claim to be perfect. They say I have betrayed my friends - but only when they let me down. And I've killed two or three men; but they deserved it. And most of the time I was in uniform. Then there are women who say I've treated them badly. But what else could I do? We're all born to love and hate.

You don't believe me. Of course not. The fact is I'm terrified of what we have all done. There is death in the wells. The seas are stained with blood. Who will plant the immortal wheat in valleys of dry bones? Whatever it is that men call God created a garden, flowing with milk and honey, and we have all connived to lay it waste.

I am not a hero. I followed where the big men led. I am one of you. Judge me and judge yourselves.