**Menelaus**
[405] Was any one else there, to help you rise?

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

**Menelaus**
You are sick from phantom shapes; what sort?

**Orestes**
I seemed to see three maidens, black as night.

**Menelaus**
I know whom you mean, but I do not want to name them.

**Orestes**
[410] Yes, for they are revered; you were well-informed, to avoid naming them.

**Menelaus**
Are these the ones that drive you to frenzy, with the curse of kindred blood?

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

**Menelaus**
It is not strange, if those who have done dreadful things should suffer them.

**Orestes**
But I have a way to recover from these troubles.

**Menelaus**
[415] Do not speak of death; that is not wise.

**Orestes**
It is Phoebus, who commanded me to kill my mother.

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

**Orestes**
We are slaves to the gods, whatever those gods are.

**Menelaus**
And does Loxias not help your affliction?

**Orestes**
[420] He will in time; this is the nature of gods.

**Menelaus**
How long is it since your mother breathed her last?

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

**Menelaus**
How soon the goddesses arrived to avenge your mother's blood!

**Orestes**
I am not clever, but I am by nature a true friend to my friends.

**Menelaus**
[425] Does your father give you any help at all, for your avenging him?

**Orestes**
Not yet; I call delay the equal of inaction.

**Menelaus**
How do you stand in the city after that deed of yours?

**Orestes**
I am so hated that no one will speak to me.

**Menelaus**
Have your hands not even been cleaned of blood, according to custom?

**Orestes**
[430] No, for wherever I go, the door is shut against me.

**Menelaus**
Which citizens are driving you from the land?

**Orestes**
Oeax, who refers to my father his reason for hating [Troy](http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/entityvote?doc=Perseus:text:1999.01.0116:card=427&auth=perseus,Troy&n=1&type=place).

**Menelaus**
I understand; he is avenging on you the blood of Palamedes.

**Orestes**
That was nothing to do with me; yet I am destroyed for three reasons.

**Menelaus**
[435] Who else? Some of the friends of Aegisthus, I suppose?

**Orestes**
They insult me, and the city listens to them now.

**Menelaus**
Will the city allow you to keep the scepter of Agamemnon?

**Orestes**
How, seeing that they will not allow me to remain alive?

**Menelaus**
What is their method? Can you tell me plainly?

**Orestes**
[440] A vote will be taken against us today.

**Menelaus**
To leave the city? Or to die, or not to die?

**Orestes**
Death by stoning at the hands of the citizens.

**Menelaus**
Then why not cross the border and try to escape?

**Orestes**
Because we are encircled by men fully armed.

**Menelaus**
[445] Private foes or [Argive](http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/entityvote?doc=Perseus:text:1999.01.0116:card=427&auth=tgn,5001993&n=1&type=place) troops?

**Orestes**
All the citizens, so that I may die; it is shortly told.

**Menelaus**
Poor wretch! you have arrived at the extremity of woe.

**Orestes**
In you I have hopes of escape from my troubles. But since you have come with good fortune, [450] share with your friends, who are wretched, your prosperity; do not hold aside that goodness for yourself alone; but partake of troubles in your turn, and so pay back my father's kindness to those who have a claim on you. For such friends as desert us in adversity [455] are friends in name but not in deed.

**Chorus Leader**
And here is Tyndareus, the Spartan, struggling with aged step, clad in black robes, with his hair cut short in mourning for his daughter.

**Orestes**
Menelaus, I am ruined. See, Tyndareus [460] approaches us, the man of all others I most shrink from facing, because of the deed I have done. For he nursed me when I was small, and lavished on me many a fond caress, carrying me about in his arms as the son of Agamemnon; and so did Leda; [465] for they both honored me no less than the Dioscuri. Ah me! my wretched heart and soul, it was a sorry return I made them! What darkness can I find for my face? What cloud can I spread before me in my efforts to escape the old man's eye?

**Tyndareus**
[470] Where, where may I see Menelaus, my daughter's husband? For as I was pouring libations on Clytemnestra's grave I heard that he had come to [Nauplia](http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/entityvote?doc=Perseus:text:1999.01.0116:card=470&auth=tgn,7011013&n=1&type=place) with his wife, safe home again after many years. Lead me to him; for I want to approach him [475] and clasp his hand, as a friend whom at last I see again.

**Menelaus**
Hail, old man, rival of Zeus for a bride!

**Tyndareus**
All hail to you, Menelaus, my kinsman!

Ah! What an evil it is to be ignorant of the future! There is that matricide before the house, a viper darting venomous flashes from his eyes, whom I loathe. [480] Menelaus, are you speaking to that godless wretch?

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

**Tyndareus**
This is his son, this creature here?

**Menelaus**
Yes, his son; if he is in misfortune, he ought to be honored.

**Tyndareus**
[485] You have been so long among barbarians that you have become one of them.

**Menelaus**
Always to honor one's kin is a custom in [Hellas](http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/entityvote?doc=Perseus:text:1999.01.0116:card=470&auth=tgn,1000074&n=1&type=place).

**Tyndareus**
And another custom is to yield a willing deference to the laws.

**Menelaus**
The wise hold that everything which depends on necessity is a slave.

**Tyndareus**
Keep that wisdom for yourself; I will not have it.

**Menelaus**
[490] Yes, for you are angry, and also old age is not wise.

**Tyndareus**

**Tyndareus**
What does a dispute about foolishness have to do with him? If right and wrong are clear to all, who was ever more senseless than this man, because he never weighed the justice of the case, [495] nor appealed to the universal law of [Hellas](http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/entityvote?doc=Perseus:text:1999.01.0116:card=470&auth=tgn,1000074&n=2&type=place)? For when Agamemnon breathed his last [struck on his head by my daughter] a most foul deed, which I will never defend, [500] he should have brought a charge against his mother and inflicted a holy penalty for bloodshed, banishing her from his house; thus he would have gained moderation instead of calamity, keeping strictly to the law and showing his piety as well. As it is, he has come into the same fate as his mother. [505] for though he had just cause for thinking her a wicked woman, he has become more wicked by murdering her.

I will ask you, Menelaus, just one question. If a man's wedded wife should kill him, and his son in turn will kill his mother in revenge; [510] next the avenger's son to expiate this murder will commit another: where will the chain of horrors end? Our forefathers settled these matters the right way. They forbade any one with blood upon his hands to appear in their sight or cross their path; [515] but they purified him by exile, they did not kill him in revenge. Otherwise someone, by taking the pollution last upon his hands, is always going to be liable to have his own blood shed. Now I hate wicked women, especially my daughter who killed her husband; [520] Helen, too, your own wife, I will never commend, nor would I even speak to her; and I do not envy you a voyage to [Troy](http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/entityvote?doc=Perseus:text:1999.01.0116:card=507&auth=perseus,Troy&n=1&type=place) for a worthless woman. But the law I will defend with all my might, to put an end to this brutal spirit of murder, [525] which is always the ruin of countries and cities alike.

*Turning to Orestes* Wretch! Had you no heart when your mother was baring her breast in her appeal to you? I, who did not see that awful deed, weep unhappy tears from my old eyes. [530] One thing at least agrees with what I say: you are hated by the gods, and you pay atonement for your mother by your fits of madness and terror. Why do I need to hear from other witnesses what I can see for myself? Therefore, Menelaus, take heed; [535] do not oppose the gods in your wish to help this man; but leave him to be stoned to death by the citizens, or do not set foot on Spartan land. My daughter is dead, and rightly; but it should not have been his hand that slew her. [540] In all except my daughters I have been a happy man; there I am not blessed.

**Chorus Leader**
He is enviable, who is fortunate in his children, and does not bring hazardous notoriety on himself.

**Orestes**
Old man, I am afraid to speak before you, [545] in a matter where I am sure to grieve you to the heart. I am unholy because I killed my mother, I know it, yet holy on another count, because I avenged my father. Only let your years, which frighten me from speaking, set no barrier in the path of my words, [550] and I will go forward; but now I fear your gray hairs.

What ought I to have done? Set one thing against another. My father begot me; your daughter gave me birth, being the field that received the seed from another; for without a father no child would ever be born. [555] So I reasoned that I ought to stand by the author of my being rather than the woman who undertook to rear me. Now your daughter—I am ashamed to call her mother—came to a man's bed in a private and unchaste wedding; I speak against myself when I speak [560] badly of her, yet I will speak. Aegisthus was her secret husband in the home; I killed him, and I sacrificed my mother, an unholy crime, no doubt, but done to avenge my father.

Now, as regards the reasons for which I deserve to be stoned as you threatened, [565] hear the service I am conferring on all [Hellas](http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/entityvote?doc=Perseus:text:1999.01.0116:card=544&auth=tgn,1000074&n=1&type=place). For if women become so bold as to murder their husbands, taking refuge in their children, hunting down pity with the breast, they would think nothing of destroying their husbands [570] on any charge whatsoever. But I, by a horrible crime, as you boast it to be, have put an end to this custom. I hated my mother and killed her justly. She was false to her husband when he was gone from his home to fight for all [Hellas](http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/entityvote?doc=Perseus:text:1999.01.0116:card=544&auth=tgn,1000074&n=2&type=place) at the head of its armies, [575] and she did not keep his bed undefiled; and when her sin had found her out, she did not impose punishment on herself, but, to avoid paying the penalty to her husband, punished my father by death. By the gods! it is not a good time for me to mention the gods, [580] when defending the charge of murder; but if I consented by my silence to my mother's conduct, what would the murdered man have done to me? Would he not now in hatred be tormenting me with the Furies? Or does my mother have goddesses as allies, but he does not, in his deeper wrong? [585] You, yes! you, old man, have been my ruin by begetting a wicked daughter; for it was owing to her audacious deed that I lost my father and became my mother's murderer. You see, Telemachus did not kill the wife of Odysseus, because she did not marry husband upon husband, [590] but the marriage-bed remained untainted in her home.

And you see Apollo, who makes the navel of the earth his home, dispensing to mortals unerring prophecies, whom we obey in all he says; I killed my mother in obedience to him. [595] Find him guilty of the crime, slay him; his was the sin, not mine. What ought I to have done? or is the god not competent to expiate the pollution when I refer it to him? Where then should anyone flee, if he will not rescue me from death after giving his commands? [600] Do not say that the deed was done badly, but unfortunately for the ones who did it. A blessed life those mortals lead who make wise marriages; but those for whom it does not fall out well are unfortunate both in and out of doors.

**Chorus Leader**
[605] Women by nature always meddle in the doings of men, with unfortunate results.

**Tyndareus**
Since you are so bold and suppress nothing, but answer me back in such a way as to vex my heart, you will lead me to go to greater lengths in procuring your execution; [610] and I shall regard this as a fine addition to my labors in coming here to adorn my daughter's grave. Yes, I will go to the chosen band of Argives and set the city, willing or not, on you and your sister, to pay the penalty of stoning. [615] She deserves to die even more than you, for it was she who embittered you against your mother, always carrying tales to your ear to increase your hate the more, announcing dreams from Agamemnon, and Aegisthus' bed, [620] may the gods in Hades loathe it! for even here on earth it was bitter; till she set the house ablaze with fires never kindled by Hephaestus.

Menelaus, I tell you this, and I will do it, too: if you then consider my hatred or our marriage connection of any account, do not ward off this man's doom in defiance of the gods, [625] but leave him to be stoned to death by the citizens, or do not set foot on Spartan land. Remember you have been told all this, and do not choose the ungodly as friends, pushing aside the more righteous. Servants, lead me from this house.*Tyndareus and his attendants depart.*

**Orestes**
[630] Go, so that the remainder of my speech may come to this man without interruption, free from your old age. Menelaus, why are you pacing round and round in thought, going back and forth, in a dilemma?

**Menelaus**
Let me alone! When I think it over, [635] I am perplexed to know where to turn in these events.

**Orestes**
Do not come to a final decision now, but after first hearing what I have to say, then make up your mind.

**Menelaus**
Good advice! Speak. There are times when silence would be better than speech, and the reverse also.

**Orestes**
[640] I will speak now. A long statement has advantages over a short one and is more intelligible to hear. Give me nothing of your own, Menelaus, but repay what you received from my father. I am not speaking of possessions; if you save my life, [645] you will save my dearest possession.

I have done wrong; I ought to have a little wrong-doing from you to requite that evil, for my father Agamemnon also did wrong in gathering the Hellenes and going to [Ilium](http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/entityvote?doc=Perseus:text:1999.01.0116:card=640&auth=tgn,7002329&n=1&type=place), not that he had sinned himself, [650] but he was trying to find a cure for the sin and wrong-doing of your wife. So this is one thing you are bound to pay me back. For he really gave his life, as friends should, toiling hard in battle with you, so that you might have your wife again. [655] Pay back to me the same thing you got there. For one day exert yourself, on my behalf standing up in my defense, not ten full years.

As for what [Aulis](http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/entityvote?doc=Perseus:text:1999.01.0116:card=640&auth=perseus,Aulis&n=1&type=place) took, the sacrifice of my sister, I let you have that; do not kill [Hermione](http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/entityvote?doc=Perseus:text:1999.01.0116:card=640&auth=perseus,Hermione&n=1&type=place). [660] For in my present plight, you must have an advantage over me and I must pardon it. But give to my miserable father my life and the life of my sister, a maiden so long; for by my death I shall leave my father's house without an heir.

[665] You will say it is impossible. That's the point; friends are bound to help friends in trouble. But when fortune gives of its best, what need of friends? For the god's help is enough of itself when he is willing to give it. All [Hellas](http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/entityvote?doc=Perseus:text:1999.01.0116:card=640&auth=tgn,1000074&n=1&type=place) believes that you love your wife, [670] and I am not saying this to flatter or wheedle you; by her I implore you. Ah me, my misery! to what have I come! Well? I must suffer, for I am making this appeal on behalf of my whole family. O my uncle, my father's own brother! Imagine that the dead man in his grave [675] is listening, that his spirit is hovering over you and saying what I say, this much for tears and groans and misfortunes. I have spoken and I have begged for my safety, hunting what all seek, not myself alone.

**Chorus Leader**
[680] I, too, though I am only a woman, beseech you to help those who need it; for you have the power.

**Menelaus**
Orestes, you are a man for whom I have a deep regard, and I want to take part in your troubles; it is a duty, too, to help relatives bear their ills, [685] by dying or killing enemies, if god gives the power to do so. I wish I had that power granted me by the gods. For I have come destitute of allies, after my long weary wanderings, [690] with the small strength of my surviving friends. We should never get the better of Pelasgian Argos by fighting; if we should prevail by soothing speeches, we will come to some hope there. For how can you win a great cause by small [695] [:efforts? It is foolish even to wish it.]

For when the people fall into a vigorous fury, they are as hard to quench as a raging fire; but if you gently slacken your hold and yield a little to their tension, cautiously watching your opportunity, [700] they may possibly calm down; if their gusts abate, you may obtain whatever you want from them easily. They have pity, and a hot temper too, an invaluable quality if you watch it closely. So for you I will go and try to persuade Tyndareus [705] and the city to moderation. A ship also dips if its sheet is hauled too taut, but rights itself again if it is let go. The god hates excessive eagerness, and the citizens do also; I must save you, I don't deny it, [710] by cleverness, not by violence against those who are stronger. I could not do it by strength, as you perhaps imagine; for it is not easy to triumph single-handed over the troubles that beset you. I would never have tried to bring the [Argive](http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/entityvote?doc=Perseus:text:1999.01.0116:card=682&auth=tgn,5001993&n=1&type=place) land over to softness; [715] but it is necessary. [for the wise to be slaves to fortune.]*Menelaus and his retinue depart.*

**Orestes**
O you that have no use, except to lead an army in a woman's cause! O worst of men in your friends' defense, [720] do you turn your back on me and flee, the deeds of Agamemnon lost and gone? After all, father, you had no friends in adversity. Alas! I am betrayed; no longer do I have any hope of finding a refuge where I may escape the death-sentence of [Argos](http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/entityvote?doc=Perseus:text:1999.01.0116:card=682&auth=perseus,Argos&n=1&type=place); for this man was my haven of safety.

[725] But I see Pylades, the best of friends, coming at a run from Phocis—a pleasant sight! A man who can be trusted in troubles is a better sight than a calm to sailors.

**Pylades**
I have come through the city quickly, as I should, [730] having heard and myself clearly seen the citizens assembling, against you and your sister, to kill you at once. What is happening? How is it with you? How are you doing, my best of comrades, friends and kin? For you are all these to me.

**Orestes**
I am ruined, to make plain to you my troubles in brief.

**Pylades**
[735] You must destroy me also; for friends have all in common.

**Orestes**
Menelaus is the worst of men to me and my sister.

**Pylades**
It is natural for the husband of an evil woman to become evil.

**Orestes**
He no more repaid me by coming here, than if he had never come.

**Pylades**
Oh, has he really arrived in this land?

**Orestes**
[740] He took a long time, but he was very soon detected as evil to his friends.

**Pylades**
And did he bring his wife, the worst of women, with him on his ship?

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

**Pylades**
Where is she, the one woman who proved the ruin of so many Achaeans?

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

**Pylades**
[745] And what did you say to your father's brother?

**Orestes**
Not to see me and my sister killed by the citizens.

**Pylades**
By the gods! What did he say to that? I would like know this.

**Orestes**
He was cautious, the usual policy of ignoble friends.

**Pylades**
What excuse did he advance? When I have learned that, I know everything.

**Orestes**
[750] There was a new arrival, the father who begot those noble daughters.

**Pylades**
You mean Tyndareus; he was angry with you, perhaps, for his daughter's sake?

**Orestes**
You understand. And Menelaus preferred the family relationship with him to that with my father.

**Pylades**
He did not have the courage to share your troubles, when he was here?

**Orestes**
No, for he was not born a warrior, though strong among women!

**Pylades**
[755] Your case is desperate, it seems, and you must die.

**Orestes**
The citizens must give their vote about us on the murder.

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

**Orestes**
Our life or death; a brief speech on a large subject.

**Pylades**
Leave the palace with your sister now and try to escape.

**Orestes**
[760] Don't you see? We are being watched by guards on every side.

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

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

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

**Orestes**
By whom? This would be a further trouble to add to mine.

**Pylades**
[765] Strophius, my father, in a fit of anger, has banished me from his house.

**Orestes**
Bringing against you a private charge, or one in which the citizens share?

**Pylades**
He says it is an unholy crime to have helped you slay your mother.

**Orestes**
Alas! It seems my troubles will cause you grief as well.

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

**Orestes**
[770] Are you not afraid that [Argos](http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/entityvote?doc=Perseus:text:1999.01.0116:card=763&auth=perseus,Argos&n=1&type=place) will desire your death as well as mine?

**Pylades**
I am not theirs to punish; I belong to [Phocis](http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/entityvote?doc=Perseus:text:1999.01.0116:card=763&auth=tgn,4003963&n=1&type=place).

**Orestes**
A terrible thing is the mob, whenever it has villains to lead it.

**Pylades**
But with honest leaders its counsels are always honest.

**Orestes**
Very well; we must consult together.

**Pylades**
About what necessity?

**Orestes**
[775] Suppose I go and tell the citizens—

**Pylades**
That your action was just?

**Orestes**
In avenging my father?

**Pylades**
I am afraid they would be glad to catch you.

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

**Pylades**
That is cowardly.

**Orestes**
How then should I act?

**Pylades**
Suppose you stay here, what means of safety do you have?

**Orestes**
I have none.

**Pylades**
And if you go, is there any hope of escaping your troubles?

**Orestes**
[780] There might be, possibly.

**Pylades**
Then that is better than staying.

**Orestes**
Then I will go.

**Pylades**
At least you die in this way, you will die more honorably.

**Orestes**
You are right; in this way I escape cowardice.

**Pylades**
Better than by staying.

**Orestes**
After all, my action was just.

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

**Orestes**
Some one or two might pity me—

**Pylades**
Yes, your noble birth is a great point.

**Orestes**
[785] Resenting my father's death.

**Pylades**
That is all quite clear.

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

**Pylades**
Well said.

**Orestes**
Shall we tell my sister?

**Pylades**
God forbid!

**Orestes**
True, there might be tears.

**Pylades**
That would be a grave omen.

**Orestes**
Yes, silence is clearly better.

**Pylades**
And you will gain time.

**Orestes**
[790] There is only one obstacle in my way.

**Pylades**
What fresh objection now?

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

**Pylades**
But I will take care of you.

**Orestes**
It is annoying to have to touch a sick man.

**Pylades**
Not to me, when it is you.

**Orestes**
Beware of becoming a partner in my madness.

**Pylades**
Let that pass.

**Orestes**
You will not hesitate?

**Pylades**
No, for hesitation is a grave ill among friends.

**Orestes**
[795] On then, pilot of my course!

**Pylades**
A service I am glad to render.

**Orestes**
And guide me to my father's tomb.

**Pylades**
For what purpose?

**Orestes**
That I may appeal to him to save me.

**Pylades**
Yes, that is the proper way.

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

**Pylades**
No; she was an enemy. But hasten, so that the vote of [Argos](http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/entityvote?doc=Perseus:text:1999.01.0116:card=786&auth=perseus,Argos&n=1&type=place) may not catch you first, [800] supporting those limbs, slow from sickness, on mine; for I will carry you through the town, thinking little of the mob and unashamed. For how shall I prove my friendship, if not by helping you in sore distress?

**Orestes**
Ah! the old saying again, “get friends, not relations only.” [805] For a man who fuses into your ways, though he is an outsider, is better for a man to possess as a friend than a whole host of relations.*Orestes and Pylades go out*

**Chorus**
The great prosperity and the prowess, proudly boasted throughout [Hellas](http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/entityvote?doc=Perseus:text:1999.01.0116:card=807&auth=tgn,1000074&n=1&type=place) and by the streams of Simois, [810] went back again from good fortune for the Atreidae long ago, from an old misfortune to their house, when strife came to the sons of Tantalus over a golden ram, to end in most pitiable banqueting and [815] the slaughter of high-born children; and this is why murder exchanges for murder, through blood, and does not leave the two Atreidae.

**Chorus**
What seemed good was not good, [820] to cut a mother's flesh with ruthless hand and show the sword stained black with blood to the sun's bright beams; “to commit a noble crime” is an impious, subtle, malignant madness! [825] The wretched daughter of Tyndareus in terror of death screamed to him: “My son, this is unholy, your bold attempt upon your mother's life; do not, while honoring your father, [830] fasten on yourself an eternity of shame.”

**Chorus**
What affliction on earth surpasses this? What calls for keener grief or pity, than to shed with your hand a mother's blood? Oh! what a dreadful crime he committed, [835] and now is raving mad, a prey to the Furies, whirling blood with racing eyes, the son of Agamemnon! O the wretch! when [840] he saw a mother's bosom over her robe of golden weave, and yet he made her his victim, in recompense for his father's sufferings.

**Electra**
Women, has my poor Orestes left the house, [845] mastered by the heaven-sent madness?

**Chorus Leader**
Not at all; he has gone to the [Argive](http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/entityvote?doc=Perseus:text:1999.01.0116:card=844&auth=tgn,5001993&n=1&type=place) people to stand the appointed trial for his life, in which he and you must live or die.

**Electra**
Oh! Why did he do it? Who persuaded him?

**Chorus Leader**
[850] Pylades; but this messenger will no doubt soon tell us what happened to your brother there.

*A messenger, formerly a servant of Agamemnon, enters.*

**Messenger**
Wretched, unhappy daughter of the general Agamemnon, my lady Electra, hear the sad tidings I bring you.

**Electra**
[855] Alas! we are ruined; your words show it; you have clearly come with tidings of woe.

**Messenger**
The Pelasgians have decided by vote that you, poor lady, and your brother are to die this day.

**Electra**
Alas! my expectation has come to pass; I have long feared this, [860] and have been wasting away in mourning for what was sure to happen. But what was the trial, what was said by the Argives, to condemn us and ratify our death? Tell me, old friend; must I die by stoning or the sword? [865] For I share my brother's misfortunes.

**Messenger**
I had just come from the country and was entering the gates, needing to learn what was decided about you and Orestes, for I was always well disposed to your father when he was alive, and it was your house that reared me, [870] poor indeed, yet loyal in the service of friends. I saw a crowd going and taking their seats on the height, where they say Danaus first gathered his people for a meeting, making amends to [Aegyptus](http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/entityvote?doc=Perseus:text:1999.01.0116:card=866&auth=tgn,7016833&n=1&type=place). So, when I saw the throng, I asked a citizen: [875] “What news in [Argos](http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/entityvote?doc=Perseus:text:1999.01.0116:card=866&auth=perseus,Argos&n=1&type=place)? Tidings of the enemy haven't ruffled the city of Danaus, have they?” But he said: “Don't you see Orestes there, on his way to he tried for his life?”

I saw an unexpected sight, which I wish I had not seen, [880] Pylades and your brother approaching together, the one with his head down, weakened by sickness; the other sharing his friend's sorrow like a brother, tending his illness with constant care. Now when the Argives were fully gathered, [885] a herald rose and said: “Who wishes to give his opinion whether Orestes should be slain or not for the murder of his mother?” Then up stood Talthybius, who helped your father sack the Phrygians. He spoke out of both sides of his mouth, a mere tool of those in power as he always is, [890] expressing high admiration for your father, but not praising your brother, urging his crooked sentiments in specious words, that it would establish laws as to parents that are not good; and all the while he was darting lively glances at the friends of Aegisthus. [895] Such is that tribe; heralds always trip across to the lucky side; the one who has power in the city or a post in the government is their friend.

**Menelaus**
[385] O gods, what do I see? What living corpse greets my sight?

**Orestes**
You are right; I am dead through misery, though I still gaze upon the light.

**Menelaus**
How savage the look your unkempt hair gives you, poor wretch!

**Orestes**
It is not my looks, but my deeds that torture me.

**Menelaus**
Your tearless eyes glare dreadfully!

**Orestes**
[390] My body is gone, though my name has not deserted me.

**Menelaus**
Unsightly apparition, so different from what I expected!

**Orestes**
Here I am, the murderer of my wretched mother.

**Menelaus**
I have heard, spare your words; evils should be seldom spoken.

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

**Menelaus**
[395] What ails you? what is your deadly sickness?

**Orestes**
My conscience; I know that I am guilty of a dreadful crime.

**Menelaus**
What do you mean? Wisdom is shown in clarity, not in obscurity.

**Orestes**
Grief especially has ruined me—

**Menelaus**
Yes, she is a dreadful goddess, yet are there cures for her.

**Orestes**
[400] And fits of madness, the vengeance of a mother's blood.

**Menelaus**
When did your madness begin? Which day was it?

**Orestes**
On the day I was heaping the mound over my poor mother's grave.

**Menelaus**
When you were in the house, or watching by the pyre?

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

**Menelaus**
[405] Was any one else there, to help you rise?

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

**Menelaus**
You are sick from phantom shapes; what sort?

**Orestes**
I seemed to see three maidens, black as night.

**Menelaus**
I know whom you mean, but I do not want to name them.

**Orestes**
[410] Yes, for they are revered; you were well-informed, to avoid naming them.

**Menelaus**
Are these the ones that drive you to frenzy, with the curse of kindred blood?

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

**Menelaus**
It is not strange, if those who have done dreadful things should suffer them.

**Orestes**
But I have a way to recover from these troubles.

**Menelaus**
[415] Do not speak of death; that is not wise.

**Orestes**
It is Phoebus, who commanded me to kill my mother.

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

**Orestes**
We are slaves to the gods, whatever those gods are.

**Menelaus**
And does Loxias not help your affliction?

**Orestes**
[420] He will in time; this is the nature of gods.

**Menelaus**
How long is it since your mother breathed her last?

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

**Menelaus**
How soon the goddesses arrived to avenge your mother's blood!

**Orestes**
I am not clever, but I am by nature a true friend to my friends.

**Menelaus**
[425] Does your father give you any help at all, for your avenging him?

**Orestes**
Not yet; I call delay the equal of inaction.

After him lord Diomedes made a speech; he said they should not kill you and your brother, [900] but keep clear of guilt by punishing you with exile. Some roared out that his words were good, but others disapproved. Next stood up a fellow, who cannot close his lips; one whose impudence is his strength; an [Argive](http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/entityvote?doc=Perseus:text:1999.01.0116:card=898&auth=tgn,5001993&n=1&type=place), but not of [Argos](http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/entityvote?doc=Perseus:text:1999.01.0116:card=898&auth=perseus,Argos&n=1&type=place), forced on us; [905] confident in bluster and ignorant free speech, and plausible enough to involve them in some mischief sooner or later; [for whenever a man with a pleasing trick of speech, but of unsound principles, persuades the mob, it is a serious evil to the state; but those who give sound and sensible advice on all occasions, [910] if not immediately useful to the state, yet prove so afterwards. And this is the way in which to regard a party leader; for the position is much the same in the case of an orator and a man in office.] He was for stoning you and Orestes to death, [915] but it was Tyndareus who kept suggesting arguments of this kind to him as he urged the death of both of you.

Another then stood up and said the opposite; he was not handsome in appearance, but a brave man, rarely coming in contact with the town or the circle in the market-place; [920] a farmer—and they are the only ones who preserve our land—but clever, and eager to grapple with the arguments, his character without a blemish, his walk in life beyond reproach. He said that they should crown Orestes, the son of Agamemnon, for showing his willingness to avenge a father [925] by the murder of a wicked and godless woman who would prevent men from taking up arms and going on foreign service, if those who remain behind destroy households by corrupting men's wives. [930] To the better sort, at least, his word carried conviction.

No one spoke after him. Then your brother came forward and said: “You dwellers in the land of Inachus! [Pelasgians in ancient times, and later Danaids] I helped you no less than my father [935] when I slew my mother; for if the murder of men by women is to be sanctioned, then the sooner you die, the better, or you must become the slaves of women; and that will be doing the very reverse of what you should. As it is, she who betrayed my father's bed [940] has died, but if you take my life, the law becomes relaxed, and the sooner each one of you dies, the better; for it will never be daring at any rate that they will lack.”

Yet, for all he seemed to speak well, he did not persuade the assembly; but that villain who spoke in favor of slaying you and your brother [945] gained his point by appealing to the mob. Poor Orestes scarcely persuaded them not to kill him by stoning, promising to die by his own hand, with you, on this day. Pylades, in tears, is now bringing him from the conclave; [950] and his friends bear him company, with wailing and lamentation; so he comes, a bitter sight and piteous vision. Make ready the sword or prepare the noose for your neck, for you must leave the light; your noble birth [955] availed you nothing, nor did Phoebus from his seat on the tripod at [Delphi](http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/entityvote?doc=Perseus:text:1999.01.0116:card=931&auth=perseus,Delphi&n=1&type=place); he was your undoing.*The messenger withdraws.*

**[Chorus Leader**
Ah, hapless maiden! How silent you are, your face covered and bent to the ground, as if about to dash upon a course of lamentation and wailing.]

**Electra**
[960] O Pelasgia, I take up the dirge, doing bloody outrage on my cheeks with white nail, and beating on my head; these are the portion of Persephone, fair young goddess of the nether world. [965] Let the Cyclopian land break forth into wailing for the sorrows of our house, laying the steel upon the head to crop it close. This is the piteous, piteous strain that goes up for those who are about to die, [970] once the battle-leaders of [Hellas](http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/entityvote?doc=Perseus:text:1999.01.0116:card=960&auth=tgn,1000074&n=1&type=place).

**Electra**
It has gone, it has gone, and is lost, all the race of Pelops, and the glory that crowned their happy home once; the envy of heaven seized them and that cruel [975] murdering vote among the citizens. Oh, oh! you tribes of short-lived men, full of tears, full of suffering, see how fate runs counter to your hopes! All receive in turn their different [980] troubles in length of time; and the whole of mortal life is uncertain.

**Electra**
Oh! to reach that rock which hangs suspended midway between earth and heaven, that fragment from [Olympus](http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/entityvote?doc=Perseus:text:1999.01.0116:card=982&auth=tgn,7011019&n=1&type=place), which swings on chains of gold, so that I may utter my lament [985] to Tantalus, my forefather, who begot the ancestors of my house. They saw infatuate ruin, the chase of winged steeds, when Pelops in four-horse chariot [990] drove over the sea, hurling the body of murdered Myrtilus into the ocean swell, after his race near Geraestus' strand, foam-flecked from the tossing sea. [995] From this came a woeful curse upon my house, brought to birth among the sheep by the son of [Maia](http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/entityvote?doc=Perseus:text:1999.01.0116:card=982&auth=tgn,1049816&n=1&type=place), when there appeared a baleful, baleful portent of a lamb with golden fleece, [1000] for Atreus, breeder of horses; from which Strife changed the course of the sun's winged chariot, fitting the westward path of the sky towards the single horse of Dawn; [1005] and Zeus diverted the career of the seven Pleiads into a new track and exchanged . . . death for death: both the banquet to which Thyestes gave his name, and the treacherous love of Cretan Aerope, [1010] in her treacherous marriage; but the crowning woe has come on me and on my father by the bitter constraints of our house.

**Chorus Leader**
Look, here comes your brother, condemned to die, and with him Pylades, most loyal of friends, [1015] true as a brother, guiding his feeble steps, his yoke-fellow, pacing carefully.

**Electra**
Alas! I weep to see you stand before the tomb, my brother, face to face with the funeral pyre. [1020] Alas, again! as I take my last look at you, my senses leave me.

**Orestes**
Be silent! an end to womanish lamenting! resign yourself to your fate. It is piteous, but nevertheless [you must bear the present fate.]

**Electra**
[1025] How can I be silent, when we poor sufferers are no longer to gaze upon the sun-god's light?

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

**Electra**
Alas for your unhappy youth, Orestes, and for your fated [1030] untimely death! When you should have lived, you are going to die.

**Orestes**
By the gods, do not unman me, bringing me to tears by the recollection of my sorrows.

**Electra**
We are about to die; it is not possible for me not to grieve over our troubles; it is a piteous thing for all men to lose life, that is so sweet.

**Orestes**
[1035] This is the day appointed for us; we must fit the dangling noose about our necks or whet the sword for use.

**Electra**
You be the one to kill me, brother, so that no [Argive](http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/entityvote?doc=Perseus:text:1999.01.0116:card=1018&auth=tgn,5001993&n=1&type=place) may insult Agamemnon's son by my death.

**Orestes**
Enough that I have a mother's blood upon me; I will not kill you, [1040] but die by your own hand, however you wish.

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

**Orestes**
Enjoy that empty satisfaction, if embraces have any joy for those who have come so near to death.

**Electra**
[1045] My dearest, you who have a name that sounds most loved and sweet to your sister, partner in one soul with her!

**Orestes**
Oh, you will melt my heart! I want to give you back a fond embrace. And why should such a wretch as I still feel any shame? *Embracing Electra* Heart to heart, my sister! how sweet to me this close embrace! [1050] In place of children and the marriage bed [this greeting is all that is possible to us both in our misery].

**Electra**
Ah! If only the same sword, if it is right, could kill us both, and one coffin of cedar-wood receive us!

**Orestes**
That would be very sweet; but surely you see [1055] we are too destitute of friends to be allowed to share a tomb.

**Electra**
Did that coward Menelaus, that traitor to my father, not even speak for you, or make an effort to save your life?

**Orestes**
He did not even show himself, but, with his hopes centered on the throne, he was careful not to attempt the rescue of his friends. [1060] But let us see how we may die a noble death, one most worthy of Agamemnon. I, for my part, will let the city see my noble spirit when I plunge the sword to my heart, and you in turn must imitate my daring.

[1065] Pylades, be the arbitrator of our slaughter and, when we both are dead, lay out our bodies decently; carry them to our father's grave and bury us there with him. Farewell, now; I am leaving for the deed, as you see.

**Pylades**
Stop! there is first one point I have to blame you for, [1070] if you thought I would care to live when you are dead.

**Orestes**
But why are you called on to die with me?

**Pylades**
Do you ask? What is life to me without your companionship?

**Orestes**
You did not kill your mother, as I did to my sorrow.

**Pylades**
At least I helped you; and so I ought to suffer the same penalty.

**Orestes**
[1075] Surrender to your father, do not die with me. You still have a city, while I no longer have, and your father's home, and a great refuge of wealth. You have failed to marry my poor sister, whom I betrothed to you from a deep regard for your companionship; [1080] but find another bride and rear a family; for the marriage-tie which bound us is no more. Farewell, be happy, my beloved friend; we cannot, but you may; for we, the dead, are robbed of happiness.

**Pylades**
[1085] How far you are from grasping what I mean! May the fruitful earth, the radiant sky refuse to hold my blood, if ever I turn traitor and desert you when I have freed myself. For I shared in the murder, which I will not deny, [1090] and also schemed the whole plot, for which you are now paying the penalty; and so I ought to die together with you and her. For I consider her, whom you betrothed to me, as my wife. Whatever shall I say, when I reach [Delphi](http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/entityvote?doc=Perseus:text:1999.01.0116:card=1069&auth=perseus,Delphi&n=1&type=place), the citadel of [Phocis](http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/entityvote?doc=Perseus:text:1999.01.0116:card=1069&auth=tgn,4003963&n=1&type=place), [1095] if I was your friend before your misfortunes, but ceased to be your friend, when you were unfortunate? That must not be; no, this concerns me, too. But since we are to die, let us take counsel together that Menelaus may share our misfortune.

**Orestes**
[1100] Best of friends! if only I could see this before I die.

**Pylades**
Listen to me, and delay the stroke of the sword.

**Orestes**
I will, if I may take vengeance on my enemy.

**Pylades**
Hush now! I have small confidence in women.

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

**Pylades**
[1105] Let us kill Helen, a bitter grief to Menelaus.

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

**Pylades**
With our swords; she is hiding in your house.

**Orestes**
Indeed she is; and already she is putting her seal on everything.

**Pylades**
No longer, after she is married to Hades.

**Orestes**
[1110] But how? She has her barbarian attendants.

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

**Orestes**
They are only fit to look after mirrors and perfumes!

**Pylades**
Has she brought Trojan luxury with her here?

**Orestes**
So much so, that [Hellas](http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/entityvote?doc=Perseus:text:1999.01.0116:card=1105&auth=tgn,1000074&n=1&type=place) is too small for her to live in.

**Pylades**
[1115] The race of slaves is nothing to those who are free.

**Orestes**
Well, if I can do this deed, I do not shrink from dying twice over.

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

**Orestes**
Explain the matter, and continue describing your plan.

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

**Orestes**
[1120] So far I follow you, but not beyond.

**Pylades**
We will lament our sufferings to her.

**Orestes**
So that she will shed tears, although her heart is glad.

**Pylades**
And our condition will be like hers.

**Orestes**
How shall we proceed next in our contest?

**Pylades**
[1125] We shall have swords concealed in our cloaks.

**Orestes**
Will we dispose of her attendants first?

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

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

**Pylades**
And then the deed itself shows us where we must exert ourselves.

**Oretes**
[1130] To kill Helen; I understand that watchword.

**Pylades**
You have it; now hear how sound my scheme is. If we drew the sword upon a woman of greater chastity, the murder would be infamous; but, as it is, she will be punished for the sake of all [Hellas](http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/entityvote?doc=Perseus:text:1999.01.0116:card=1105&auth=tgn,1000074&n=2&type=place), [1135] whose fathers she slew, whose children she destroyed, and made widows out of brides. There will be shouts of joy, and they will kindle the altars of the gods, invoking on our heads many blessings, because we shed a wicked woman's blood. [1140] After killing her, you will not be called “the matricide,” but, resigning that title, you will succeed to a better, and be called the slayer of Helen the murderess. It can never, never be right that Menelaus should prosper, and your father, your sister and you should die, [1145] and your mother—but I pass that by, for it is not seemly to mention it—and for him to possess your home, though it was by Agamemnon's prowess that he got his bride. May I die, if we do not draw our swords upon her! But if we do not accomplish Helen's death, [1150] we will set fire to the house and die. For we will not fail to achieve one distinction, an honorable death or an honorable escape.

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

**Orestes**
[1155] Ah! there is nothing better than a trusty friend, neither wealth nor monarchy; a crowd of people is of no account in exchange for a noble friend. You were the one who devised the vengeance against Aegisthus, and stood by me in danger, [1160] and now again you are offering me a means to punish my foes and do not stand aside—but I will cease praising you, for there is something wearisome even in being praised to excess. Now since in any case I must breathe my last, I want to do something to my enemies before my death, [1165] so that I may requite with ruin those who betrayed me, and so that those who made me suffer may grieve. Yes! I am the son of Agamemnon, who was considered worthy to rule [Hellas](http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/entityvote?doc=Perseus:text:1999.01.0116:card=1155&auth=tgn,1000074&n=1&type=place), no tyrant but yet god-like in power; I will not disgrace him [1170] by submitting to die like a slave; my last breath shall be free and I will take vengeance on Menelaus. For if we could secure one object, we would be lucky, if a means of safety should unexpectedly come our way from somewhere, and we should be the slayers, not the slain; this is what I pray for. [1175] This wish of mine is a pleasant dream to cheer the heart, without cost, by means of the mouth's winged words.

**Electra**
I think I have it, brother, a means of safety for you, and for him and thirdly for myself.

**Orestes**
You mean divine providence. But why do I say that? [1180] Since I know the natural shrewdness of your heart.

**Electra**
Listen to me now; and you pay attention also.

**Orestes**
Speak; the prospect of good news holds a certain pleasure.

**Electra**
You know Helen's daughter? Of course you do.

**Orestes**
I know her, [Hermione](http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/entityvote?doc=Perseus:text:1999.01.0116:card=1155&auth=perseus,Hermione&n=1&type=place), whom my mother reared.

**Electra**
[1185] She has gone to Clytemnestra's tomb.

**Orestes**
To do what? What hope are you hinting at?

**Electra**
She was going to pour a libation over the tomb of our mother.

**Orestes**
Well, how does what you have said lead to our safety?

**Electra**
Seize her as a hostage on her way back.

**Orestes**
[1190] What good can your suggested remedy do us three friends?

**Electra**
If, after Helen's slaughter, Menelaus tries to do anything to you or to Pylades and me—for this bond of friendship is wholly one—say that you will kill Hermione; you must draw your sword and hold it to the maiden's throat. [1195] If Menelaus, when he sees Helen fallen in her blood, tries to save you to insure the girl's life, allow him to take his daughter to his arms; but if he makes no effort to curb the angry outburst and leaves you to die, then cut the maiden's throat. [1200] And I think if he puts in a mighty appearance at first, he will calm down in time; for he is not bold or brave by nature. That is my line of defense for our safety. My speech is over.

**Orestes**
O you that have the spirit of a man, [1205] though your body shows you to be a woman, how far more worthy you are to live than to die! Pylades, you will lose such a woman to your sorrow, or if you live, you will have a blessed marriage.

**Pylades**
Then may it be so, and may she come to the city of [Phocis](http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/entityvote?doc=Perseus:text:1999.01.0116:card=1204&auth=tgn,4003963&n=1&type=place) [1210] with all the honors of a happy wedding.

**Orestes**
How soon will [Hermione](http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/entityvote?doc=Perseus:text:1999.01.0116:card=1204&auth=perseus,Hermione&n=1&type=place) return to the palace? All the rest was very well said, if we succeed in catching this impious father's cub.

**Electra**
Well, I expect she is near the house already, [1215] for the length of time agrees exactly.

**Orestes**
Good; you, Electra, my sister, stay before the palace and await the maiden's approach; keep watch in case any one, whether an ally or my father's brother, forestalls us by his entry before the murder is complete; [1220] and then make a signal to the house, either by beating on a panel of the door or calling to us within. Let us enter now and arm ourselves with swords for the final struggle, [:Pylades, for you share the labor with me.]

[1225] O father, in your home of gloomy night, your son Orestes calls you to come to the rescue of the destitute. It is on your account I am wrongfully suffering, and it is by your brother that I have been betrayed for doing right; it is his wife I wish to take [1230] and kill; you be our accomplice for this deed.

**Electra**
Oh father, come! if within the ground you hear the cry of your children, who are dying for your sake.

**Pylades**
O kinsman of my father, Agamemnon, hear my prayers also; save your children.

**Orestes**
[1235] I killed my mother—

**Electra**
I held the sword—

**Pylades**
I . . . set them free from fear—

**Orestes**
To aid you, father.

**Electra**
Nor did I betray you.

**Pylades**
Will you not hear these reproaches and rescue your children?

**Orestes**
With tears I pour you a libation.

**Electra**
And I with laments.

**Pylades**
[1240] Cease, and let us set about our business. If prayers really do pierce the ground, he hears. O Zeus, god of my fathers, and holy Justice, give success to him and me and her; for there is one struggle for three friends, and one penalty, [1245] for all to live or—pay death's account.*Orestes and Pylades enter the palace.*

**Electra**
My dear friends of [Mycenae](http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/entityvote?doc=Perseus:text:1999.01.0116:card=1246&auth=perseus,Mycenae&n=1&type=place), of foremost rank in [Argos](http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/entityvote?doc=Perseus:text:1999.01.0116:card=1246&auth=perseus,Argos&n=1&type=place), the home of the Pelasgians.

**Chorus**
What are you saying to us, mistress? [1250] For this honored name is still left for you in the Danaid town.

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

**Chorus**
But why do you call me to this service? Tell me, my dear.

**Electra**
[1255] I am afraid that some one, who is stationed at the house for slaughter, may find trouble upon trouble.

**First Semi-Chorus**
Let us make haste and go on; I will keep careful watch upon this road towards the east.

**Second Semi-Chorus**
[1260] And I on this one, that leads westward.

**Electra**
Throw a glance sideways.

**Chorus**
Here and there, then we are looking back again, [1265] as you tell us.

**Electra**
Cast your eyes around, let them see everything, through your tresses.

**First Semi-Chorus**
Who is that on the road? Who is this [1270] country-man wandering round your house?

**Electra**
Ah! friends, we are ruined; he will at once reveal to our enemies the armed ambush.

**Second Semi-Chorus**
Calm your fears; the road is not occupied, as you think, my dear.

**Electra**
[1275] Well? Is your side still secure? Give me a good report, if the space before the court-yard is deserted.

**First Semi-Chorus**
All goes well here; look to your own watch, for no Danaid is approaching us.

**Second Semi-Chorus**
[1280] Your report agrees with mine; there is no noise here either.

**Electra**
Well then, I will listen in the gateway.

**Chorus**
You within the house, why are you delaying to spill your victim's blood, [1285] now that all is quiet?

**Electra**
*spoken*
They do not hear; alas for my troubles! Can it be that her beauty has blunted their swords?

*sung*
Soon some [Argive](http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/entityvote?doc=Perseus:text:1999.01.0116:card=1286&auth=tgn,5001993&n=1&type=place) in full armor, hurrying [1290] to her rescue, will attack the palace.

*spoken*
Keep a better look-out; it is not a contest of sitting still; turn about, some here, some there.

**Chorus**
*sung*
[1295] I am looking everywhere in turn along the road.

**Helen**
*within*
Oh, Pelasgian Argos! I am being foully murdered.

**Chorus**
Did you hear? The men have put their hand to the slaughter.

It is Helen screaming, at a guess.

**Electra**
*sung*
[1300] O eternal might of Zeus, of Zeus, only come to help my friends!

**Helen**
*within*
Menelaus, I am dying, but you do not help me, though you are near.

**Electra**
*sung*
Slay her, kill her, destroy her! Stab with your twin double-edged swords [1305] the woman who left her father, left her husband, and killed so many of the men of [Hellas](http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/entityvote?doc=Perseus:text:1999.01.0116:card=1302&auth=tgn,1000074&n=1&type=place), slain beside the river-bank, where tears rained down, by the iron darts [1310] all round the eddies of Scamander.

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

**Electra**
My dearest friends, it is [Hermione](http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/entityvote?doc=Perseus:text:1999.01.0116:card=1311&auth=perseus,Hermione&n=1&type=place) advancing into the middle of the bloodshed; let our clamor cease. [1315] For she comes headlong into the meshes of the net. The prey will be good, if it is caught. Take up your places again with looks composed and faces not betraying what has happened; I too will have a gloomy look, [1320] as if I knew nothing of what has been done.[*Hermione*](http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/entityvote?doc=Perseus:text:1999.01.0116:card=1311&auth=perseus,Hermione&n=2&type=place) *enters.*

Ah! maiden, have you come from wreathing Clytemnestra's grave and pouring libations to the dead?

**Hermione**
Yes, I have returned after securing her favor; but I was filled with some alarm about a cry I heard from the palace [1325] as I was still at a distance.

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

**Hermione**
Oh, don't say so! What is your news?

**Electra**
[Argos](http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/entityvote?doc=Perseus:text:1999.01.0116:card=1311&auth=perseus,Argos&n=1&type=place) has sentenced Orestes and me to death.

**Hermione**
Oh no! not my own relatives!

**Electra**
[1330] It is decreed; we have put on the yoke of necessity.

**Hermione**
Was this the reason of the cry within?

**Electra**
Yes, a suppliant cried out as he fell at Helen's knees—

**Hermione**
Who is he? I know nothing more, if you do not tell me.

**Electra**
Unhappy Orestes, entreating mercy for himself and me.

**Hermione**
[1335] The house then has good reason to shout.

**Electra**
What else would make someone entreat more earnestly? But come and throw yourself before your mother in her prosperity, join your friends' supplication that Menelaus may not see us die. [1340] O you that were nursed in my mother's arms, have pity on us and relieve our pain. Come here to the struggle, and I myself will be your guide; for you alone have power over our safety.

**Hermione**
See, I am hastening to the house; [1345] as far it as rests with me, regard yourselves as safe.*Hermione enters the palace.*

**Electra**
Now, friends in the house with swords, seize the prey!

**Hermione**
*within*
Oh no! Who are these I see?

**Orestes**
Silence! You are here for our safety, not yours.

**Electra**
Hold her, hold her! Point a sword at her throat, [1350] then wait in silence, that Menelaus may learn that he has found men, not Phrygian cowards, and he has been treated as cowards deserve.*She enters the palace.*

**Chorus**
Oh, oh, friends! raise a din, a din and shouting before the house, that the murder when done [1355] may not inspire the Argives with wild alarm, to make them bring aid to the palace, before I see for certain that Helen's corpse lies bloody in the house, or hear the news from one of her attendants; [1360] for I know a part of the tragedy, of the rest I am not sure.

In justice, retribution from the gods has come to Helen; for she filled all [Hellas](http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/entityvote?doc=Perseus:text:1999.01.0116:card=1353&auth=tgn,1000074&n=1&type=place) with tears, through that accursed, accursed [Paris](http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/entityvote?doc=Perseus:text:1999.01.0116:card=1353&auth=tgn,7008038&n=1&type=place) of Ida, [1365] who drew [Hellas](http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/entityvote?doc=Perseus:text:1999.01.0116:card=1353&auth=tgn,1000074&n=2&type=place) to [Troy](http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/entityvote?doc=Perseus:text:1999.01.0116:card=1353&auth=perseus,Troy&n=1&type=place).

**Chorus Leader**
[But the bolts of the palace-doors rattle; be silent; for one of the Phrygians is coming out, from whom we will inquire how it is within.]

*The Phrygian Eunuch enters from the palace, expressing the most abject terror. His lines are sung, in answer to the Chorus' spoken questions.*

**Phrygian**
I have escaped from death by [Argive](http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/entityvote?doc=Perseus:text:1999.01.0116:card=1366&auth=tgn,5001993&n=1&type=place) sword, [1370] in my Asian slippers, by clambering over the cedar-beams that roof the porch and the Doric triglyphs, away, away! O Earth, Earth! in barbaric flight! [1375] Alas! You foreign women, where can I escape, flying through the clear sky or over the sea, which bull-headed Ocean rolls about as he circles the world in his embrace?