

Scene 4

PYLADES enters.

PYLADES

Ladies, excuse me, can you tell me if this is the palace of the king Aegisthus?

ELECTRA

It is, sir; you have guessed correctly.

CHORUS

It is, sir; you have guessed correctly.

PYLADES

And am I right in guessing that this lady is his Queen? She looks fittingly regal.

ELECTRA

Yes; you are in the presence of her most regal Majesty.

PYLADES

Hail, royal lady! I bring excellent news to you and Aegisthus, from friends.

CLYTEMNESTRA

I would be most grateful for any good omen; but first tell me who you are.

PYLADES

My name is Phanoteus, and I come on urgent business.

CLYTEMNESTRA

What is it, sir? Tell me: as you are a friend, I'm sure your message is welcome!

PYLADES

Orestes is dead; that is the message.

ELECTRA

Oh, God! Oh, God!

CHORUS (ALL)

Oh, God! Oh, God!/
lyrics

CLYTEMNESTRA

What did you say, what was that? Ignore her!

PYLADES

I repeat- Orestes is dead.

ELECTRA
I can't take
it!/Lyrics

CHORUS (ALL)
I can't take
it!/Lyrics

CLYTEMNESTRA

(to ELECTRA) Will you stop it? Leave us alone. Sir, you must tell me exactly, how did Orestes die?

Electra moves to down stage right, during this monologue, she cuts/harms herself methodically, in a ritualistic fashion. The Chorus assists her in harming herself. Focus shifts back and forth between Pylades and Electra during this section, with focus landing on Electra as the section builds to a climax.

PYLADES

That is the reason why I have come to you; I will tell you everything. As you might have heard, Orestes had gained some fame for his athletic skills in recent months. He went and entered himself into the Delphian games, as a runner. In brilliant form, he won his race, astonishing all who attended. To put it bluntly, I have never seen his equal; he was unmatched in every contest that the judges announced. He was admired by all, and they all chanted his name: Orestes, son of Agamemnon, who once ruled the army of Greece.

Up until then, all was well; but, when the gods send harm, not even the strongest man can escape. For, on another day, he entered the chariot race with many other skillful drivers.

They took their stations where the appointed umpires placed them; then, at the sound of the horns, they started their race. The racers shouted to their horses, and shook the reins in their hands. The whole course was filled with the noise of rattling chariots. The dust flew up in great clouds, and the racers drove on without hesitation in a confused throng, each of them striving to pass his rivals. Orestes, driving close to the pillar at either end of the course, almost grazed it with his wheel each time, and, giving rein to the trace-horse on the right, checked the horse on the inner side. Thus far, all the chariots had escaped mishap; but one by one they met with accidents and fatal collisions. Orestes kept himself apace, keeping his horses behind the other chariots, with this strategy he expected to outlast all the others; but when he saw that the Athenian racer was the last of his competitors remaining, Orestes sent a shrill cry ringing through the ears of his swift colts, and gave chase. They raced side by side- first one man was in the lead, then the other.

They pursued the finish line, when suddenly, Orestes mistakenly slackened his left rein while the horse was turning, and he struck the edge of the pillar, breaking axle-box in half. He was instantly thrown over the chariot-rail, where he was caught in his own tangled reins; and, as he fell on the ground, his horses broke free and scattered into the middle of the course. When the people saw him fall from the car, a huge cry of pity went up for the young man, who had seemed invincible to them, now dashed to earth. The other drivers ran to him, and pulled him from the wreckage, but he was so covered with blood that no friend who saw it would have recognized his pitiful corpse.

Without delay, they burned his body on a pyre; and representatives are bringing his remains in a small bronze urn to find proper burial in his fatherland. That is my story. These are hard words to say, but it was perhaps even more difficult to have witnessed the event.

CHORUS

(moaning)

Now the whole of our ancient family is broken, perished, torn out by its roots.

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