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IPHIGENIA IN TAURIS

A PLAY IN FIVE ACTS

Translated by David Luke

Characters

IPHIGENIA, daughter of Agamemnon and Clytemnestra

ORESTES, her brother

PYLADES, his friend

THOAS, king of the Taurians

ARCAS, his attendant

The scene is a grove in front of the temple of Diana in Tauris.

Translator's note: The translation imitates Goethe's five-foot iambic blank verse and is intended to be metrically correct in that sense. A reading with correct scansion is in all cases possible provided (a) that the words are pronounced as in British English (e.g., "détail," not "detail"), and (b) that the (anglicized) classical proper names are pronounced correctly. "Iphigenia," for instance, must be read as five syllables with penultimate stress. I have added the stress-accent in cases where doubt might arise. "Atreus" may be read either as two syllables (l. 340) or as three (l. 360), where the diaeresis (") indicates this.

ACT I

IPHIGENIA. Into your shade, you gently stirring treetops,
Into this ancient sacred leafy grove,
The goddess's own silent sanctuary,
I come forth, and come even now with dread
As if it still were my first time of coming: 5
For still I feel a stranger in this place.
So many years ago, divine decree,
To which I bow, brought me and hid me here;
But now, as then, I am in alien land.
For from the friends I love the sea divides me 10
And day by day I stand upon the shore
Seeking with all my soul the land of Greece;
And to my sighs, alas, there comes no answer
But hollow echoes of the roaring wave.
How lonely is the man who lives alone 15
Far from his family! Bitter grief corrupts
Each present joy before his very lips.
His yearning thoughts swarm back unceasingly
Towards his father's house, where first the sun
Disclosed the heavens to him, where between 20
Brothers and sisters tender bonds of love
Were forged for ever as they lived and played.
I will not wrangle with the gods; and yet,
How lamentable is the lot of women!
A man rules in his home, and rules in war, 25
And in a foreign land he finds recourse;
Possessions gladden him, victory crowns him,
He lives assured of honourable death.
But strict and narrow is a woman's fortune:
Even to obey a boorish husband is 30
Duty and solace—how much harsher then
The fate that drives her into distant exile!
Such is my case: here noble Thoas holds me
To sacred office solemnly enslaved.
And I confess in shame that with a mute 35
Resentment I have served you, oh my goddess,
My rescuer! For should not my whole life
Be dedicated willingly to you?
And I have always hoped, and I still hope,
For help from you, holy Diana: you 40
It was who caught me in your gentle arms,

Act I

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The banished daughter of the mightiest king.
 O maid of Zeus, if he, that king of men,
 If by your guidance godlike Agamemnon,
 Whose heart shook when you asked him for his daughter, 45
 Who to your altar brought what he loved best:
 If he with honour from Troy's toppled ramparts
 Has now returned and reached his fatherland,
 And found his wife, Electra and his son,
 Dear treasures all, preserved for him by you— 50
 Then give me also to my friends again,
 And save me, whom you saved from death, at last
 From this life here as well, this second death!

Enter Arcas.

ARCAS. The king has sent me here, and bids me greet
 The priestess of Diana and to hail her. 55
 This is the day on which we thank our goddess
 Of Tauris for new glorious victories.
 I haste ahead of Thoas and his army
 To tell you that he comes, that it draws near.
 IPHIGENIA. We are ready to receive them worthily; 60
 Our goddess too will look with gracious eyes
 Upon the welcome offerings of the king.
 ARCAS. Oh, in your eyes as well, most honoured lady,
 Our dear and holy priestess, shall I not find
 In your eyes too a look more bright and radiant, 65
 Portending joy to all of us? For still
 Mysterious grief obscures your inmost soul,
 And vainly we have waited for long years
 To hear from you some friendly, heartfelt word.
 As long as I have known you in this place 70
 Your eyes have frozen me with that same look:
 And to this very day, deep in your breast,
 As if with iron chains your heart is locked.
 IPHIGENIA. And such reserve befits the exiled orphan.
 ARCAS. Do you feel orphaned and in exile here? 75
 IPHIGENIA. Can a strange land become our native soil?
 ARCAS. And yet your own land has grown strange to you.
 IPHIGENIA. That is why my heart bleeds and cannot heal.
 In my first youth, when scarcely bound by love
 Yet to my parents and their other children, 80
 When the new tender shoots, growing together
 Around the older stems, so sweetly strove
 Towards the sky, alas! an alien curse

Suddenly struck me, separated me	
From those I loved; and by its brazen hand	85
The dearest bonds were severed. It was lost,	
Our youth's best happiness, the thriving growth	
Of early years. Even when saved, I felt	
No more than a mere shadow; and the joy	
Of life never took root in me again.	90
ARCAS. If you are so unhappy as you say,	
Then I may say you are ungrateful too.	
IPHIGENIA. Have I not always thanked you?	
ARCAS. But was that	
The pure and loving thanks, the benefactor's	
Truest reward, the fleeting glance, the smile	95
That tells him he has given happiness?	
When you came here so many years ago,	
Brought by a deep mysterious destiny,	
The gods' gift to this temple, Thoas met you	
And showed you his respect and his affection;	100
And you found refuge, you found welcome on	
Our shore which until then, to any stranger	
Who landed, was a place of fear: they all,	
By ancient custom, perished bloodily	
Here on the sacred altar of Diana.	105
IPHIGENIA. Is life no more than leave to draw one's breath?	
What life is this, that in this holy place	
I pass in sorrow, like some mournful shade	
Lingering by its own grave? How can we say	
We are alive and glad and know ourselves,	110
When every day, spent in vain reverie,	
Is a mere presage of the dull grey days	
That we shall spend in dreary self-oblivion	
As sad departed ghosts on Lethe's shore?	
What early death is worse than useless life?	115
And I, a woman, chiefly bear this fate.	
ARCAS. Your noble pride, your self-dissatisfaction	
I pardon, though I pity you as well,	
For it has robbed you of the joy of life.	
You say you have done nothing since you came here:	120
Have you not cured the king's deep melancholy?	
Have you not changed the ancient cruel custom	
That dooms all strangers landing here to death	
Upon Diana's altar, year by year	
Gently persuading Thoas to suspend it,	125
Saving so many wretched prisoners' lives	
And letting them set sail for home again?	

Act I

5

The goddess was not angered when she saw
 That ancient bloody sacrifice withheld,
 But heard the prayers of her gentle priestess: 130
 For now, does not winged victory salute
 Our warriors, fly ahead of them indeed,
 And do we all not feel a new contentment
 Since Thoas, having reigned so long with wisdom
 And warlike valour, takes new pleasure now, 135
 With you to counsel him, in showing mercy,
 Easing the duty of our mute obedience?
 Can you call your life useless, when on thousands
 The balm of your sweet influence falls like dew,
 When you have been an ever-welling spring 140
 Of happiness to us, since some god sent you,
 And when to strangers you have given safe
 Homecoming from our wild and fatal shore?
 IPHIGENIA. So little done we soon lose sight of, when
 We look ahead and see so much to do. 145
 ARCAS. Do you praise those who underprize themselves?
 IPHIGENIA. We censure those who measure their own deeds.
 ARCAS. We censure those too proud to know their worth
 No less than those too vain for modesty.
 Oh hear me, and believe the honest word 150
 Of a plain-speaking man and faithful friend:
 When the king speaks to you today, be kind,
 And make it easier for him to speak.
 IPHIGENIA. Your well-meant words dismay me; many times
 I have been pressed to answer his proposal. 155
 ARCAS. You must consider what is best for you.
 Since the king lost his son, there are not many
 Among his friends and followers he trusts,
 And these no more than he has ever done.
 He looks askance at every noble youth 160
 Who might succeed him, fears that in old age
 He will be alone and helpless, perhaps ousted
 By some bold rising, killed before his time.
 The Scythian thinks little of fine speech,
 And the king least of all. He is accustomed 165
 Only to giving orders and to acting:
 He does not know the art of delicately
 Steering a conversation to its point.
 You must not make it hard for him with cold
 Reserve, with seeming not to understand 170
 His meaning. Meet him gracefully half-way.
 IPHIGENIA. Must I invite the fate that threatens me?

ARCAS. How can you call his wooing you a threat?
 IPHIGENIA. Of all I dread, I dread this most of all.
 ARCAS. Surely you will reward his love with trust. 175
 IPHIGENIA. If first he will release me from this fear!
 ARCAS. Why do you hide your name and race from him?
 IPHIGENIA. Because such secrecy befits a priestess.
 ARCAS. Nothing should be held secret from the king.
 He does not order you to speak, and yet 180
 He feels it deeply, his great heart is sad
 That you should keep such a defensive silence.
 IPHIGENIA. Does he resent it, have I angered him?
 ARCAS. I almost think so; he is silent too
 But casual words that he lets fall convince me 185
 That he has set his heart upon one thing:
 To gain possession of you. Do not leave him,
 Oh do not leave him now to his own thoughts!
 Or in his soul resentment will take root
 And grow into some terror for you. Then, 190
 Too late, you will remember my advice.
 IPHIGENIA. What! are the king's intentions so ignoble?
 No man of honourable name, whose heart
 Is governed by some reverence for the gods,
 Should ever harbour them; and would he dare 195
 To drag me from the altar to his bed?
 Then I will call on all the heavenly ones
 And on my goddess above all, Diana
 The resolute! I am her virgin priestess,
 And she, herself a virgin, will protect me! 200
 ARCAS. You need not be alarmed; he is not a boy,
 To be impelled to rash hot-blooded deeds.
 I fear a different danger as I watch
 Him brood, another harsh decision which
 He will stand by inflexibly. For when his 205
 Mind is made up, nothing can move him. Therefore
 I beg you, trust him, show him gratitude
 Even if that is all that you can offer.
 IPHIGENIA. Oh, if you know more, tell me what you know!
 ARCAS. The king himself will tell you; he is coming. 210
 You honour him, and your own heart invites you
 To treat him kindly and without reserve.
 Kind words from women have great influence
 With noble-minded men.

Exit.

IPHIGENIA. He counsels well;
And yet how can I follow his advice?
But I will gladly give the king the thanks
I owe him for his magnanimity;
And let me hope to please him with kind words,
Yet speak the truth into his mighty ear.

Enter Thoas.

Now may our goddess bless you royally, 220
Oh king, and grant you victory and fame
And wealth and the well-being of your people
And every pious wish in plenitude!
That you, the careful ruler of so many,
May know a happiness reserved for few. 225

THOAS. The praises of my people would content me,
But I have won what others now enjoy
More than myself. How happy is that man,
A king or humble subject, who can say
That fortune smiles upon his house and home! 230
You shared with me my days of deepest grief
When I had lost my last and dearest son,
Snatched from my side, killed by my enemies.
So long as thoughts of vengeance filled my mind
I could not feel my dwelling's desolation; 235
But now that I have laid their kingdom waste
And have avenged him, I return and find
No satisfaction here with my own people.
Once I read happiness in all their faces,
Gladness to serve me; but their service now 240
Is dulled by anxious care and mute resentment.
They brood upon the future, and obey me
Because they must, but think: He has no heir.
I come now to this temple; many times
I have come before, to pray for victory 245
Or to give thanks for it. Today I bring
A hope long cherished, not unknown to you
Or unexpected: that you will confer
A blessing on my people and on me
By coming home with me to be my wife. 250

IPHIGENIA. My lord, I am a stranger, and you offer
Too much to me; I stand ashamed before you,
A fugitive who never have sought more
Than peace and shelter here—these you have given.

- THOAS. That you still keep your origins a secret 255
 From me, as from the least among my subjects,
 Would not seem right and just to any people.
 My shores mean fear to strangers; so the law
 And so necessity command. But you
 Enjoy here every hospitable right, 260
 You we have welcomed, and you spend your days
 As your own mind and your own choice determine.
 You, I had hoped, would trust me, as a host
 Is trusted by a guest whom he befriends.
- IPHIGENIA. I have not named my parents to you, not 265
 From lack of trust, but from a kind of shame,
 My lord; for if you knew who stands before you,
 How cursed and steeped in infamy I am
 Whom you have cherished and protected—then
 Perhaps, alas, your generous heart would quail 270
 With horror and strange dread, and far from bidding
 Me share your throne, you would drive me from your kingdom
 Before my time, before the gods had yet
 Decreed my glad homecoming and the end
 Of all my wanderings, you would banish me 275
 Perhaps, into the weary wretchedness
 Which like an ice-cold alien menace waits
 For all the homeless exiles of the world.
- THOAS. I do not know the counsel and intent
 Of the high gods for you and for your house. 280
 But since you have lived here with us, enjoying
 The gentle rights of hospitality,
 I have not lacked their blessing, and you shall not
 Persuade me easily that I have taken
 A cursèd outlaw under my protection. 285
- IPHIGENIA. Your kindness brings you blessing, not your guest.
- THOAS. The gods curse good deeds done to evil-doers.
 So make an end now of your reticence!
 I ask this of you, and will treat you justly.
 The goddess has entrusted you to me: 290
 You have been sacred to me, as to her,
 And henceforth too her will shall be my law.
 If there is hope of your returning home,
 Then I release you from all obligation;
 But if that way is barred to you for ever, 295
 Your family scattered or annihilated
 By some disastrous fortune, then I shall

Act I

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Claim you as mine, and have some rights to do so.

Speak freely then! for I shall keep my word.

IPHIGENIA. My tongue has lain in bondage: it is hard 300

To free it now and to disclose at last

A secret so long kept, for once confided,

The words are out, and cannot find their way

Back to the heart's deep refuge, but must fly

To do harm or do good, as the gods will. 305

Hear then: my ancestor was Tantalus.

THOAS. That was a weighty word, so calmly spoken.

Are you of his race, whom the world remembers

As one to whom the gods once showed high favour,

That Tantalus whom Zeus himself invited 310

To counsel him and sit at table with him,

Whose conversation, rich in wise experience

And many an oracular subtlety,

Was fascinating even to the gods?

IPHIGENIA. This was the man. But the gods should not mix 315

With humankind as if men were their peers.

The mortal race is weak, and giddiness

Must seize it on those unaccustomed heights.

He was no traitor, he was not ignoble,

Only too great to serve, and as a friend 320

Of the great Thunderer, all too human. So

His fault was human, and their judgement stern;

And poets sing of him that bold presumption

And breach of trust hurled him from Jove's right hand

Down to the shades of ancient Tartarus. 325

Alas, and his whole house the gods now hated!

THOAS. For his offence, or did they too offend?

IPHIGENIA. His sons and grandsons, violent of heart

They were, and marrow of the Titans' strength

They inherited from him; but the high god, 330

He forged a brazen ring about their brows,

And he made blind their wild and gloomy eyes

To patience, moderation and wise counsel.

All their desires turned into raging lust

And raged all round them, fierce and limitless. 335

Pelops himself, the son of Tantalus,

Self-willed and violent—he won his wife,

Oenomaós's daughter Hippodámia,

By treachery and murder. Then she bore him

Two brothers, Atreus and Thyestes. They, 340

As they grew older, watched with envious eyes
 Their father's preference for his first son
 Born of another marriage. Hatred joined them,
 And secretly they planned and carried out
 Together their first deed of fratricide. 345
 Pelops, supposing the boy's stepmother
 To be his murderess, cried out against her,
 Demanding back his son, and Hippodámia
 Killed herself—

THOAS. You are silent? Tell the rest.
 Do not regret your trust in me; speak on. 350

IPHIGENIA. Happy the man with ancestors whose deeds
 Are a glad memory, a lofty tale
 And good to tell, who proudly sees himself
 As one more link upon a noble chain.
 For generations of a family 355
 Take time to breed a hero or a monster;
 A lineage of good or evil men
 Brings forth at last one whom the whole world loves
 Or one who horrifies the world. When Pelops
 Died, his two sons, Atreüs and Thyéstes, 360
 Ruled Argos jointly. But this peace was not
 A lasting one. Thyestes before long
 Seduced his brother's wife; he in revenge
 Banished him from the kingdom. But Thyestes,
 Brooding on evil deeds, had long ago 365
 Stolen a son from Atreus; secretly,
 With flattering malice, reared him as his own;
 And now, filling his heart with rage and vengeance,
 Sent him into the city, where he planned
 To kill his father, thinking him his uncle. 370
 The would-be murderer was caught, and Atreus
 Doomed him to cruel death, believing him
 To be his brother's son. In drunken rage
 He watched the tortured boy, and learnt too late
 Who he had been. Then, lusting for such dire 375
 Revenge as never had been known before,
 He fell to silent scheming. He pretended
 A reconciliation with his brother,
 Lured him and his two nephews back to Argos,
 Seized the young boys, slaughtered and cooked them both 380
 And for the first day's dinner served this foul
 And nauseous dish of horror to their father.
 Thyestes, glutted now on his own flesh,

Act I

11

Felt a strange sadness, asked: Where are my children?
 And thought he heard their voices and their footsteps 385
 Already at the door, when Atreüs,
 With his teeth bared in dreadful glee, threw down
 In front of him their severed heads and feet.
 My lord, you turn your face away in horror:
 So the bright sun's face turned, its chariot swerved 390
 From its eternal path across the sky.
 From such a house your priestess is descended;
 And her ancestral story has much more
 To tell of hideous fates and deeds of madness
 Which now the heavy wings of night have hidden, 395
 And dreadful mirk obscures their memory.

THOAS. So let your silence hide them. I have heard
 Enough abominations! Tell me by
 What miracle you sprang from that wild race.

IPHIGENIA. Atreus's eldest son was Agamemnon; 400
 He is my father. Yet I will declare
 That since my childhood I have known in him
 The very model of a perfect man.
 I was his first-born child by Clytemnestra;
 Electra was the next. He reigned in peace, 405
 And so the royal house of Tantalus
 Rested from its long turmoil. But my parents
 Lacked one thing for their happiness, a son;
 And scarcely had this wish been granted, scarcely
 Was dear Orestes born and his two sisters 410
 Lovingly tending him, than as he grew
 So a new evil grew to threaten us.
 Your countrymen have heard of the great war
 In which the might of all the lords of Greece
 Is laying siege to Troy, to avenge the abduction 415
 Of the world's loveliest woman. Whether they
 Have yet destroyed the city and completed
 Their vengeance, is not known to me. My father
 Led the Greek army. His ships vainly waited
 At Aulis for a favourable wind; 420
 Diana, angry with the king, delayed them,
 Demanding, through her priest, a sacrifice;
 And Calchas named my father's eldest daughter.
 They lured me with my mother to the camp,
 They dragged me to the altar, and my life 425
 Was offered to the goddess—this appeased her!
 She did not want my blood, she rescued me,

Hiding me in a cloud. When I regained
My life, my senses, I was in this temple.
I who now stand before you, I am she: 430
Atreus's grandchild, Agamemnon's daughter,
Iphigenía, great Diana's handmaid.

THOAS. The unnamed stranger and the royal princess
Merit my trust and favour equally;
And I repeat the offer I have made: 435
Come, follow me, and share all that is mine.

IPHIGENIA. My lord, how can I dare accept? The goddess
Who saved me, must not she alone dispose
Of me and of my consecrated life?
She sought and found this place of refuge for me 440
And keeps me here, to be perhaps one day
A joy to my old father, who has now
Suffered enough her seeming punishment.
Perhaps my happy homecoming is near;
And should I now, blind to her purposes, 445
Bind myself here against her will? I prayed
Her for some token, if I was to stay.

THOAS. This is her token: that you still are here.
You need not be so anxiously evasive.
Refusal wastes its breath in eloquence: 450
The only word the other hears is 'no'.

IPHIGENIA. I am not using mere misleading words.
I have disclosed my deepest feelings to you.
And you must know yourself how anxiously
I long to see my father and my mother, 455
Electra and Orestes—you must feel
My hope that in our ancient halls one day,
Where often grief still murmurs out my name,
Joy yet may welcome me like one new-born,
And deck our door-posts with the festive garland! 460
Oh, if you sent me home again, you would
Be giving life to me and to us all.

THOAS. Set sail then, and return! Do your heart's bidding,
Ignore the voice of reason and good counsel,
Be nothing but a woman, and surrender 465
To such ungoverned impulse as may seize you
And drag you restlessly about the world.
For when the hearts of women are inflamed
No sacred bond can hold them, flattering
Seducers can entice them; fathers, husbands, 470
In constant love have cherished them in vain.

Act I

13

But if that sudden ardour of the blood
Is silent in them, then they will be deaf
To any power of golden-voiced persuasion.
IPHIGENIA. My lord, do not forget your noble promise! 475
Is this your answer to my confidence?
You seemed prepared for all that I might say.
THOAS. But not for such unhopèd-for words as these.
Yet I should have expected them; I knew
That I had come to parley with a woman. 480
IPHIGENIA. My lord, do not speak ill of our poor sex.
A woman's weapons are not glorious
Like those of men, yet they are not ignoble.
Believe me, here I am a better judge
Than you of what is in your interests. 485
You do not know yourself or me, and yet
You think we could find happiness together.
Full of this confidence, in all good will,
You urge me to consent to what you wish;
And here I thank the gods that they have given me 490
The strength that will not let me undertake
This marriage-bond which they have not approved.
THOAS. This is no god, but your own heart that speaks.
IPHIGENIA. Their only speech to us is through our hearts.
THOAS. And have I not the right to hear it too? 495
IPHIGENIA. The storm of passion drowns that gentle voice.
THOAS. Only the priestess hears it, I dare say.
IPHIGENIA. A king should hearken to it most of all.
THOAS. Your sacred office and your family's
Celestial dining-rights no doubt bring you 500
Nearer to Jove than a mere earthborn savage.
IPHIGENIA. This is how you reward me for the confidence
You forced from me.
THOAS. I am no more than human.
Let us make an end of this. My word still stands:
Be priestess of Diana, as she chose you. 505
But may she pardon me the sin of having,
Against old usage and against my conscience,
Withheld her sacrificial victims from her.
No stranger lands here with impunity:
He is condemned to death by ancient law. 510
You alone bound me with such magic ties
Of kindness—half a gentle daughter's love
And half the sweet affection of a bride,
Or so it seemed—which charmed and held my heart

So fast that I forgot my royal duty. 515
 For you had lulled my senses into slumber:
 I did not hear my people's murmurings
 Of discontent. Now my son's early death
 Is blamed more openly on me; the crowd
 Demands immediate sacrifice, and I 520
 No longer will delay it for your sake.

IPHIGENIA. It was not for my sake I spoke against it.
 The gods do not demand blood-offerings;
 If men think so, it is their own illusion,
 The fantasy of cruel human lusts. 525
 Did not Diana save me from the priest?
 She wanted me to serve her, not to die.

THOAS. For us it is not fitting to interpret
 And bend a sacred custom thus or thus
 To suit our needs and fickle reasonings. 530
 Do now your duty, as I shall do mine.
 Two strangers have been found, hiding in caves
 By the sea shore; they have brought danger to
 My kingdom, and they are my prisoners.
 Your goddess shall reclaim with these first victims 535
 The due so long withheld from her. They shall
 Be sent to you; you know the ceremony.

Exit.

IPHIGENIA. You have clouds, oh gracious rescuer,
 To snatch up innocent victims, to hide them
 And on winds to bear them away from their 540
 Grim fate's grasp, far over the sea,
 Over the wide earth's uttermost reaches,
 Carrying them to the place of your choosing.
 You are wise, you behold the future,
 And the past is still present for you, 545
 And your eyes watch over your servants
 As your light, the life of the night-time,
 Watches serenely over the earth.
 Oh let my hands be preserved from bloodshed!
 It can bring no rest and no blessing; 550
 Even the shade of a fated victim
 Haunts his wretched involuntary murderer,
 Waits for the evil hour of his terror.
 For the immortals love the far-flung
 Goodly races of humankind, 555
 And they gladly extend man's fleeting

Act II

15

Life for a little, glad to grant him
A longer look at their own eternal
Heavens, sharing their sight with mortals,
Pleasing them with it a little longer.

560

ACT II

Orestes. Pylades.

ORESTES. This is a road that leads us to our death;
And every step we take fills me with peace.
When I prayed to Apollo for a respite
From the avenging demons that pursue me
So horribly, his divine words held out, 565
Or so it seemed, sure hope of help and rescue
Here in the temple where his dearest sister
Rules over Tauris. Now he keeps this promise,
For now my misery is all to end
Here with my life. How easily do I, 570
Whose heart a god's hand seized and crushed, whose mind
Is numbed with pain, how easily renounce
The sun's sweet light! And if it is decreed
That Atreus's descendants shall not fall
In battle, crowned and conquering—if I must 575
Die as my ancestors and father did
Wretchedly, like a beast, bloodily slaughtered,
Then let it be! Better the altar here
Than the dark infamous corner where some next-
Of-kin assassin's nets ensnare their victim. 580
Leave me in peace till then, daughters of hell,
You unleashed hounds who sniff behind my feet,
Hunting the blood that drips from them, this blood
That marks the path for you to follow me!
Leave me, for I shall soon come down to you! 585
The daylight must not look on you or me,
The green and lovely earth must not become
A playground for such spectres! I shall seek
You in the underworld, where all alike
Are bound by fate in dull eternal gloom. 590
Only you, Pylades my friend, the guiltless
Companion of my guilt and of my exile,

I grieve to take with me so prematurely
 Into that land of grief! Your life and death
 Are all I now have hopes and fears about. 595

PYLADES. Orestes, unlike you I am not ready
 Yet to go down into that shadow-kingdom.
 I am still pondering how in this dark maze
 Of paths that seem to lead us to our doom
 We yet may find some steep way back to life. 600
 I do not think of death; I wait and watch
 For some god-given opportunity
 To make our glad escape from here. For death
 Must come inevitably, whether men
 Fear it or not; and even when the priestess 605
 Raises her hand to cut the fatal lock
 From each of our death-consecrated heads,
 My only thought shall be of how to save us.
 Lift yourself out of this despondency!
 Our danger is increased by your misgivings. 610
 We have Apollo's word: Orestes shall
 Find help and consolation and homecoming
 Here at his sister's shrine. No double sense
 Hides in the words of gods, as sad men think.

ORESTES. When I was still a child, my mother wrapped 615
 This mantle of life's darkness round my head.
 And so I grew, an image of my father,
 And on my mother and her paramour
 My mute gaze rested as a sharp reproach.
 How often when my sister, poor Electra, 620
 Sat silent by the fire in the great hall,
 I would cling to her knees in dumb distress
 And stare at her with my wide childish eyes
 As she wept bitterly. Then she would tell
 Me many things about our noble father. 625
 I longed to see him, longed to be with him,
 And wished myself at Troy, or his return.
 Then the day came when he—

PYLADES. Oh let hell's goblins
 Gibber at night about that darkest hour!
 Let us remember better times: let them 630
 Nerve us afresh to new heroic deeds.
 The gods have need of many men to serve them,
 Many good men on this wide earth, and they
 Are counting on your service still. They did not
 Destine you to accompany your father 635
 When he went his unwilling way to Hades.

Act II

17

ORESTES. If only I had caught his garment's hem
And followed him!

PYLADES. The gods who saved your life
Were provident for mine, for what would have
Become of me, if you did not exist?
Since we were children I have only lived
With you and for you, wishing nothing else.

640

ORESTES. Do not remind me of those happy days
When I had taken refuge in your house
And wisely, lovingly, your noble father
Tended me like a young half-frozen flower;
And you, an ever livelier companion,
Like a light many-coloured butterfly
Round some dark blossom, every day you danced
And played round me with new abundant life
And joy that overflowed into my soul,
Till I was borne along with you on tides
Of eager youth, my troubles all forgotten.

645

PYLADES. I loved you: that was when my life began.

ORESTES. Say rather, that was when your troubles started.
This is the dreadful secret of my fate:
That like a plague-infected exile, I
Bear hidden pain and death about with me,
That in whatever wholesome place I come to
I soon see all those faces fresh with health
Wither and wince in slow death-agony.

650

660

PYLADES. Orestes! I would be the first to die
Like that, if there were poison in your breath;
Yet here I am, still happy and undaunted.
And happiness and love are wings that lift us
To heroes' deeds.

665

ORESTES. To heroes' deeds? Ah yes,
There was a time when we were planning them!
Often we would go hunting then together,
And chase our quarry over hill and dale,
Hoping one day to equal our great forebears
In strength and valour, and with club and sword
Hunt the earth clear of monsters and of bandits;
Then in the evening we would sit and rest
On the wide sea's shore, lean against each other
And watch the waves lapping about our feet,
And all the world lay open wide before us.
Then one of us would start, and seize his sword,
And our innumerable future deeds
Would throng like stars around us in the night.

670

675

- PYLADES. The great achievement that one's soul desires 680
 Is infinite. We should like all our deeds
 To be at once as great as they become
 When long years later, in the mouths of bards,
 Their fame has spread to many lands and peoples.
 How fine the deeds of our forefathers sound 685
 When we are young and in the quiet evening
 Drink in their music as some minstrel plays!
 Yet what we do is what it was to them:
 Mere hard, unfinished labour.
 And thus we chase the things that flee from us 690
 And hardly heed the path that we are treading,
 Or see the footprints of our ancestors,
 The traces of their lives, left there beside us.
 We hurry in pursuit of their mere shadows,
 Glimpsing them far ahead, a godlike vision 695
 That crowns the golden-clouded mountain-tops.
 I can respect no man who ponders how
 Public opinion may one day exalt him.
 But you should thank the gods that in your youth
 They have done such great things through you already. 700
- ORESTES. When by their will a man does some glad deed,
 Defending his own family, increasing
 His kingdom, making safe its boundaries,
 Slaying old foes or putting them to flight—
 Then let him thank the gods for granting him 705
 Our life's chief satisfaction. I was chosen
 To be a butcher, singled out to murder
 My mother whom I nonetheless revered,
 Infamously avenging infamy.
 Thus they decreed my ruin. Oh believe me, 710
 The gods have cursed the house of Tantalus
 And have ordained for me, his last descendant,
 No innocent or honourable death.
- PYLADES. The gods do not avenge ancestral crimes
 On the descendants: each man, good or evil, 715
 Gets his requital when his deed is done.
 Blessings, not curses, are inherited.
- ORESTES. Did a parental blessing bring us here?
- PYLADES. At least we know it was the high gods' will.
- ORESTES. It is the high gods' will, then, that destroys us. 720
- PYLADES. First do their bidding, then you may have hope.
 Brother and sister must be reunited:
 When you have brought Diana back to Delphi
 And she again is worshipped with Apollo

Act II

19

There by a noble people, they will both 725
Reward this deed with favour; they will save you
From the infernal demons, none of whom
Has even dared enter this sacred grove.

ORESTES. Then I shall have at least a peaceful death.

PYLADES. I think quite otherwise. I have reflected 730
With care on what has been and what will be,
And think I understand the combination.
In the gods' counsels this great deed perhaps
Has long been ripening. Diana wearies
Of this rude shore, this barbarous people, their 735
Bloodthirsty human sacrifices. We
Were chosen for this noble enterprise:
It is our task, and we have been brought here
Already very strangely to its threshold.

ORESTES. How very artfully you interweave 740
The counsels of the gods with your own wishes.

PYLADES. What else is human wisdom but to listen
Attentively for hints of heaven's will?
A noble man who has done some great wrong
May be called by the gods to some hard task, 745
Something that seems impossible to us:
This hero conquers, and his penance serves
The gods and serves the world, which then reveres him.

ORESTES. If I am called upon to live and act,
Then let some god lift from my burdened brow 750
The nauseous swoon that drags me on and on
Along this path smeared with my mother's blood,
Downwards to death! Let him be merciful
And stanch this fountain that for ever wells
Out of her wounds, raining defilement on me! 755

PYLADES. Be calm and wait. You are making matters worse.
Leave to the Furies their own office! Let
Me think, and do not speak. When the time comes
And our joint strength is needed for the deed,
I will call on you, and with considered daring 760
We both shall move to its accomplishment.

ORESTES. I hear Ulysses talking.

PYLADES. Do not mock me.
We each must choose someone to emulate,
Some hero who will guide us up the steep
Paths to Olympus. And I must confess 765
I do not think that trickery and cunning
Disgraces any man bent on bold deeds.

ORESTES. I prefer one who is both brave and honest.

- PYLADES. That is why I did not ask your advice.
 I have made a beginning. From our guards 770
 I have elicited some facts already.
 There is a stranger here, a god-like woman
 Who holds in check that old bloodthirsty law;
 Incense and prayer and purity of heart
 She offers to the gods instead. Men praise 775
 Her gentle nature. She was born, they say,
 Of the Amazon race, and fled her country,
 Escaping from some terrible misfortune.
- ORESTES. Her reign of light, it seems, has lost its power
 Now that a criminal is here, pursued 780
 And hooded by the curse as by vast darkness.
 Now pious bloodlust has released old custom
 From its new bondage, to destroy us both.
 The savagery of the king condemns us;
 A woman will not save us from his rage. 785
- PYLADES. Be glad it is a woman! for a man,
 Even the best, grows used to cruelty
 And in the end will even bind himself
 By law to what he loathes; hardened by habit
 He changes almost out of recognition. 790
 But when a woman has made up her mind
 She is inflexible, one can rely
 More surely on her, both for good and ill.
 —Hush, she is coming; leave us. I must not
 Tell her our names at once, I will only half 795
 Confide our story to her. Go, and let
 Us meet again before she speaks to you.

Exit Orestes. Enter Iphigenia.

- IPHIGENIA. Tell me, oh stranger, from what land you come,
 For you resemble, if I judge aright,
 A Greek and not a Scythian. 800

She removes his chains.

- This freedom
- Which I restore to you puts you in peril;
 May the gods shield you both from what awaits you.
- PYLADES. Oh sweetest voice! Thrice welcome music of
 My mother-tongue here in a foreign land!
 Now the blue mountains of my native shore 805
 Appear before my captive eyes again,
 Bringing new gladness. Oh let this my joy

Act II

21

Persuade you that I also am a Greek!
 For a brief moment I forgot how much
 I stand in need of you; I had allowed 810
 My mind to feast upon that splendid vision.
 Oh tell me then, unless your lips are sealed
 By some decree of fate, from which of our
 Peoples you claim your godlike origin.

IPHIGENIA. I am the priestess who now speak to you, 815
 Chosen and consecrated by her goddess;
 Let it suffice you to know that. Say now
 Who you are, and what ineluctable
 Misfortune brought you here with your companion.

PYLADES. Easily I can tell you of the fate 820
 That dogs our steps with burdensome persistence;
 I would it were no harder, godlike lady,
 For you to give us some bright glimpse of hope.
 We are from Crete, the sons of great Adrastus;
 I am the youngest, Cephalus, and he 825
 Laódamas, the eldest of the house.

Between us stood another brother, rude
 And wild, who even in our childish games
 Sowed discord and destroyed all pleasure in them.
 We were content to do our mother's bidding 830
 While our father was absent at the war
 With Troy; but when he came back, rich with spoils,
 And then soon died, the three of us fell out
 About the title and the inheritance.

I took the eldest's part, and it was he 835
 Who slew our brother. Still the Fury drives him
 Hither and thither for this deed of blood.
 But now Apollo's oracle at Delphi
 Sends us with words of hope to this wild shore.
 Here in his sister's temple, as he told us, 840
 Help was at hand, we should be blessed and saved.
 We have been captured and brought here and offered
 To you in sacrifice. That is our story.

IPHIGENIA. Then did Troy fall? Oh tell me so, dear friend!
 PYLADES. Troy is no more. Oh tell me you will save us! 845

Hasten the help a god has promised us;
 Have pity on my brother, oh let him
 Soon hear you say a kind and gracious word!
 And yet I beg you, when you speak to him
 Be gentle with him, for so easily 850
 He can be seized and shaken to the core

- By joy or grief or by his memories—
 A fever and a madness will attack him
 And his clear generous soul be given over
 To all the rage of the avenging Furies. 855
- IPHIGENIA. Great as your trouble is, I do implore you
 Forget it now, till you have answered me.
- PYLADES. The lofty city that for ten long years
 Withstood the assembled might of all the Greeks
 Now lies in ruins, and will stand no more. 860
 But round it many graves of our best warriors
 Remind us still of that barbarian place.
 Achilles fell, with his beloved friend.
- IPHIGENIA. They too, those godlike heroes, in the dust!
- PYLADES. Ajax, Télamon's son, and Palamedes— 865
 They too were not to see their homes again.
- IPHIGENIA. (He does not name my father, does not say
 He was among the slain. Yes! he still lives!
 I shall see him again. Oh hope, my heart!)
- PYLADES. But happy are the thousands who died there 870
 Their death in battle, bitter and yet sweet:
 For those who did return found, by some god's
 Hostility, no triumph waiting for them,
 But hideous terrors and a dismal end.
 Do these shores lie beyond the voice of man? 875
 For as far as it reaches it bears word
 Of the appalling crimes that were committed.
 Have you not heard what happened in Mycene,
 What deed still makes its stricken halls re-echo
 With never-ending grief?—Great Agamemnon, 880
 On the day he returned, was trapped and murdered,
 With the help of Aegisthus, by his wife.—
 I see that you revere that royal house:
 This unexpected monstrous news has moved
 You to distress you try in vain to hide. 885
 Are you the daughter of a friend, or were you
 A neighbour to the king, born in that city?
 Do not conceal it; and forgive me for
 Being the first to tell you of these horrors.
- IPHIGENIA. How did they carry out the dreadful deed? 890
- PYLADES. When the king, on the day of his arrival,
 Stepped from his bath, refreshed and calm, and asked
 His wife to hand his robe to him, the deadly
 Clytemnestra cast round his noble head,
 Over his shoulders, an ensnaring fabric, 895

Act III

23

Cunningly folded, intricately wrought;
And as he vainly struggled to break free
As from a net, the treacherous Aegisthus
Struck him: and thus this mighty prince went down
To death and Hades, with his eyes enshrouded.

900

IPHIGENIA. And what was her accomplice's reward?

PYLADES. A kingdom and a bed, both his already.

IPHIGENIA. So wicked lust inspired this shameful crime?

PYLADES. And a deep-seated long desire for vengeance.

IPHIGENIA. And how had Agamemnon wronged the queen?

905

PYLADES. By a dark deed which would, if there could be
Any excuse for murder, have excused her.

He had lured her to Aulis, where the Greek
Ships were delayed at a divinity's

Behest, by violent adverse winds; and there

910

He dragged their eldest child, Iphigenia,

To great Diana's altar, where she fell

A bloody sacrifice to the Greek cause.

And this, they say, bred such a deep resentment

In Clytemnestra's heart, that when Aegisthus

915

Wooded her, she yielded to him, and herself

Ensnared her husband in a fatal net.

IPHIGENIA (*covering her head*). It is enough; I shall return to you.

Exit.

PYLADES. She seems much moved: the royal house's fate

Concerns her, for whoever she may be

920

She must have known King Agamemnon well

And is some member of a noble house,

Sold to this place. Thus fortune favours us.

Be calm, my heart! We must be bold and wise,

And steer towards this rising star of hope.

925

ACT III

Iphigenia. Orestes.

IPHIGENIA. Unhappy prisoner, I loose your bonds

In token of a still unhappier fate.

The freedom granted in this sanctuary

Is like a last bright glimpse of life to one

Mortally sick: a messenger of death.

930

And still I cannot, dare not tell myself
 That you are lost. How could I consecrate
 You both to death, murder you with my hand?
 No one, no other hand, may touch your heads
 So long as I am priestess of Diana, 935
 And yet if I refuse to do that duty,
 The duty which the angry king demands,
 He will appoint one of my maidens in
 My place, and all the help I then could give you
 Would be no more than ardent wishes. Oh, 940
 Dear fellow-countryman, even a slave
 Who has approached our hearth and household gods
 Is welcome to us in a foreign land;
 With what blessings and joy must I not then
 Receive you both, who represent to me 945
 The heroes I have learnt from early childhood
 To hold in reverence, who soothe and flatter
 My inmost heart with a sweet hope's renewal!

ORESTES. Is it with wise intent that you conceal
 Your name and origin, or may I know 950
 Whom, like a goddess, I have here encountered?

IPHIGENIA. This you shall know. But now, complete the tale
 Which I have only half heard from your brother:
 What dire and unexpected fate awaited
 Those who returned from Troy, and speechlessly, 955
 Upon their very thresholds, struck them down?
 When I came to this shore I was still young,
 Yet I remember how I shyly gazed,
 Half in astonishment and half in fear,
 Upon those heroes, watching them set forth. 960
 It was as if Olympus had been opened
 And all the noble figures of the past
 Sent down to terrify our enemy;
 And Agamemnon splendid above all!
 Oh tell me! so he fell, no sooner home 965
 Than murdered by his wife and by Aegisthus?

ORESTES. It is as you have said.

IPHIGENIA. Oh poor Mycene!
 How wild a crop of curses they have sown
 Upon you, the accursèd Tantalids!
 Like monstrous weeds that shake their heads and scatter 970
 A thousand seeds of evil all around them,
 So they engendered for their children's children
 Next-of-kin-killers, like an endless madness!

Act III

25

A sudden swoon of fear darkened my hearing
Of what your brother said: tell me the rest. 975
How did the last son of that royal race,
The noble child destined one day to avenge
His father's death—oh say, how did Orestes
Escape the hour of blood? Did the same fate
Ensnare him with the nets of hell, or is 980
He saved? Is he alive? And is Electra
Still living?

ORESTES. They still live.

IPHIGENIA. Oh golden sun,
Lend your bright rays, lay them before Jove's throne
As thanks from me, for I am poor and mute.

ORESTES. If you are bound by friendship, or by some 985
Bond even closer, to that royal house,
As by your sweet delight you seem to tell me,
Oh then check your heart's impulse, hold it fast!
For when we feel such joy, sudden relapse
Into great grief is hard to bear. I see 990
You only know of Agamemnon's death.

IPHIGENIA. Need I know more? Is this not news enough?

ORESTES. You have been told of only half the horror.

IPHIGENIA. Need I fear for Electra and Orestes?

ORESTES. They live; but what of Clytemnestra's fate? 995

IPHIGENIA. No fear nor hope avails against it now.

ORESTES. She is no longer in the land of hope.

IPHIGENIA. Did she shed her own blood in mad remorse?

ORESTES. No, yet she met her death by her own blood.

IPHIGENIA. Tell me more plainly, to resolve my doubt. 1000

A thousand troubled and uncertain thoughts
Beat with dark wings of fear about my head.

ORESTES. So the gods have elected me to be

The bearer of this tale, this deed that I
So long to bury in the speechless caves 1005
Of night's mute underworld! Against my will
I am compelled by your sweet voice; but it
May ask a gift of pain and still receive it.

The day their father died, Electra rescued
And hid Orestes: Strophius, the king's 1010
Brother-in-law, received him willingly
And brought his nephew up with his own son
Pylades, who befriended the newcomer
With sweetest ties of brotherly affection.

And as they grew up, so there grew in them 1015

A burning, deep desire to avenge
 The murder of the king. Unheralded,
 Disguised, they reached Mycene with the grievous
 News of Orestes' death, as they pretended,
 Bringing his ashes; and Queen Clytemnestra 1020
 Received them well. When they were in the palace,
 Electra made herself known to Orestes,
 Rekindling in him the hot fire of vengeance
 Which in the sacred presence of his mother
 Had flickered low. She took him secretly 1025
 To the place where their father was struck down,
 Where on the floor that had been washed so often
 The traces of that blood so foully shed,
 Though old and faint, still ominously lingered.
 With an inflaming passion she described 1030
 To him each detail of the infamous deed,
 Described her slavish miserable life,
 The arrogance of the successful traitors,
 The danger to them both, brother and sister,
 Whose mother now had grown unnatural; 1035
 Then thrust on him that ancient dagger which
 Had slain so many Tantalids already;
 And Clytemnestra fell by her son's hand.

IPHIGENIA. Oh you immortals, who live blessedly
 In the pure day above the changing clouds, 1040
 Was this why you have kept me all these years
 So far from humankind, so near to you,
 Why you imposed on me this childlike task
 Of nourishing a flame of sacred fire,
 And why my soul, as if it were that flame, 1045
 Has been drawn upwards everlastingly,
 In gentle love, to your bright dwelling-place:
 All this, that I might be so late to learn
 These horrors of my kin, feel them more deeply?
 —Oh tell me of the unfortunate Orestes! 1050

ORESTES. If only I could tell you he is dead!
 Like a hot ferment, from his mother's blood
 Her slaughtered ghost
 Rose up, and summoned the Night's ancient daughters:
 'Seize him, the matricide, let him not flee! 1055
 Your appointed prey, this murderer, hunt him!'

They heard, they listened, and like hungry eagles
 They peered about them with their hollow eyes,
 In their black caverns they began to stir;

Act III

27

Out of the hidden corners their companions, 1060
Doubt and Remorse, crept noiselessly to join them.
From the waters of hell foul vapours rose
Before them, circling round their guilty victim,
Befogging him with endless rumination
On what he did and cannot now undo. 1065
Thus these appointed demons, these destroyers
May tread again the gods' sweet fertile earth
From which an ancient curse once banished them.
Their quarry flees, they follow tirelessly,
Each pause portends an onset of new terror. 1070
IPHIGENIA. Alas, poor fugitive! the same pursuit
Afflicts you, and you feel what he must suffer.
ORESTES. What do you mean by that? What same pursuit?
IPHIGENIA. You are like him, haunted by fratricide;
Your younger brother has already told me. 1075
ORESTES. I cannot bear that you who are so noble
And great of heart, should be deceived by falsehood.
Let strangers deal with strangers in this way,
Weaving their subtle webs of careful fiction
Around each other's feet; but between us 1080
Let there be truth!
I am Orestes, and my guilty head
Bows itself to the grave and longs for death;
I welcome it in any form! For you,
Whoever you may be, and for my friend, 1085
I desire rescue, but not for myself.
It seems that you live here against your will.
Seek some means, then, how you may both escape
And leave me here. Let my slain corpse be cast
From the cliff-top, my blood reek to the sea, 1090
And bring a curse on this barbarian shore!
Go home together and begin a new
And better life, in the sweet land of Greece.

He moves away from her.

IPHIGENIA. Grace of fulfilment, sweetest daughter of
Most mighty Zeus, at last you have descended 1095
Upon me! How your image towers above me!
My gaze can scarcely reach up to your hands
Which are so full of fruit, garlands of flowers,
The blessings and the treasures of Olympus.
And as one knows a king by his excess 1100
In giving, for what must to him seem little

Is wealth enough for thousands: so we know
 You, oh immortals, by your long withheld
 Gifts that have been wisely and long prepared.
 For you alone know what is good for us, 1105
 You who behold the future's far-flung kingdom,
 Which every evening sky, each cloak of stars
 And clouds conceals from men. Calmly you listen
 As like impatient children we implore you
 For swifter gifts; you do not pluck for us 1110
 The heavens' golden fruit till it is ready;
 But woe to him who snatches what is still
 Unripe, and eats the bitterness of death.
 Oh let this happiness so long awaited,
 Which I scarcely dared think of, let it not 1115
 Dissolve and vanish like the dear dream-shadow
 Of a lost friend, leaving a threefold grief!

ORESTES (*returning to her*).

If you are praying to the gods, pray for yourself
 And Pylades, but do not speak my name.
 You will not save the criminal you are 1120
 Befriending, merely share his cursèd fate.

IPHIGENIA. My fate and yours are closely intertwined.

ORESTES. No! let me make my way to death alone
 And unaccompanied. Even if you could cloak
 An evildoer in your priestly veil, 1125
 You could not hide me from the Sleepless Ones;
 Your heavenly presence, lady, though it may
 Turn them aside, it cannot drive them back.
 They dare not set their brazen insolent feet
 Within the precinct of your sacred grove; 1130
 But here and there, from far off, I can hear
 Their hideous laughter. Wolves will wait like this
 Around the tree a wayfarer has climbed
 To save himself. They lie in wait for me
 Out there: and if I leave this wooded shelter 1135
 Then they will rise, shaking their snaky heads
 And stamping up the dust all around me, rise
 And drive their quarry on.

IPHIGENIA. Hear me, Orestes;
 I have a loving word to say to you.

ORESTES. Keep it to say to one whom the gods love. 1140

IPHIGENIA. The gods are lighting you to a new hope.

ORESTES. From the river of death, through smoke and fog
 I see a pale glint lighting me to hell.

Act III

29

- IPHIGENIA. Have you no other sister but Electra?
- ORESTES. There was an eldest whom I scarcely knew, 1145
 Whom lucky death, hard though it seemed to us,
 Soon rescued from our house's misery.
 Oh, question me no more; would you become
 Yourself one of the Furies? Gloatingly
 They are blowing the ashes from my soul, 1150
 They will not even let the last dull embers
 Left over from our family's holocaust
 Die out in me. Oh must this fire forever,
 Fanned to fresh rage deliberately fed
 With hell's hot sulphur, burn and scourge my soul? 1155
- IPHIGENIA. I will scatter sweet incense in the flame.
 Oh let this conflagration in your heart
 Be cooled by love's pure breath, its gentle breeze!
 Orestes, oh my dear, can you not hear me?
 Have the demons of terror that pursue you 1160
 Made the blood run so dry in all your veins?
 Does some creeping enchantment, like the head
 Of the foul Gorgon, turn your limbs to stone?
 Oh, if a mother's blood calls from the ground
 And cries its hollow summons down to hell, 1165
 Shall a pure sister's blessing not have power
 To call the gods of healing from Olympus?
- ORESTES. It calls! It calls! Do you then seek my ruin?
 Are you a vengeance-goddess in disguise?
 Who are you, you whose voice so terribly 1170
 Can stir my soul into so deep a turmoil?
- IPHIGENIA. There in your deepest soul you know the answer.
 Orestes, it is I, Iphigenía!
 I am alive.
- ORESTES. You!
- IPHIGENIA. Oh my brother!
- ORESTES. Leave me!
 Go, I advise you, do not touch my hair! 1175
 It scorches like Creüsa's bridal garment,
 With unquenchable fire: do not come near me!
 Vile as I am, I want to die alone
 Like Hercules, enclosed in my own shame.
- IPHIGENIA. You are not going to die! Oh, if you only 1180
 Could calm yourself, speak one calm word to me!
 Resolve my doubts, let me be sure of this
 Great happiness that I so long have prayed for.
 Like a great turning wheel, delight and grief

Change places in me. You are a man, a stranger, 1185
 A tremor holds me back: yet my whole soul
 Draws me and drives me to embrace my brother.

ORESTES. Is this some Bacchic temple, has the priestess
 Been seized by a disordered sacred frenzy?

IPHIGENIA. Oh hear me, look at me! see how my heart 1190
 After so many years, opens to joy:
 The joy of greeting what is dearest now
 To me in all the world, kissing your head,
 Holding you in my arms, which hitherto
 Were open only to the empty winds! 1195
 Oh let me, let me do so! for the eternal
 Fountain that gushes from Parnassus, down
 From rock to rock into the golden valley,
 Flows no more clearly than this joy that pours
 Out of my heart and like a blessed sea 1200
 Surrounds me. Oh Orestes, oh my brother!

ORESTES. Sweet nymph, I do not trust you or your flattery.
 Diana's servants should be more austere:
 She punishes those who profane her temples.
 Do not embrace me in this way! Or if 1205
 You wish to love and rescue some young man
 And offer him a tender happiness,
 You should turn your attention to my friend:
 He is worthier of it. Go and look for him
 Where he is wandering on that rocky path; 1210
 Show him the way, and spare me.

IPHIGENIA. Oh my brother,
 Come to yourself! You have found me: recognize me!
 Do not mistake your sister's pure delight
 For reckless, lawless passion. O blest gods,
 Lift the delusion from his staring eyes, 1215
 Or this our moment of extremest joy
 Will plunge us into threefold wretchedness!
 She is here, your long-lost sister! I was saved
 From death: the goddess snatched me from the altar
 And brought me here, to her own sanctuary. 1220
 You are a captive, marked for sacrifice,
 And in the priestess you have found your sister.

ORESTES. Unhappy woman! Let the sun then watch
 The last abominations of our house!
 Is Electra not here? for she must perish 1225
 Along with us, she must not now live on

(continued...)