

Agamemnon's daughter Iphigeneia was not sacrificed to allow her father's fleet to sail to Troy. She was spirited away by Artemis, to a remote place on the Black Sea, where she became a priestess, tasked with sacrificing all foreigners to the goddess. Unexpectedly, her brother Orestes arrives. He has no idea his sister is still alive.

IPHIGENEIA in TAURIS

By Euripides

Translated Andrew Wilson

FOR JULIET

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by Athens of the North

Iphigeneia in Tauris

**IPHIGENEIA
AMONG THE TAURIANS**

[Iphigeneia in the Crimea]

BY EURIPIDES

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CHARACTERS

IPHIGENEIA, daughter of Agamemnon and Clytemnestra

ORESTES, her brother

PYLADES, friend and companion of Orestes

CHORUS of local Taurian women

A HERDSMAN

THOAS, king of the Taurians

A MESSENGER

ATHENA

SCENE

In front of the Temple of Artemis, close to the north shore of the Black Sea.

Iphigeneia

My name is Iphigeneia. I am the daughter, the eldest child, of king Agamemnon of Argos and queen Clytemnestra. Clytemnestra's sister, Helen - yes that Helen - ran off to Troy with her Trojan lover. She was married to my uncle Menelaus.

But this is *my* story.

There's a narrow strait – where the tides flow back and forth, yet the winds are constant – the Euripos it's called. Close by is a bay, an infamous bay, called Aulis. It was here, because of Helen, my father had me killed (or so he thought).

Here at Aulis, my father, king Agamemnon, had collected a fleet of a thousand ships. His mission: to sail to Troy and take it. He'd three things in mind: to claim Troy for the Greeks as a prize for victory; to punish the Trojans for taking Helen. And to earn the gratitude of his brother Menelaus.

But the winds wouldn't blow, and the ships couldn't sail. My father's grand plan seemed doomed. In desperation, he turned to religion for a way out. Offerings were burned. Calchas, the expert, explained the gods' requirements.

“Agamemnon, you are, of course, supreme commander of this Greek force. But, no ship will set sail from this land until you present your daughter, Iphigeneia, to the goddess Artemis – as a blood sacrifice. You once promised to sacrifice the year's finest produce to Artemis, the bringer of light in the darkness; that was the year your wife Clytemnestra gave you a daughter. (Yes, me, the finest produce was, apparently, me!) So now it's her you must sacrifice.”

Odysseus organised it. The Greeks fooled my mother. Told her I'd been chosen to marry Achilles – what an honour! And so – helpless, conned - I arrived at Aulis. I found myself hoisted up by my heels high above the altar. I felt the searing heat of the fire. The priest's knife was flashing towards my throat.

Then Artemis made a switch. She gave the Greeks a deer in place of me, and snatched me away from under their noses. She wafted me through the sky – how wonderfully bright it seemed! - to come to earth in this place: the land of the Taurians. A vile place. The Taurians are savages, and their king is a savage. Thoas is his name. It means “the quick” – they call him that because he's as fast as a falcon when he swoops on his prey. And no one ever escapes his talons.

Artemis set me up in this temple of hers. I have been her priestess here for many years. My job is to supervise her... cult, all the... rituals. It may sound fine, but... I'd better not say any more. She makes me afraid. I perform the consecrations – others carry out the actual... sacrifices – the secret rites that take place inside the “holy of holies”.

Last night I had a dream, or rather... a nightmare. It may help me to talk about it. In my dream I seemed to have escaped from this awful country. I was living back home in Argos. I was a young girl, asleep in my bedroom. Suddenly I felt tremors. There was an earthquake. I ran outside. I saw the roof of the house collapse, and the whole building come crashing down. All that was left of the house where my family lived

was a single pillar. The top of this pillar, the capital of the column, had long fair hair. It was crying out as if it were a person. I sprinkled it with water. That's always the first thing I do when we prepare a foreigner... for death, for sacrifice in the temple. I was weeping.

My explanation of the dream is this. My brother, Orestes, is dead. It was him I was preparing for sacrifice. Because the pillars of a house are its sons! And anyone I sprinkle with water is killed! The dream can't mean anyone else: the only son in the family is - was - Orestes. When I "disappeared" my aunt and her husband Strophius had no children.

And so now I'm going to conduct the funeral rites for my brother. I'm a long way from him – and he from me. What else can I do? My friends will help. Greek women the king gave me as my acolytes. Why aren't they here, I wonder? My friends, where are you? I'll go inside and wait for them. The goddess's temple is all I have to call a home.

Iphigeneia goes into the temple. We are expecting the arrival of the chorus of Greek women, but instead:

Enter furtively Orestes and his friend (and cousin) Pylades, son of Strophius.

Orestes

Have a good look. Make sure there's no one ahead of us.

Pylades

Will do. All-round observation.

Orestes (*He spots the temple*)

Pylades! Could this be the temple of the goddess? The one we've come all the way from Argos to find?

Pylades

Yes, certainly looks like it. What do you think?

Orestes

Yes. And the altar – where the blood of Greeks gets spilled!

Pylades

These brown streaks are definitely blood-stains.

Orestes

Do you see the trophies hanging up under the roof there?

Pylades

Personal stuff looted from the dead. They came in peace but met an ugly death.

But keep your eyes open. We must be on our guard.

Orestes

Apollo! I came here on your advice, as you told me to. Is this some new trap you've set for me? I avenged my father, as you told me to. And I killed my mother, as you told me to. Now I'm an outcast driven from my home – on and on the Furies hound me – as I shake off one squadron, others take their place. Backwards and forwards they keep dogging me, and still I'm on the run.

I came to you and asked how I could end this crazed cross-country chase, get off this mad treadmill. You told me to go to the land of the Taurians, where your sister Artemis has a shrine, and fetch the statue of the goddess. According to legend that's where it landed when it fell from heaven. I'm to get hold of it somehow. There'll be danger, but when I succeed, maybe through some cunning plan - or more likely by a stroke of luck - I'm to present it to Athens. And that's all I was told, except that when I've done it, I'll find peace, an end to my ordeal.

So here I am. I've done what you said. I've come here to this dismal, deathly place.

Pylades' mind has been wandering. He's heard all this many times before.

Pylades! Concentrate! I'm relying on you! What's the plan? Look how high those walls are! There are the steps leading up to the entrance, but I doubt we could force the doors open – they look like solid bronze – and, anyway, we don't have the tools. And if they catch us trying to break in, we're dead. Before we get ourselves killed, let's forget the idea. We can make it back to the ship we came on.

Pylades grabs him as he starts to run

Pylades

Hold your horses! Hang on! Running away is not an option – and certainly not for a hero, which is what you're supposed to be. The god's order cannot be ignored. (*Looking around furtively*) Let's slip away from the temple here, and hide somewhere.

Orestes is not impressed. How is hiding any better than making a run for it?

There's a cave near the beach. Its mouth is masked by the breakers. It's well away from our ship – there's a danger some local may spot our transport. If he reports it to the authorities, we would get caught, for sure.

Then, as soon as it gets dark, we must make our move. We steal the statue from the temple any way we can. Look! There's a bit of gap up there on the frieze where we might squeeze through. Heroes do what they have to. No one anywhere respects a coward.

Orestes (*he's shamed by Pylades, and perhaps overplays his newly-found enthusiasm*)

Well said. You've convinced me. Let's go and hide somewhere we won't be found. The god's orders must be obeyed – I can't not do what he tells me to. Heads high! We're young. No excuses! Let's go for it!

As they run off, a group of women enter from the opposite side. They are the Chorus, Greek women of varying ages captured by the Taurians – not sacrificed like their menfolk, but held as slaves, and allocated as acolytes to the temple of Artemis. They sing, divided into two groups who respond to each other.

Chorus

As they approach, we hear a chant:

People who live
Along this coast
Beyond the rocks
The rocks that clash
To guard the sea
That few dare cross.
The sea called "Black".

A sudden shout is heard:

Silence for the holy procession!

Semichorus A sing, invoking the goddess:

Daughter of Leto,
Artemis, Huntress,
We come to your temple
Its columns, its riches:
Slaves of your priestess.

Semichorus B respond:

Such a long way from Hellas
Its gardens its towers,
Its trees and its horses.
Greece, how we miss you,

The home of our fathers.

The temple doors open and Iphigeneia comes out, with three attendants, one of whom carries a gold jug containing milk, one a bowl of honey, and another a flask of wine.

Chorus leader (*sung speech – recitative, echoing the chant as they entered*)

You sounded upset.

We've come to your call,

Agamemnon's daughter.

Agamemnon who took

The towers of Troy

With a thousand ships

And ten thousand men.

Iphigeneia (*sings*)

No proper music, no lyres

No proper mourners, no funeral hymns;

I grieve alone

With no one to share

The pain that I feel.

The pain doesn't leave

As I weep as I mourn

For my brother who is dead.

Such a horror I saw in the gloom

A dream in the dark, as dark as the night.

My life's at an end.
My family destroyed;
My life is over.
Argos is no more.
Her future is gone.
Her suffering was in vain.

Fate, you are cruel to me.
You took my brother, you stole him from me,
You sent him to Hades.
That's why I bring with me
These offerings for him.
Honey, milk and wine.
To be spilt on the earth.
Comfort for the dead.

(Spoken) Give me the golden jug and the offerings for Hades, lord of the dead.

She pours the libations and sings:

King Agamemnon's son.
I send this for you in your underworld home.
Accept what I give.
You don't have a tomb
Where my tears could be shed.
Far off is our land,
The land where I died.
Or so they all wished.

Chorus

Semichorus A sing:

I want to scream
Wild noise echoing
with shouts of frenzy
Shrieking like a savage
for you, my mistress.
The death cry,
The joyless dirge that Hades chants.

All shout together:

Oimoi!

Individual voices, screaming:

- The family of Atreus!
- The light of the house!
- The hopes of the kingdom!
- All gone! All gone!

Together:

Oimoi!

Semichorus B

The curse on this family

Hits hard again.

The crimes of Pelops

And then his sons' black deeds

Come back to haunt us.

Punishment

For all whose line goes back to Tantalus.

Iphigeneia (*singing*)

I was born unlucky

Long before that night

My mother gave me birth,

I was already doomed.

I was unlucky growing up.

My mother was a queen and I was her princess,

First-born darling of a royal house,

To be courted soon by every prince in Greece.

But then my father marked me out

His daughter

For slaughter.

And wasted all her mother's love and care.

A chariot took me

On a trip to Aulis bay.

To meet my future lord

The sea-goddess's son.

I was Achilles' bride-to-be,

Now it's here I live.

The Black Sea has no friends

And nor do I. No friends

No man, no home, no child.

My simple dream exists no more.

I thought I'd be singing the praises of Hera

Working at my homely loom,

On a tapestry weaving conventional tales, of strife

Between Athena and her Titan foes.

But, no! I'm a killer

A spiller

Of strangers' blood as they plead for their lives.

Now there's a worse pain

Orestes my brother is dead.

A baby when I left

Safe at his mother's breast,

Once my country's king-to-be.

Chorus leader

There! Coming from the shore! One of the men who minds the cattle. He's got something to tell you, by the looks of him.

Herdsmen

Am I addressing Iphigeneia, daughter of Agamemnon and Clytemnestra? I have important information to impart.

Iphigeneia (*slightly irritated by his pompous manner*)

You are interrupting us. What is so very important?

Herdsmen (*he's very enthusiastic at the prospect of a human sacrifice*)

They're here. We've got 'em. Their ship got here through the Clashing Rocks, god knows how. Two young men. Ripe and ready for slaughter. For the sacrifice the goddess Artemis loves. You best get yourself organised, get your washing bowls out and all the stuff you need - for a ceremony!

Iphigeneia

Where are they from? Can you tell from what they look like?

Herdsmen

Greeks. Most definitely Greeks. No more than that.

Iphigeneia

Did you manage to catch any names?

Herdsmen

One of them called the other one Pylades.

Iphigeneia

What was the second visitor called?

Herdsmen

Don't know. No one heard.

Iphigeneia

How did you find them, and manage to catch them?

Herdsmen (*beginning what might be a long tale*)

'Twas down by them there breakers. The sea 'twas rough...

Iphigeneia

What on earth were you cattle herders doing on the beach?

Herdsmen

We'd gone down to wash our animals – it's good for 'em. Washing' em in the sea...

Iphigeneia (*interrupting*)

Go back a bit. How did you catch them? I want to know the details. It must have been tricky. They are the first for quite a while. There's been no Greek blood to stain the goddess' altar for a very long time.

Herdsmen (*his chance to hold forth at last*)

We'd driven our beasts down on to the beach. There's a crack in the cliff, a sort of cave right where the breakers roll in. It's used as a shelter by fishermen, crabbers, the ones who harvest the sea-snails you get the purple dye from. Right there it was that one our hands spotted the two young men. He came creeping back on tiptoe to tell us.

"Can't you see 'em?" he whispered, "those gods! Look at 'em just sitting there!"

One of us, a religious bloke, lifted up his arms and started praying:

"O thou son of Leucothea that dwellest in the sea, thou Guardian of Ships, Lord Palaemon, be thou gentle unto us! Or if it be ye, ye Sons of Zeus, ye Heavenly Twain! Or perhaps it's ye, beloved sons of Nereus, father of the noble choir of fifty daughters..."

But someone else, a regular piss-taker, started mocking him as he prayed.

"It's just some shipwrecked fools," he said, "sitting scared shitless on a rock because they've heard about the special welcome we give foreigners in this land."

That made sense to most of us. We decided to grab 'em for sacrifice to the goddess.

Suddenly, one of the pair leapt up from the rock, and started twitching his head from side to side, and waving his arms, and screaming like a madman. Reminded me of a lad on his first hunt who's just spotted a wild boar. "Pylades!" he shouted. "Can't you see her? Can't you see that she-dragon, the daughter of Hell? And that one there, with the poisonous snakes, her mouth open, hissing at me? Another one there! Dressed in flames and shooting fire at me! Look at her wings, flying at me, she's coming to kill me! She's holding my mother in her arms. Or is it a massive rock? She's about to hurl it at me. Please! She's going to kill me! Help! How can I escape?"

We of course didn't see none the things he was carrying on about. But he proper put the wind up the cattle and the dogs, who answered him with much bellowing and barking.

We kept still, crouching quietly. Was he about to die? No! He drew his sword and plunged into the herd, like a lion, stabbing at their flanks. The sea grew red with blood, like as if crimson flowers were floating on it..

When we saw our animals being hacked down and slaughtered, we grabbed weapons, all of us. We used conch-shells to sound the alarm, alerting neighbours to our plight. We didn't think us poor cattle minders would be any match for these fit young Greeks. It wasn't long before a sizeable number had gathered. But the mad fit passed, and the boy collapsed, foam dripping from his mouth. When we saw he was down, it was our signal to get stuck in, pelting him with stones. The other Greek wiped the foam away, and was protecting his fallen mate, covering him with his nice thick cloak. He was shielding him from the hail of missiles and nursing him as a good friend should.

But then he came to, the first one did, and sprang to his feet. He realised he was about to be swamped by a sea of enemies. He cried out. But we never let up the barrage of rocks, and we soon had them surrounded.

That was the moment when we heard this terrifying cry: "Pylades, we're going to die. Make sure we die with honour. Draw your sword and follow me!" When we saw the enemy's two blades flashing, we ran for it, scattering for safety among the rocks and bushes. But as one lot of us fled, others took their place, pelting them continuously. And when they gave up, a new contingent carried on the barrage. But I tell you what was amazing. Out of all the thousands of stones that got thrown, not a single one hit the target – must be because the bodies are reserved for sacrifice to the goddess.

Eventually we got the better of them, despite our complete lack of bravery. We surrounded them, and somehow managed to knock their swords out of their hands with our stones. They were exhausted and collapsed on the ground. We took them to the king. He took one look at them, and immediately sent them on to you – for ritual purification before you cut their throats.

Miss, say a prayer that you always get victims like these. This way the Greeks will pay for murdering you at Aulis.

Chorus leader

What a strange story! We wonder who he is, the man who has appeared? Who came from Greece across the sea that has no friends?

Iphigeneia

Quite so. *(To the Herdsman)* Go and fetch the Greeks. I'll get everything organised.

The Herdsman leaves

Poor, desperate Iphigeneia! Before, when fellow Greeks fell into her hands, her heart would go out to them; she would shed a tear of sympathy, though always appearing business-like. But now my dreams have made me pitiless, a wild thing. Anyone who comes here now, beware! You'll find me a heartless enemy.

This is what I know, my friends: the fact you have suffered yourself doesn't make you more generous to others who suffer.

But the justice of Zeus is not working for me: no wind from god has blown Helen this way through the Clashing Rocks, Helen my murderer, along with Menelaus. How I'd love to have **them** to deal with! They'd find their Aulis here and pay for my Aulis! The Aulis where the Greeks' eager hands hoicked me up like a sacrificial calf and butchered me. Where the butcher-in-chief was my own father.

She cries out as if still in pain.

The pain. How can I ever forget how it felt? Again and again I shot out an arm, trying to grab his beard, screaming things like: "This was supposed to be my wedding day! What kind of a perverted wedding is this? What have you done? While you are murdering me here, my mother and her friends from Argos are singing wedding-songs. The sound of flutes fills the hall. And I, the bride, am being put to death by my father!"

You told me I was going to marry Achilles. You tricked me into journeying all this way. My bridegroom in this bloody pantomime was Death, not Peleus' son.

When I left home, I did not say my goodbyes, time for that - so I thought - when I got back to Argos. I was nervous, preoccupied behind my bridal veil, excited by thoughts of moving to Peleus' palace! I never even gave my brother a cuddle or kissed my sisters' lips. And now my brother is dead.

My darling. If you are dead, Orestes, what a fine future you've lost, what a fine inheritance.

If a human sheds blood – or touches a dead body or a woman who's given birth – Artemis bans those persons from her temples, branding them unclean. But the goddess herself delights in shedding human blood! I can't accept that a goddess goes in for such hypocrisy.

I can't believe that the daughter of Zeus and Leto could be so two-faced. I don't believe in the Feast of Tantalus either – that a man could have served up his own son as a feast for the gods to enjoy!

It's obvious. The people hereabouts like killing. They pretend it's for the goddess' sake, what she wants.

I do not believe that a god can be evil.

She stands motionless, looking towards the temple.

Chorus

Semichorus A sing:

— ♪ ♪ — — ♪ ♪ — ♪ ♪ — ♪ — —

Bosporus! Dark rocks where the rough waters surge together.

♪ — ♪ ♪ ♪ — ♪ ♪ — ♪ —

A gadfly once chased Io across this strait,

— ♪ ♪ ♪ — ♪ ♪ ♪ ♪ — ♪ — —

Over this thin gorge that closes the Black Sea entrance,

♪ ♪ — ♪ ♪ — — — — — ♪ ♪ — —

From the continent where sits Europe, over to Asia.

υ - υ υ - υ - - - υ υ - υ υ

Now who can these sailors be, who came from the bulrushes

υ - υ - - -

That line Eurotas' banks?

υ - υ υ - - - -

Or fringe holy Dirce's river?

υ - υ υ - υ υ - υ - - - υ - -

They came here, they came here to us who give no friendly welcome,

- - - -

But human blood

- - - υ υ - υ -

Stains these altars and column shafts:

- - - υ υ - -

Great Zeus' daughter commands us.

Semichorus B echo them precisely:

— ∪ ∪ — — ∪ ∪ — ∪ ∪ — ∪ — —

Did they with oars carved from a pine-tree in rhythm crest waves,

∪ — ∪ ∪ ∪ — ∪ ∪ — ∪ —

And cross this mighty sea in their wooden craft,

— ∪ ∪ ∪ — ∪ ∪ ∪ ∪ — ∪ — —

Sails spread and guided by steady breezes onward?

∪ ∪ — ∪ ∪ — — — — — ∪ ∪ — —

As they struggled to win more wealth and riches to show off

∪ — ∪ ∪ — ∪ — — — — ∪ ∪ — ∪ ∪

At home? Many many men like these two compete for the

∪ — ∪ — — —

Rewards of boundless cash

∪ — ∪ ∪ — — — —

That will never satisfy them.

U - U U - U U - U - - - U - -

They travel all over the world, to find exotic places,

- - - -

Collecting loot.

- - - U U - U -

All have hopes. But the greedy lose.

- - - U U - -

Modest men are rewarded.

Semichorus A sings again:

- - - U U - U -

How did they navigate their way

- - - U U - U -

Through the gorge of the Clashing Rocks,

- - - U U -

Where Phineus never sleeps,

— — ∪ ∪ — ∪ — ∪ ∪ ∪ — ∪ —

Past those ever-rushing waters and Amphitrite's

— ∪ ∪ — ∪ — —

Hideaway washed by salt spray?

∪ — — — — ∪ ∪ —

Nearby dance those nymphs of the sea

— — — — ∪ ∪ — ∪ —

All fifty daughters of Nereus,

— — — — ∪ ∪ —

Singing they whirl in a ring.

— — — — ∪ ∪ —

Sails puff out, filled by the breeze;

— — — — — ∪ ∪ —

Rudders held still hiss at the stern;

- - - ♪ ♪ -

Strong winds blow from the south,

- - - - ♪ ♪ -

Or gentler ones from the west,

- - - ♪ ♪ -

Wafting ships to the shore,

- ♪ ♪ - ♪ ♪ - - -

On to the coast where the sea-birds

- - - - - ♪ ♪ -

Breed on white sand marking the isle

- - - - - ♪ ♪ -

Where Achilles' trains ever more,

- - - ♪ ♪ - -

Midst harsh waves of the Black Sea.

And Semichorus B echo them:

How I'd cheer if my mistress' prayers
Brought Helen to meet us here!
How I'd love it if she,
Leda's daughter, would come, all the way from Troy, so that
Water of death'd be sprinkled
Around her head, all over her hair;
Her throat'd be cut with a knife
My mistress' fitting revenge.
And how we'd welcome the news,
If there came some message from Greece,
If some visitor came
By sea to free us at last
From our grim slavery bonds!
In dreams I'm back in my home
Once again there where I was born,
Laughing, singing, out with my friends,
Happy, content with my life there.

As Orestes and Pylades, handcuffed, are led in by some of the king's guards, the Semichoruses join together form an escort to dedicate them to the goddess for sacrifice. This chant is businesslike and formal, contrasting with the personal reflections of the previous songs.

Now here come the pair of them handcuffed and tied,
As a fresh new gift for the goddess's shrine.
He wasn't a liar, the herdsman who spoke;
What he said was the truth. Are we ready to work?
Be silent, my friends!
They are Greeks, they're the choicest prizes we give
To the goddess! Now they're under her power!

O queen, if you like what is offered to you,
The Taurians beg you, accept if you will,
These gifts as a sacrifice. Not that we think
That it's right. It's a crime to behave so in Greece.

(The Chorus' true feelings come out in the last few lines. Perhaps they could be the rescuers they were singing about earlier? But who really notices the words of a hymn?)

Orestes and Pylades and their guards now stand before Iphigeneia.

Iphigeneia

Hmm. I must first make sure that all is just the way the goddess likes.

(To the guards) Untie the prisoners' hands. They should not be restrained now they are the property of the goddess. Go inside the temple and get everything prepared. The usual routine. You know what's needed.

The guards go into the temple. Iphigeneia inspects the prisoners and sighs.

Who I'd love to know is your mother, the woman who gave birth to you, and your father... and your sister, supposing you have one? How lonely she'll be, robbed of two brothers like you. Losing a brother: something that happens, a blow of fate that nobody can predict. The gods move in a mysterious way. None of us can know anything for certain. The future is impossible to understand.

To the prisoners

Where are you from? Coming here must have been terrible for you. Your journey must have seemed never-ending. Now your visit here will never end.

Orestes

(Full of bravado) Spare us the sympathy, bitch, whatever your name is. Don't beat yourself up on our account. How ridiculous for the killer to start blubbing over her victim! Scared to get on with it? As stupid as the condemned man snivelling, when he knows there can be no reprieve. I'm going to be a dead man, why be a fool as well? That's two bad things instead of one! Let fate take its course. Don't be sorry for us. We don't need your tears. We were well-informed about the rituals here. No surprises.

Iphigeneia

First question. One of you is called Pylades. We heard his name used. Which of you is Pylades?

Orestes

It's him. And much good may that knowledge do you.

Iphigeneia

He's Greek. What city is he from?

Orestes

Why do you need to know that?

Iphigeneia

Are you brothers?

Orestes

Blood-brothers. But we're not related. OK ma'am?

Iphigeneia

Your name. What name did your parents give you?

Orestes

Loser. Or by rights it should have been.

Iphigeneia

You are indeed lost. I know what you are, but I need your name. What is your name?

Orestes

Your job is to take my life; leave my name alone.

Iphigeneia

Why won't you tell me? Why so stubborn?

Orestes

If my name were known, it would only humiliate me further. I'd rather be a nameless corpse.

Iphigeneia

Won't you even tell me what city you're from?

Orestes

What's the point? What good would that do you? I'm about to die!

Iphigeneia

It would satisfy my curiosity. What stops you doing that one thing for me?

Orestes

All right. I'm from a city everyone has heard of – Argos!

Iphigeneia (*She gasps*)

O gods! Really? Is that where you come from? So far?

Orestes

Actually, to be precise, from Mycenae. A prosperous place, once.

Iphigeneia (*forgetting herself for a moment*)

From Argos! How wonderful! I am so pleased you are here!

Orestes

I'm not. But so glad it's made your day.

Iphigeneia

Were you driven from your home? Or did you leave of your own free will? What happened?

Orestes

I chose to leave – although I really had no choice.

Iphigeneia

I have a question. I would love to know...

Orestes

Ask away. It'll stop me brooding about what's going to happen.

Iphigeneia

Have you ever heard of place called Troy – it's somewhere people are always talking about?

Orestes

I wish I hadn't. But I can't get away from it, it haunts me - even in my dreams.

Iphigeneia

The news is it's been destroyed. By an army. It no longer exists.

Orestes

That is so. Your information is correct.

Iphigeneia

Did Helen get back home to Menelaus?

Orestes

Yes. Bringing with her... trouble to my...a member of my family.

Iphigeneia

Where is she? She owes me for some... trouble she caused me too.

Orestes

Back in Sparta! Back in Menelaus' bed, just as if nothing had happened!

Iphigeneia

Monstrous! That's what I think – and the Greeks would agree with me.

Orestes (*bitter irony*)

Her marital adventures have provided so much fun for me too.

Iphigeneia

And the news about the Greeks' return home – all reliable too?

Orestes

I'm amazed how you seem to know most of the story already!

Iphigeneia

But I want to get all the details. Before you die ...

Orestes

If that makes you happy, fire away.

Iphigeneia

A priest called Calchas, did he make it back from Troy?

Orestes

He's dead, that's what they were told in Mycenae.

Iphigeneia

(*Aside*) Holy queen, that's excellent news. (*To Orestes*) What about the son of Laertes, Odysseus?

Orestes

Not back yet. But alive – according to reports.

Iphigeneia

Curse him! I hope he dies, and never does get home.

Orestes

He's in trouble enough – even without your curse.

Iphigeneia

And the son of Thetis, the sea-nymph. Is Achilles still alive?

Orestes

No, he isn't. And leaves no family. His wedding in Aulis came to nothing.

Iphigeneia

It was a bogus marriage, as those who were there know well.

Orestes

Who are you? You seem very well informed on things in Greece.

Iphigeneia

It's where I'm from. My life there... ended when I was still a girl.

Orestes (*he's becoming sympathetic*)

Poor love, I see now why you're so keen to know about the place.

Iphigeneia

And the war leader. The one whose success they talk about.

Orestes

Who? The one I know did not find success.

Iphigeneia

A man called Agamemnon. The son of Atreus.

Orestes

I don't know anything about him. Keep off this subject, sister!

Iphigeneia

I'm not going to! Tell me what I want to know! Or by the gods...

Orestes

He died. Wretched man. And he caused the death of... someone else.

Iphigeneia

Dead? O god! Something terrible happened? I can't... it's such a shock...*(she is sobbing)*.

Orestes

What are you crying for? He meant nothing to you, surely.

Iphigeneia

I am devastated... thinking of his former days of glory.

Orestes

He died horribly. His wife... put him to death.

Iphigeneia (*still weeping*)

I am crying like this because of what she must have gone through, not just for the one who died.

Orestes

That's enough now. No more questions.

Iphigeneia

Just one more. His wife. The poor victim's wife. Is she still alive?

Orestes

She isn't. Her son, the boy she gave birth to, he killed her.

Iphigeneia

A whole family destroyed! Why for god's sake did he do that?

Orestes

To punish her for killing his father. To avenge him.

Iphigeneia

Impossible for him. To do what's right, he had to commit a crime.

Orestes

Right he may have been, but he gets no credit for it from the gods.

Iphigeneia

Did Agamemnon have any other children? Is anything left of his family?

Orestes

One daughter. Electra.

Pylades seems about to speak. Electra is his wife.

Iphigeneia

Wasn't there another daughter? One who was... sacrificed? Any news of her?

Orestes

None. She's dead. That all that's known.

Iphigeneia

A grim fate. And grim to be the father that had her put to death.

Orestes

Her life was sacrificed to help an evil woman who deserved no help.

Iphigeneia

The boy whose father died, is he still alive? Living in Argos?

Orestes

He's alive; although the poor wretch's home is nowhere – or anywhere.

Iphigeneia (*suddenly excited*)

My dreams were not true, then. Good riddance to you! You meant nothing.

Orestes

The gods are worse. They tell more lies than dreams do. Why do we believe they're wise?

Chorus (*getting a word in at last*)

What about us? Are my parents still alive? Or dead? Can anyone tell us?

Iphigeneia (*ignoring them*)

I've had an idea. Let me tell you what has suddenly occurred to me. Something that will benefit you, my prisoners, and help me as well. It's always great to kill two birds with one stone. If I were to spare your life, would you be willing to take a message for me to my friends in Argos? It's a letter a prisoner once wrote for me – I never learned to write. He felt sorry for me: although I had to kill him, he didn't blame me, saying it was the law that condemned him to death. And thus, according to the goddess' rules, it was right that he should die.

This is the first time I've had a chance to save someone who could take my news to Argos for me, and deliver this letter to my loved ones back home. You know Mycenae, and the people I'm talking about. You have the right family connections. Get home safely. A very decent reward for carrying a few tablets – what could be easier? There still has to be a sacrifice, I'm afraid. It's the law of the land. Leave this man here – the goddess will be quite satisfied with one of you.

Orestes

I see only one flaw in your master plan. Leaving him to be killed is too heavy a price for me to pay. I am the captain of this ship of pain – he's merely crew, along on the voyage to help me out. It's not right for me to escape shipwreck by throwing him overboard, just because that's what you want. This is what should happen. Let him take the letter, and let whoever's job it is kill me. It makes a nonsense of friendship for a man to save his own skin when things get tough. I'd be ashamed. This man happens to be a friend whose life is just as precious to me as my own.

Iphigeneia (*sincerely moved*)

How very noble and generous! What a fine and decent family you must come from! Genuine love for those you love. I would be so proud to have a brother like you. I do have a brother. He's alive, I know – how I wish I could see him!

But if that's your decision, I'll send him with the letter, and you shall die, since for some reason you seem determined to do so.

Orestes

Who will sacrifice me? Who'll have my death on their conscience?

Iphigeneia

I shall. The goddess ordained me to perform this rite.

Orestes

Not a role one would envy – an unhappy one for you, reverend sister.

Iphigeneia

Nevertheless, there is no alternative. I have to do my duty.

Orestes

Will you be wielding the knife? Will you do the actual killing? A man's job, surely. Not something you'd ask a woman to do.

Iphigeneia

No, I just sprinkle the holy water on your head.

Orestes

So who, if I may ask, does do the actual killing?

Iphigeneia

Inside the temple are people, experts, whose... job this is.

Orestes

And when I'm dead, what sort of funeral do I get?

Iphigeneia

Your body will be cremated inside the temple, and then the ashes go into a cave in the rocky hillside.

Orestes

I'd always imagined it would fall to my sister to lay out my body, and arrange my funeral

Iphigeneia

No chance of that, poor man. Whoever you are, you are a long way from home - and civilisation. But, seeing you are from Argos, I'll do what I can for you. You'll have a proper funeral, with flowers and a full ceremony – you'll be rubbed with the richest olive oil first, and I'll pour golden honey from the bees that feed on the wild-flowers on the mountains on to your pyre.

But I must go and fetch the letter from the temple. I don't want you to think I have anything against you personally – so, guards, no need to tie them up again.

What surprise it'll be for him – when (fingers crossed!) he gets my news! The one I love in Argos – the one I love the best! How incredibly happy he'll be when he finds out the one he thought was dead is alive after all!

Iphigeneia goes into the temple to fetch the letter. The Chorus are disturbed and anxious (shown by their use of the dochmiac meter)

Chorus (*sing, to Orestes*)

How I weep for you

When the bowl's prepared

Soon to soak your hair:

Water turns to blood.

Orestes (*speaks*)

I don't need your pity. Don't be upset on my account, my friends.

Chorus (*sing, to Pylades*)

How I'm glad for you.

You are going home.

You're so lucky, son,

To see home again.

Pylades (*speaking*)

Don't envy me! I'm leaving my friend here to die.

Chorus (*singing*)

I have changed my mind;

Your journey is cruel.

You are dead like him.

Which would I rather be?

My poor heart's confused -

Sadder for him, or you?

Orestes draws Pylades to one side. Their guards watch but do not intervene.

Orestes

Pylades, are you wondering what I'm wondering?

Pylades

I don't know. What are you wondering?

Orestes

This girl. Who is she? She sounded so Greek when she was asking us about the Trojan business – which of the Greeks got home safely, about Calchas the bird-signs boffin – and she knew the name Achilles! And she seemed so sympathetic to Agamemnon's suffering, and she questioned me about his wife and his children! She must have some family connection with Argos. Otherwise why would she be sending a letter, and asking for all this information? She sounds as if she's really involved in what's going on in Argos.

Pylades

You've taken the words out of my mouth – my thoughts exactly: except for one thing. Everyone – everyone with their wits about them that is – knows about the tribulations of the Argive royal family. It's public knowledge. But there's something else I want to say.

Orestes

What? Tell me what's on your mind.

Pylades

For you to die while I go on living is wrong. How does it make me look? I was with you when we began this journey together; it is right that we should be together in death. On every hill, in every valley throughout Argos – and Phocis too – people will be calling me coward, chicken, wimp. The hoi polloi, riff-raff they may be, will be convinced I got home and saved my own life by betraying you. Or even - looking at your family problems – by murdering you to take your throne. I'd have a motive all right. Because I am married to your sister, our son could legally become king.

If this happens, and I fear it will, how ashamed I'll be! I want us to die at the same moment, with our throats cut at the same moment, and our bodies to be burned together. I have been your friend for ever; no one must ever say I let you down.

Orestes

Enough! No more of that! This is my mess. I have to deal with it myself. One person's suffering is sufficient: no point in doubling our pain. You say you'd be judged shameful and contemptible. It would be the same for me. I'd feel just as bad if you died for me. It's better if I die, because I... did what I did. It's what the gods want.

But you are not hated by the gods, your family is clean, not rotten, guilty and condemned like mine.

If you live, you will have sons whose mother is my own sister, the sister I gave away to become your wife. I'll be remembered – and my family will not disappear. There will be heirs. It will survive.

No. You go. Stay alive. Look after my father's estate. Give me your right hand. Swear that when you get home to Greece and see the horses grazing on the Argive plain you'll do this: raise a mound of earth, and set up a memorial for me on the top. Let my sister mourn for me, and cut a lock of her hair to place on the tomb. Tell them how I died: slaughtered on an altar as a sacrifice, by a woman from Argos. Stay with my sister whatever the future brings – even if all our family's wealth is gone.

Now I say goodbye. You have been the closest to me of all those I love. Since we were boys we've always been together – remember the fun we had out hunting, and the bad times you helped me survive.

Apollo – the great oracle – lied to us. He tricked us into going as far away from Greece as possible. It was to hide his shame at what he made us do before. I trusted him completely. He persuaded me to kill my mother, and now I'm paying for her death with my own.

Pylades

You shall have your memorial – and I wouldn't dream of deserting your sister. My love for you will be as strong as it was when you were alive – or stronger. The god's prophecy has not yet been fulfilled, to be sure – though he does seem to be cutting it fine. But you're not dead yet. It happens, it does sometimes happen that just when you think all is lost, everything changes.

Orestes

What nonsense! Apollo's lies are no comfort. Anyway, here's the woman back. Coming out of the temple now.

Iphigeneia returns with the sealed tablets.

Iphigeneia

You guards. You may go now. Go inside and get the equipment ready for the men who'll be doing the killing.

The guards enter the temple, leaving Iphigeneia alone with the prisoners. She hands over the tablets to Pylades.

Here is the letter – there's quite a lot of it. I've been thinking – I need you to agree to one thing more. People change their minds once they're no longer in danger: they lose their fear, and start to get other ideas. I am worried that the person who is supposed to take my letter back to Argos might forget all about it once he gets away from here.

Orestes

What are you asking? What's the problem?

Iphigeneia

I want him to swear, a formal oath, that he will convey these tablets to Argos, and deliver them to the friends that I specify.

Orestes

And will you swear an oath in return?

Iphigeneia

To do what? Or not do what? Explain.

Orestes

To let him go, and not to kill him.

Iphigeneia

Of course! Otherwise how could he deliver the letter!

Orestes

What about the king? Will he agree to this?

Iphigeneia

Yes. I shall persuade him. And I'll put him on the boat myself.

Orestes

(To Pylades) Swear then. *(To Iphigeneia, as Pylades seems at a loss)* Tell him what to say – you are the religious expert!

Iphigeneia

Say this: "I shall give this to your friends".

Pylades *(raising his right hand)*

"I shall give this letter to your friends."

Iphigeneia

And I shall see you safely past the Black Rocks.

Pylades

Which of the gods do you swear by to guarantee your oath?

Iphigeneia

By Artemis. I am respected in her temple.

Pylades

I by mighty Zeus, ruler of heaven.

Iphigeneia

And if you break your oath, and double-cross me?

Pylades

May I not return home. And if you fail to save me?

Iphigeneia

May I die and never set foot in Argos again.

Pylades

There's one thing we've not thought about, though.

Iphigeneia

If it's worth hearing, tell me.

Pylades

There needs to be a proviso. If anything happens to my ship, and the letter gets lost at sea with everything else, but I manage to save my life, the oath should no longer hold.

Iphigeneia

Tell you what I'll do then. There's more than one way to skin a weasel. I'll tell you everything that's written in my letter. You can then pass it on to my friends. We win either way. If you manage to hand over the letter safely, its contents will make themselves clear – you save your breath. But if the letter does get lost, my words are safe if you are saved!

Pylades

Excellent suggestion – good for both of us. Just tell me what it is I need to pass on, and who to pass it on to, when I get to Argos.

Iphigeneia

Tell Orestes, Agamemnon's son. "The girl they sacrificed at Aulis is alive. This message is from Iphigeneia, who they thought was dead..."

Orestes (*interrupting the dictation, oblivious of its significance*)

Where is she? Has she come back to life?

Iphigeneia

Right here in front of you of course! Now where was I? Please don't interrupt. "Bring me home to Argos, dear brother, from this foreign land, before I die. Rescue me, free me from the ritual killings I carry out for the goddess, from my duties, slaughtering those who come from overseas..."

Orestes

Pylades, what's happening? Have we gone mad?

Iphigeneia (*continuing relentlessly*)

"... or I shall place a curse upon your family, Orestes." There, I've said his name a second time! Make sure you remember it.

Orestes

O gods!

Iphigeneia

What are you shouting about? It's impolite to interrupt me while I'm speaking.

Orestes

Sorry. Carry on. I was getting carried away. I can work it out for myself. Something incredible is about to happen...

Iphigeneia (*ignoring him*)

Say how the goddess Artemis saved me by switching me with a deer. That was what my father sharpened his sword for, he killed the deer, not me, as he thought. Artemis brought me to this country. That's the letter; that all that's written in the tablets.

Pylades

Thank you. What I swore to do will be very easy! It won't take very long to keep my promise.

He hands the letter to Orestes

Here you are, Orestes. I am a conscientious postman. This is a letter for you. It's from your sister.

Orestes

I know! And now I throw it away! I am so happy! I don't know what to say! My darling! Sister!

He moves to throw his arms around Iphigeneia

Let me hug you! I never thought this could happen! It's amazing! Incredible news! I'm just so utterly...

Iphigeneia (*trying desperately to extricate herself from his clutches*)

I don't know who you are, but how dare you touch me! I am a holy priestess. My robes are sacred. No one is allowed to touch them.

Orestes (*as she struggles to break free*)

My own! My darling! My sister, Agamemnon's child, like me! Don't be shy! I'm sure you never thought you'd be holding your brother in your arms.

Iphigeneia

You? My brother? What nonsense is this? Everyone knows Argos is where he is – or maybe Nauplia.

Orestes

No he isn't, you crazy creature!

Iphigeneia (*she is not buying it*)

So. Was it the woman from Sparta, the daughter of Tyndareus, who was your mother?

Orestes

Of course! And my father was the grandson of Pelops.

Iphigeneia

What? Can you prove this to me?

Orestes

Yes. Ask me anything you like about my family.

Iphigeneia (*still highly suspicious*)

No. You give me the information, and I'll know if it's true.

Orestes (*he releases her*)

All right. First, something I was told about. By Electra. Do you know about the feud between Atreus and his brother Thyestes?

Iphigeneia

I did hear about it. They had a quarrel over a golden lamb.

Orestes

Then you know you about the tapestry that tells their story? A fine piece of weaving – done by you?

Iphigeneia

My heart says it's you – my mind... you're very close.

Orestes (*both are getting more and more excited*)

And that time the sun went back on its course? That was in your picture?

Iphigeneia

It was! I remember what a beautiful cloth I was embroidering, the threads were so fine.

Orestes

And the water your mother brought to Aulis for your wedding? The special jar?

Iphigeneia

I remember. The ceremony is not something I'm likely to forget!

Orestes

And the lock of hair you gave your mother?

Iphigeneia

Something for her to remember me by - there's no grave for her to visit.

Orestes

And then there's the evidence I've actually seen with my own eyes. I'll describe it. An ancient spear in my father's house which belonged to Pelops. He had it at Pisa, when he won Hippodameia in the chariot race, and killed her father Oenomaus. It was kept hidden in the girls' quarters, your own apartment!

The Reunion Duet

Iphigeneia (*singing, she runs back into his arms. During the amoibaion which follows, Iphigeneia sings, while Orestes speaks his lines*)

U - U - U - U - U - U -

Yes, yes! It is you, my sweet, closest to me of those I love!

U - U - U - U - U -

Orestes, yes it's you. My long-lost love!

U U - U U - U U - U -

You are so far away from your home, my love!

Orestes (*speaking*)

And I'm holding you, the girl who died, or so they thought.

Iphigeneia

— — ∪ ∪ ∪ ∪ — ∪ — ∪ —

See how a river of tears pours down my face

∪ — ∪ — ∪ — ∪ —

I'm sobbing. But they're tears of joy!

Orestes

...and so are mine!

Iphigeneia

∪ ∪ ∪ ∪ ∪ ∪ ∪ ∪ — ∪ —

Can it be that you could be that little babe

∪ ∪ ∪ — ∪ — ∪ ∪ ∪ — ∪ —

That little newborn baby in your nanny's arms?

— — ∪ — ∪ — ∪ — ∪ — ∪ —

O how much greater than I ever dared to hope:

∪ — ∪ — — ∪ —

My luck! What words? All turned out

U - - U - U - U U U -

Beyond all my dreams and all imagining.

Orestes

In future may we share our fortune hand in hand.

Iphigeneia

U U U - U - U U U - U -

What unexpected joy it is I'm feeling, friends

U - U - U - U - U - U -

I'm so afraid in case it flies away from me

- U U - U -

Vanishing into air.

U - U - U - U -

I greet our home the Cyclops built!

U - U - U - - U -

Our fatherland Mycenae so dear!

U U U - U - U U U - U -

Thank you for Orestes' life! Thank you for nursing him,

U U - U U - U U - U U -

And because you looked after this brother of mine,

- U - - U U

Argos' bright pathfinder.

Orestes

Our family was privileged in every way;

Our lives have known misfortune ever since our birth.

Iphigeneia

U - - U U U - U U - U -

I know, wretched as I am, how he took the sword;

U - - U - U U - - U -

My poor father severed my neck. He'd no choice.

Orestes

I was not there but I can clearly picture you.

Iphigeneia

U U U - U U - - U U - U -

Quite unaccompanied there by any wedding songs,

- U U - - - U U U U U -

Promised Achilles' bed! But it was just a trick.

U U U - U - - U U - U -

On to the altar they dragged me with tears and screams.

- - - U - U - - - -

How those bowls of water scared me! Horror!

Orestes

Yes! Horror I say too. How could our father bring himself...

Iphigeneia

U U U U U U U U - U U U U

Not like a father, not at all fatherly was it.

- U - - - U -

Now, though, all is changed! Let's both

- - - - -

Thank the god who's brought us luck!

Orestes

What if you'd killed your brother, crazy girl?

Iphigeneia

- - - - -

I didn't want to! How hard I found that choice!

- - - - -

My choice was painful. Brother you were so very close

- - - - -

To a fate that was loathsome; not at all what you deserved:

- - - - -

The death blow from me.

- - - - -

How will it end, the pain I go through?

- u - - - u - u - -

What is waiting? What does fate next

u u - u u - u u -

Have in store for the both of us? And

u u u u u - u u u - - -

However shall I find a way to bring you home,

- u u - - -

Saved from an exile's death,

u u - u u - u u - u u -

Back to Argos, before you are killed by the sword?

u u u u u - u u - - -

This is what you must do, what you must work out!

u u u - - -

But my poor mind's confused:

υ υ - υ υ - υ - υ - υ

Should we travel by land? Forget the sea-route?

- υ υ - - -

Making our way on foot?

υ υ - υ υ - υ υ - υ υ - υ

You would risk getting murdered by barbarous tribesmen

- υ υ - - - υ υ - υ υ - υ

Forcing your way where roads are non-existent. But if you

υ υ υ - υ - υ - υ - υ υ

Try the long voyage through the narrow Bosphorus

υ - - - -

Escape will be hard.

υ - υ υ - υ

It's hopeless! It's hopeless!

υ υ – υ υ – υ υ – υ υ –

Will a god, will a man, or a fortunate stroke

υ – υ υ – υ

Appear as our saviour?

υ υ – υ υ – υ – –

Bringing help to the helpless, someone?

υ – – υ – υ – – υ –

To rescue the only two who survive

υ – υ – υ

Of Atreus' family?

Her song ends

Chorus Leader

How amazing! Better than any story. And I was there! I heard it myself, live, not at second hand!

Pylades (*breaking up the touching scene*)

A bit of hugging is clearly quite in order when reunited with loved ones; but Orestes, enough with the emotional stuff. Time to face up to reality. How are we going to get away from this wretched place, so our story can end with “they reached home safely”? The clever thing - when you've had a stroke of luck – is a. not to waste it and b. to build on it. That way you can make sure your happiness lasts.

Orestes

You're right, of course. We have had luck on our side – but we deserve it. Fortune favours the brave.

Iphigeneia

Excuse me though if I speak my mind – there are a few things I need to get clear. First Electra: what happened to her, I'd really like to know.

Orestes

She's married to this guy here! She's a lucky woman!

Iphigeneia

And what is his background? Who was his father?

Orestes

Strophius. From Phocis.

Iphigeneia

And Strophius' mother was Atreus' daughter – and Agamemnon's sister, and our auntie. So we're related!

Orestes

He's our cousin, yes. And my best friend.

Iphigeneia

But he wasn't born when my father had me killed?

Orestes

No. Strophius had been without children for quite a while.

Iphigeneia

Brother-in-law! Hello!

Orestes

He's more than just one of the family: he's my shield and protector.

Iphigeneia

That...business with your mother. How could you have...

Orestes

Let's not go into that. I was avenging my father.

Iphigeneia

Yes, but what was the reason *she* killed *him*?

Orestes

Please, my mother's... you don't want to know.

Iphigeneia

No more questions then. But what about Argos – are you still welcome there?

Orestes

Menelaus is in charge. I am banished from my father's kingdom.

Iphigeneia

How could your uncle treat you so harshly when things were so bad for you?

Orestes

It's not him. It is fear of the Furies that keeps me from my home.

Iphigeneia

Now I understand. The Furies have been driving you away because of your mother?

Orestes

Driving me, yes. I'm like a horse pulling a cart driven by fiends – they keep on jerking the reins, until my mouth bleeds from the cruel bit.

Iphigeneia

I see. They drive you insane. This explains the report I heard earlier. Your behaviour down by the beach?

Orestes

It's not the first time people have had to see me like that. It is horrible.

Iphigeneia

Whatever made you come here, to this place?

Orestes

I came because I was ordered to. By the gods. By Apollo.

Iphigeneia

Ordered? Why? What for? Can you tell me, or aren't you allowed to?

Orestes

I'm happy to explain. My suffering began like this. After the... thing with my mother... the thing I don't talk about... after that happened... the unbearable feelings... I was driven out, expelled, by Furies, who kept me running until Apollo guided my steps to Athens. There I had to face prosecution by these "goddesses". There's a place in Athens, a holy spot. Zeus founded a law-court there - originally for the god Ares to face trial when he had blood on his hands. *(He's vague about the details)*

When I got to Athens, at first none of our family friends would take me in – they saw me as an enemy of the gods. Some of them felt embarrassed and gave me food – at a table on my own. They took me in, but would not let me sit down with them to eat. No one spoke to me. I took my meals apart, in silence. When it came to drinking, each filled his own private jug, and enjoyed competing with the others. I was their guest. I couldn't criticise them. I pretended not to care, though I was hurting inwardly. What did I expect? I had killed my mother. (The Athenians, I gather, turned my misery into a game, a ceremony: they celebrate Choes in my memory, a drinking competition: the Festival of Jugs).

And so, on the Hill of Ares (The Areopagus), my trial on the charge of shedding my mother's blood began. I stood on one of the speaker's platforms, while the senior Fury took her stand on the other. I gave my speech and I listened to hers. Apollo then spoke up for me, and saved my life. Athena raised her arm, and made the votes equal. My murder trial was over. I had won. I was acquitted.

But, the Furies! Those who were in court, and were won over by the verdict, took up residence in a shrine, near where the vote had taken place. But those Furies who rejected the judgement of the court, continued to pursue me, as I ran, driven ever onwards with nowhere to rest.

At last I found myself – again – in Delphi, where Apollo once told me to kill my mother. I threw myself on the sacred ground in front of his temple, and swore I'd starve myself to death right there in his sanctuary. Apollo had ruined my life: it was up to him to save it, if he wanted to.

Then he spoke. Apollo's voice issued from the golden tripod (where he delivers his oracles). He ordered me here, to fetch the statue which fell from the sky, and set it up in Athens.

This, he hinted, would make me safe: help me! If we can get hold of the statue of the goddess, I'll be cured of my madness, and I'll put you on our ship and row you back home to Mycenae!

(As Iphigeneia looks puzzled) Come on! You are my dear sister. I love you. Rescue me and save our ancient family. Because I'm finished, and so is the entire house of Pelops, if we can't get our hands on that lump of wood – the goddess' image sent from heaven, I should say.

Chorus leader

Terrible! The anger of the gods seems to have boiled over, and is making life unbearable for the seed of Tantalus.

Iphigeneia

My heart's desire, before you came here, was to go back to Argos, and see my brother. I want the same as you, for you to be set free from your troubles. I am not angry with my father any more for sacrificing me. All I want is to help our poor stricken family get back on its feet. How I wish there was some way I could get out of sacrificing you, and save the family! But I fear it would be impossible to fool the goddess, or the king, when he finds the empty plinth, with the statue gone! How will I not be killed? What explanation could I possibly give?

If you can take the statue, and get me on board your trusty ship, it will be worth the risk. If you can't organise it, I'm finished, even if you manage to get yourself home. *(No longer self-pitying. Decisive.)* No!

I've made up my mind. I am with you, even if helping you means certain death for me. I've always believed it's hard for a family to recover from losing a man. But who misses a woman?

Orestes

No. No more bloodshed. I could not bear having your death on my conscience as well as my mother's. Hers is enough. We shall not be parted. I want us both to be together – in life... or in death. If I can, I'll get away from here, and I'll take you home with me. If not, I'll stay, and we'll die together.

(Suddenly more cheerful) But listen to what my mind's telling me. If what I'm doing is repugnant to Artemis, how come Apollo, her brother, told me – officially, through his oracle – to bring the statue of the goddess to Athena's city? He knew I would meet you here! Putting two and two together, I can at least hope we're meant to find a passage home.

Iphigeneia

I don't see how we can take what we have to, and not get ourselves killed. The problem is getting back home. That's where our plan falls down. *(A pause, as Orestes looks disappointed)* However keen you are.

Orestes

Couldn't we just kill the king?

Iphigeneia

(Quite sincerely) That is a shocking suggestion! I am a guest in his country. Killing one's host, even if he is evil, is wrong.

Orestes

Come on! If it will save both our lives, we shouldn't be afraid to do it.

Iphigeneia

I'm sorry. I just couldn't. I can see your point of view, but... no.

Orestes

All right. Suppose you hide me in the temple here.

Iphigeneia

Presumably you imagine we could sneak out when it gets dark?

Orestes

(Excited at the idea) "And universal darkness buries all"! You can't get away with much in the daylight!

Iphigeneia

(Crushing him) There are security guards inside. We can't fool them.

Orestes

(Angry despair). Shit. We are fucked then. How could I ever think we'd get away?

Iphigeneia

(Tentative but smug) I think I might have come up with a little idea...

Orestes

(Quite rudely) What? Let's have it, so I can decide if it's any use.

Iphigeneia

My plan – it's quite clever, I think - is to exploit your suffering...

Orestes

(Heavy sarcasm) Sounds like a typical cunning female plan!

Iphigeneia

I shall say you came here on the run, after you murdered your mother in Argos.

Orestes

Fine! Use my pain! I can't see what good it's going to do.

Iphigeneia

I shall say it would be unlawful to sacrifice you to the goddess.

Orestes

(His cynicism is turning to enthusiasm) Why? I think I see where this is leading...

Iphigeneia

Because you're tainted, unclean! I only sacrifice the pure!

Orestes

OK! Brilliant! But how does this help us get our hands on the statue?

Iphigeneia

I shall say I need to cleanse you by washing you in the sea...

Orestes

(He is really reluctant to accept Iphigeneia's brilliant plan!) But that all-important piece of wood is still in the temple!

Iphigeneia

I'll tell them I have to wash it as well – because you touched it!

Orestes

(Still irritatingly patronising) Where's all this going to happen? Down “where make the waves toward the pebbled shore”?

Iphigeneia

(Giving as good as she gets) Aye! “Where the wind fills the white and rustling sail” - by your ship!

Orestes

Who's going to be carrying the statue? You by yourself or someone else?

Iphigeneia

I shall be. I am the only person allowed to touch it.

Orestes

And Pylades here. Will he be implicated in my crimes?

Iphigeneia

I'll say there's blood on his hands, just like yours.

Orestes

Hmm. Will you inform the king, or keep it secret from him?

Iphigeneia

I'll have a convincing story ready for him! There's no way we can keep him in the dark.

Orestes

I'm sure your imagination will be equal to the task!

Iphigeneia

I can rely on you to work out all the other details.

Orestes

Indeed. “There lies the port. The vessel puffs her sail”.

Iphigeneia

One last thing. These women must not give us away.

Orestes

That's a job for you – find a way of persuading them. Win them over. Women are good at concocting a sob story. Everything's going to be all right!

Iphigeneia

(To the Chorus. Partly ingratiating; partly intimidating). My very dear, dear friends. I'm appealing to you. It's in your hands whether my plans succeed, or fail, robbing me of my homeland, my brother and my sister: the three things I love the most.

The most important thing I can say is this. We are women. Our sex sticks together. We can always be relied on to show sisterly solidarity.

Keep your mouths shut, and join in the effort to help us escape. "Silence is a woman's finest ornament". Look. There are three of us – all friends of yours. You have it in your power to send us safely home or condemn us to death.

If you save my life, so you can share my good fortune, I will bring you safely back to Greece.

She moves among the Chorus, appealing to them individually.

Give me your hand. You, too! And you! And you, your smile tells me you're a friend! What do you say? Who's prepared to say she's on our side? Who is against us? Speak out! If you reject my appeal, I am dead, and so is my brother. No hope left.

Chorus leader

No need to worry, ma'am. We love and respect you. As long as you take care of yourself! For my part, I'll not breathe a word about your business, as Zeus is my witness.

Iphigeneia

Thank you. And good luck to you in turn.

(To Orestes and Pylades) You now get inside the temple! You, too! The king of this place will be arriving at any time, to check up on me, to make sure I've sacrificed our "guests".

As the two men enter the temple, Iphigeneia turns and raises her arms in prayer.

Holy queen, thou who didst save me in the vale of Aulis from the murderous hands of my father, save me now once more, and along with me these two. Else it will be thy fault if the word of Apollo be no longer trusted by men.

Be kind to us! Come thou to Athens! Get thee away from this barbarous land. Thou shouldst not be residing here in this land of savages, when a state so prosperous could be thy home!

The Chorus divide into two:

Semichorus A sing: [Strophe a' 1099 -1105]

The first 10 lines are Glyconic, with variations allowed at the beginning and end of the lines.

— ◡ — ◡ ◡ — ◡ —

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u u u - u u - -

- u u - u u - u -

u u u - u u - u - - -

u - - u u - u -

- - - u u - u

u - - - - u u -

u - - u - u u -

- u u - u u - u -

The rhythm changes for the last 7 lines, typically an 8 syllable line with 4 long syllables followed by a choriamb, but with variations.

- - u u - u u -

- - - - u u -

- - - u u u u u

- - - - - u u -

- - - - - u u -

- ~ ~ - ~ - ~ -

- - - ~ ~ - -

Sea-mew, cliff-haunting Halcyon
Drifting high over ocean swell
Piteous cries do you utter
Easy to grasp for the ones who know
That it's a husband, your mate, whose loss you mourn.
And my grief is in harmony:
I'm no bird, but I cry as well;
I miss my dear Greece and her crowds
I miss children, Artemis' gifts,
Prayers at her temple, on Cynthia's
 Hill, delicate leaves of the palms,
 Those fresh-looking shoots of the bay,
 Green-grey fruit of the olive trees
 Sacred symbol of Phoebus, the god;
 Holy pool whose waters are danc-
 ing in a circle: and all while the swans
 Pour out glorious music.

Semichorus B answer in song:

All those rivers of tears that flowed
Down my face and my reddened cheeks
When the walls of my city fell
And they shipped me away, a slave,
Trapped by enemy oars and spears.

I was traded for gold, for cash;
Found this barbarous land my home.
Now I work at the temple of
Holy deer-slaying Artemis,
Argive Iphigeneia's helper

Here; where what they kill are not sheep,
How I envy those who know only pain
Constantly through all of their days.
Pain's their friend, they know nothing else.
When you've lost your place in the sun,
How much worse? Your life is in ruins:
Weighty burden to bear.

Semichorus A sing again:

The lines are mostly 8 syllables, containing variations on the choriamb.

Lucky you, then, an Argive ship,
Will be taking you home, my mistress,
While the oarsmen all keep in time
With Pan's pipes brought down from the hills
Shrill flutes setting the rhythmic beat.
And Phoebus who knows what's to come
Strums his seven-stringed lyre, and sings
Escorting you all the way home
To glorious Athens, in style.
As for me, you will leave me here
Watching the oars churning the sea;
Swelling sails, mast bent in the breeze,

White spray churning foam at the bows
As your ship speeds away.

Semichorus B respond

If I were a bird I would fly
Where the sun's bright chariot glides
And land in my own room at home
Folding my wings tight to my back
At last no longer an exile.
Once more I'd be there at the dance,
Bridesmaid at some lavish affair,
Spinning around twirling my feet,
Delighting my dear mother's friends,
Keen to be the belle of the ball
Showing off my beautiful clothes
Eager to please, looking my best
Hair just so, shining and groomed,
Make-up fresh, cheeks all aglow!

Enter Thoas, the king of the Taurians, attended by armed guards.

Thoas

Where is she? The temple wardress? The Greek woman? Has she started the ceremony? For our visitors?

Iphigeneia comes out of the temple. She is carrying the wooden statue of Artemis.

Chorus leader

Here she comes, sir. I'm sure she can give you all the information you need.

Thoas

(As he moves towards her threateningly) Hey! You! Agamemnon's daughter! What are you doing with the statue of the goddess in your arms? Why have you removed it from its plinth?

Iphigeneia

Stay where you are. Don't come any nearer to the temple.

Thoas

Why? What's going on?

Iphigeneia

Don't worry. I've purified myself. [lit I have spat!] There's no danger.

Thoas

What on earth are you talking about? Explain!

Iphigeneia

The victims you captured, sir. They are unclean.

Thoas

This is just your opinion? What proof have you?

Iphigeneia

The statue of the goddess turned away, averted its gaze.

Thoas

It couldn't turn by itself. There must have been earth-tremors...

Iphigeneia

No, it did. Completely by itself. And closed its eyes too!

Thoas

So what is the explanation? Could it have been contamination caused by the prisoners?

Iphigeneia

It has to be that. The pair of them have done terrible things.

Thoas

Down by the beach - they killed one of our people?

Iphigeneia

No. They arrived here already stained with blood - family blood.

Thoas

Whose blood? I need to get to the bottom of this.

Iphigeneia

Their mother's. The pair of them worked together. They hacked her to death with swords.

Thoas

And they call us barbarians, by Apollo!

Iphigeneia

The whole of Greece turned on them, and kicked them out.

Thoas

I see why you are bringing the statue outside, then!

Iphigeneia

Yes, into the fresh air. To get it away from the taint of blood.

Thoas

How did you find out that the foreigners were unclean?

Iphigeneia

When the goddess' image turned away, that was the clue. Then I cross-examined them.

Thoas

How clever of you - then so are all you Greeks.

Iphigeneia

Yes - they tried to pull a clever trick on me. One they thought I'd fall for.

Thoas

Tempting you with some news from Argos, I'd guess.

Iphigeneia

Quite so. They said my brother, my only brother Orestes, is doing fine...

Thoas

Presumably you'd be so pleased with their story you'd save their lives!

Iphigeneia

...and that my father, too, is alive and doing well.

Thoas

But you of course ignored them, loyal to the goddess.

Iphigeneia

Yes. Greece? I detest everything to do with Greece. Greece destroyed my life.

Thoas

What are we going to do with our prisoners, then. What do you say?

Iphigeneia

There is a law in force. We must respect it.

Thoas

So why are the hand basins and the knife not in action already?

Iphigeneia

First I want to wash them. This means special purification.

Thoas

[Wishing to appear well-informed on religious matters] So would that be in a fresh-water stream, or in the sea?

Iphigeneia

Only the sea has the power to wash away all the evil of mankind.

Thoas

And then the goddess would find them more acceptable victims?

Iphigeneia

And I'd get back on good terms with her myself!

Thoas

Easy then. The sea's right here next to the temple.

Iphigeneia

[Alarmed] No! It's got to be somewhere ... unfrequented.. There's.... quite a lot of ritual stuff...

Thoas

Take 'em where you like. Your mumbo-jumbo doesn't interest me.

Iphigeneia

I've got to wash the goddess' statue as well.

Thoas

Of course. If one of those mother-killers touched it.

Iphigeneia

Why do you imagine I've taken it off its plinth?

Thoas

Good. Clever girl. You seem to have thought of everything.

Their remaining dialogue quickens in pace; the speakers should ensure there is no perceptible pause between their lines. There is also a marked change of metre, accurately reproduced from the Greek, which inevitably produces a slightly comic effect. Iphigeneia is totally in command.

Iphigeneia Do you know what needs to happen? **Thoas** Only if you tell me so!

Iphigeneia Tie the prisoners' hands together. **Thoas** Surely they can't run away?

Iphigeneia With Greeks you're better safe than sorry! **Thoas** Go then, men, and bring some rope.

A couple of Thoas' men go into the temple.

Iphigeneia Tell them too to bring the prisoners out here for me... **Thoas** Yes, of course.

Iphigeneia Cover up their heads with blankets. **Thoas** Hide their evil from the sun!

Iphigeneia And I'll need some men to help me **Thoas** These will do whatever you say.

Iphigeneia Someone needs to tell the locals... **Thoas** Tell them what? I need to know!

Iphigeneia They must stay inside their houses... **Thoas** Or they'd be at risk of seeing...

Iphigeneia Things that might contaminate them! **Thoas** Go and warn the people - you!

Iphigeneia Not to look at what they shouldn't! **Thoas** Truly you are good to them!

Iphigeneia Yes, I always help my friends! **Thoas** I'm pleased to count myself as one!

Iphigeneia A special one. **Thoas** How right the people are to give you such respect!

Iphigeneia You must stay here in the temple; I've a job... **Thoas** ...a job for me?

Iphigeneia Get the temple fumigated... **Thoas** So it's clean when you come back?

Iphigeneia When I bring the prisoners outside... **Thoas** ...then what's there for me to do?

Iphigeneia Hide your eyes so you don't see them... **Thoas** ...and thus spare myself distress.

Iphigeneia If it seems it's taking longer... **Thoas** I don't know what **is** too long!

Iphigeneia ...there's no need for you to worry. **Thoas** Holy tasks must take their time.

Iphigeneia May this cleansing be effective! **Thoas** To that prayer I say amen.

Guards bring Orestes and Pylades out of the temple. Their wrists are tied, and their heads are covered by blankets. Anxious to avoid an encounter, Thoas covers his own head. Iphigeneia is now totally dominant. Other attendants bring lambs for slaughter, and an assortment of sacrificial equipment

Iphigeneia

Here they come. I see our "guests" approaching from the temple. *(She is checking off everything)* And here are the vestments for the goddess, and the new-born lambs - for me to wash away the taint of blood with innocent blood, and the torches with their purifying flames, and all the other stuff I ordered for the ritual cleansing of the prisoners and the goddess' statue.

My instruction to the people is this: keep away from the pollution. Particularly if you are one of the temple janitors who has to keep clean hands for the gods, if you are about to get married, if you are a pregnant woman: keep well away. Stand clear. Beware lest this vileness make you unclean.

(She prays to the goddess) My queen, virgin goddess, child of Zeus and Leto, if I do cleanse these men from the taint of bloodshed, and we do perform the sacrifice in the proper place, you shall have a house that is clean and pure, and we shall be happy. But the gods, and especially you, lady Artemis, know our inmost thoughts and secret desires: my signal is clear. I need not say more.

Iphigeneia leaves with the prisoners and their escort, together with the remainder of the procession carrying the equipment for the purification ceremony. Once he is quite sure they've all gone, Thoas unveils and goes into the temple to carry out the promised fumigation. The Chorus remain on stage by themselves, and - dividing into two as usual sing. It's a hymn to Apollo, but quite light-hearted, and almost mischievous in tone.

Semichorus A

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υ υ - υ υ - υ υ - υ υ - - - υ -

- υ - υ - -

A fine son is Leto's son

Boy with the golden hair whom she gave birth to in Delos

Amid the orchards down in the vale

Skilled with the lyre and as skilled with the bow

The accurate weapon he loves. Then she took him

Far away from that rock in the sea
That famous place where she gave him life,
To Parnassus, mother of springs
The mountain where worshippers honour
Bacchus the Lord of the Dance
Where a scaly-backed serpent with eyes dark as wine
In the shade of a bay tree glistening with menace,
Hideous, awesome monster, encircled the sacred oracle site.
And you were a baby, a baby who bounced
In his dear mother's arms, just a tiny baby!
But you, Apollo! You killed it, taking its home for yourself,
Home for your oracle, golden tripod where you sit enthroned,
Telling the truth about god's plans for men,
At the centre of the earth where you live in your temple, there beside
Pure Castalia's waters.

Semichorus B respond

Themis was next, Earth's child -
The goddess' oracular power Phoebus Apollo removed:
His was the oracle now.
Earth was not beaten, though. Dreams in the night hours,
Her children, she sent to the world to inform us
Of what was and what would be to come,
All while we slept in the dark at home
In our beds. Earth took her revenge
For her daughter, robbing Apollo -
No more a prophet at all!
In a flash he zoomed straight up to Olympus' peak,
Did the youngster, so eager to challenge father Zeus

And to beg him: "Take her away, the mad goddess! Save my shrine!"

He laughed, did the old god, at his angry son

So desperately anxious not to lose out

On all the gold they bring! One shake of his head and he stopped

Letting the dreams every night foretell the future for mankind.

Now only Apollo can prophesy,

When the visitors come in their droves to the place where he sits enthroned

Singing forth his wisdom.

A man comes running in from the beach. He's one of those who were part of the procession led by Iphigeneia, one of Thoas' men. He pushes through the Chorus towards the temple. He's very out of breath.

Attendant *(Full of self importance; ignoring the Chorus and shouting to people inside the temple)*

Guards! Security! Temple-keepers! Anyone in charge! Where is Thoas? Where is our country's king? Tell our leader to come out here! Open up these mighty doors!

Chorus leader *(diffidently)*

Excuse me. Am I allowed to speak? What's happening?

Attendant

They've gone. Departed. Vanished. Disappeared. The two young men. Agamemnon's daughter planned it all. They've stolen the sacred image and fled our shores, safe in the bosom of their Grecian ship.

Chorus leader *(lying)*

That's absolutely incredible! But he's disappeared too, the king, the one you want to see. He's not in the temple.

Attendant

Where has he gone? It is vital he be informed of what's been going on.

Chorus leader *(as the Chorus all point in different directions)*

Sorry! We don't know. But get after him! First find him and, when you do, tell him your news.

Attendant

Typical! Women can't be trusted. That's a well-known fact. You were a part of this conspiracy from the start!

Chorus Leader

You're crazy! Why should we want to help them escape? What do we care about a couple of foreigners? Get on with it! Go to the palace. Find the king.

Attendant

No! Not until someone reliable can give me an answer. Is our leader inside the temple or is he not?

He bangs on the door, and shouts

Listen up! You people inside, it's you I'm talking to! Unlock the doors! Inform your master that I am outside. I have a great sackful of bad news for him.

After a while, voices are heard from inside, and Thoas emerges from the temple, with some of his bodyguard.

Thoas

Who is making this racket outside the house of the goddess? Who is hammering at the doors and ruining my peace and quiet inside?

Attendant

Huh! These women here! They were lying, trying to get me away from the temple, saying you weren't there. But you were inside all the time!

Thoas

What good did they think that would do them?

Attendant

I'll get to them in a minute. But the important facts are these: the girl who was in charge of the sacrifices, Iphigeneia, has left the country with the prisoners, taking the holy image of the goddess. The purification ceremony was just to fool you.

Thoas

What are you telling me? Fortune's wagon was rolling, and somehow she stole a ride?

Attendant

You won't believe this. She was rescuing Orestes.

Thoas

Orestes who? Not *the* Orestes, whose mother was Clytemnestra?

Attendant

Yes. He was the man the goddess had consecrated for sacrifice on this altar.

Thoas

This a nightmare! Or what else can I call it?

Attendant

Choice of words is not what you should be worrying about! Listen: as soon as you've heard what happened and all the details you'll need to focus on how to get after the foreigners and hunt them down.

Thoas

Tell me then. That's good advice. They won't have got far. They can't escape my war machine.

Attendant

When we got down to where Orestes had his ship - beached in a hidden cove where no could see it Agamemnon's daughter - though you'd sent us along specifically to keep hold of the chained prisoners - gestured to us to move away and keep our distance. They had to be purified with fire, she said, it was a secret ritual which it was forbidden to witness. Then she grabbed the prisoners' chains, and marched them off - them in front and her behind, all by herself. It didn't seem quite right, but you'd told us attendants, sir, to do what she asked, so we did.

After a while, to fool us into thinking she was doing what she'd said, she started screeching and chanting a whole lot of mumbo-jumbo, making like it was some magic to cleanse the murderers of their guilt.

We stayed put and just sat there - for what must have been ages. Then it suddenly occurred to me: once the prisoners were untied, what was to stop them killing her and making their escape? But I was scared of seeing what I shouldn't, and went on sitting there, and kept quiet. Eventually, though, it was clear we were all thinking the same thing: get after them, forbidden or not.

And then we saw the Greek ship - its oars spread out like the wings of a bird about to fly, and fifty rowers holding their blades poised and ready [tight against the thole-pins], and the two young men now freed from their chains standing on the stern-deck. Some sailors were keeping the bows steady with spars, while others made fast the anchor-cables round the cat-heads near the prow. Others still were rushing to lower a ladder, running the rope through their hands, letting it down into the sea for the foreign woman.

It was no time to hold back, now we saw their naked treachery. We tried to grab her, the foreign woman; we kept hold of the mooring ropes, and started pulling the steering-oars out through the crutch-holes. It was a sturdy well-built ship!

Words started flying. "What are you doing? Why are you stealing our statues and priestesses and trying to sail off with them! What's your name? Who's your father? Why are you kidnapping her? Are you hoping to sell her as a slave?"

And he said: "For your information, I am Orestes, brother of this girl. I am Agamemnon's son. I am taking my sister home, the sister I'd lost."

But we kept a tight hold of her, just the same, and tried to force her to come with us - back to you. That's how come we got these cuts and bruises on our faces - look at them! Neither side had weapons, so it became a punch-up. They, the two young men, thumped us and kicked us in the ribs and stomach. We were all in agony, and could hardly stand up. They left their signatures on us, that's for sure - painful ones! We ran off back up the cliff nursing our bleeding heads and black eyes. Once on higher ground we could

carry on the fight from a safer position, throwing rocks at them. But archers standing on the ship kept firing at us, making sure we kept our distance.

In the middle of all this - a big wave had washed the ship nearer the shore but the girl was afraid of getting her feet wet - Orestes threw her over his left shoulder, while grabbing the statue - the one of Zeus' daughter, Artemis, that fell from the sky - with his other hand. He deposited it and his sister on the deck. Then a voice was heard from deep in the ship:

"You seamen, Greeks all of you, take hold of your oars and row! Let's see you turn the sea white with foam."

The men gave a cheer, and, grunting in unison, struck the water with their blades. The ship was rowing steadily out of the harbour. But as she reached the open sea, a huge wave hit her. She was in serious trouble. And then a sudden fierce gust of wind caught her and began thrusting her backwards. The crew fought hard, but the force against them was irresistible. A second wave propelled the ship back towards the shore. Agamemnon's daughter stood up and prayed:

"O thou daughter of Leto, save me! I am your priestess! Rescue me from this land of savages and take me to Greece! Forgive us our theft! O goddess, thou lovest thy brother. It is surely right that I too should love my blood-kin."

The rowers in response broke into their war-chant. The order was given and they stripped off their tunics and, shoulders moving perfectly in time, dug in their oars. But still the ship was moving closer and closer to the rocks. Some of us waded out into the surf, others were trying to attach loops of rope to the boat. I however dashed back here to you, sir, so you could know what's going on down there.

Get a move on! Bring ropes and lassoes. Unless the wind drops and the sea calms down, the foreigners haven't a hope of saving themselves. The lord of the sea, mighty Poseidon, is on the Trojan side: he hates Greeks - especially the family of Agamemnon. And now, it seems, he's about to hand over Orestes to you and our countrymen, and we shall have him in our power - and his sister, caught betraying the goddess who saved her life at Aulis.

Chorus leader *[she is stunned by what's happening]*

Iphigeneia, you poor creature. If you fall into the king's hands again you will be put to death, and your brother too.

Thoas

My people! Fellow countrymen! Saddle up your horses, ride along the beach and prepare a welcome for these Greeks as they come ashore. The goddess is on your side. Hurry! Hunt them down, these evil men! Let's catch them and throw them off the cliffs, or *[second thoughts are often better!]* skewer them alive on sharpened stakes.

As for you women, accessories to these crimes, be sure you will be punished, as soon as more important business is settled. I've no time now - I have an urgent mission to attend to.

The goddess Athena appears suddenly on the temple roof. She is magnificently arrayed as the warrior goddess, complete with spear and Gorgon shield. Everyone is paralyzed with fear. Her voice is impressively loud.

Athena

King Thoas! Where are you going? Where are you despatching this expedition to? I am Athena! Hear these words of mine. Call off your pursuit. Halt the flow of troops. Orestes came here to escape the Furies' wrath, to rescue his sister and take her to Argos, to bring the sacred image of the goddess to my land, and to find relief from his current woes. You believe you have Orestes trapped on the stormy sea. I have news for you. Already, as a favour to myself, Poseidon is pacifying the heaving waters, to allow his ship a tranquil passage home.

Her voice becomes even louder, to reach the now receding Orestes.

Orestes! You can hear the voice of the goddess, far off though you be. Listen to my instructions. Continue on your journey, taking the statue and your sister. When you reach Athens, the city built by the gods, there is a place, near the borders of the land of Attica, very close to the rocky cape of Karystos, a holy place, which my people have named Halai, the Salt Lagoons. Build a temple there and place the image within. It shall have a name to recall the land of the Taurians, and your wanderings in Greece - enforced as they were by the Furies. Men in future days will worship Artemis with the title "Tauropolos" - wanderer from the Tauric land. And this is a tradition you will introduce: whenever the people celebrate her festival, let a sword be held to a man's throat, and a drop of blood be spilled. This to compensate Artemis for the sacrifice (yours!) that did not happen - a symbolic ritual to ensure the goddess has her due.

Iphigeneia! Your future role shall be as Keeper of the Key for the goddess Artemis in Brauron among her sacred meadows. When you die, you shall be buried there. Fine rich embroidered robes will be dedicated there, bequeathed by wives who've lost their lives at home while giving birth.

And, Thoas, I trust you to see that these girls are taken home to Greece. They deserve to be rewarded. They were on the side of justice helping Orestes and his sister get away.

A final point. Orestes. I helped you earlier when you were on trial on the Hill of Ares in Athens. My vote made those for you and against you the same in number. This should become the rule: if the votes are equal, the accused must be acquitted.

Son of Agamemnon, take your sister away from this place. And you, Thoas, try not to be angry!

Thoas *[controlling his rage]*

Athena, your majesty, only a lunatic would not obey the words of the gods once he had heard them. And I, assuming he has got away with the image of the goddess, am not angry with Orestes nor with his sister. The gods are stronger than us; there's no glory in competing with them. Let them go to their country, with the statue of the goddess, and good luck to them in finding somewhere to build a temple for it! Since you command me, I shall also send these women home - lucky Greece! And, because that is what you, goddess, want, I shall lower the lance I had aimed at the fugitives, and my rowers will halt their pursuit.

Athena

Thank you. What has to be cannot be changed, by you - or by the gods.

Blow, winds, speed the journey of Orestes' ship onward to Athens. I shall escort him, making sure my sister's holy statue gets there safe and sound!

She addresses her final words to the Chorus - and to Orestes' ship, which is by now over the horizon!

Go! Enjoy your good fortune! Your luck has changed!

Happy people! Your lives are saved!

Chorus

Pallas Athena, revered by the gods,

Goddess supreme, revered among men,

We shall do what you command.

What I have heard brings joy,

Joy beyond all expectation.

The final lines may not be part of the play: but the Chorus, stepping out of character, don't mind reminding the judges there's a prize to be awarded!

...and revered goddess of Victory

Stay on our side!

Make sure we win the prize!