

## THE MURDERS AT ARGOS

excerpt

**CLYTEMNESTRA:** Orestes.

*[He starts fearfully and looks around.]*

**ORESTES:** M-Mother?

**CLYTEMNESTRA:** *[coming to him, smiling]* Oh, don't look like that! Don't look as if you're scared of me. I can't bear it.

**ORESTES:** I'm not scared.

**CLYTEMNESTRA:** Of course you're not. You're my brave little boy. Or not a boy. No, no, I'm sorry. Just about a man. So tall and strong. I hardly recognized you. But of course a mother knows her own son. She knows him with her heart. Are you comfortable here, Orestes?

**ORESTES:** Yes.

**CLYTEMNESTRA:** Are you happy to be home?

**ORESTES:** I— I think so.

*[She kneels beside him studying his eyes. Suddenly she grabs his hand and kisses the palm.]*

**CLYTEMNESTRA:** Oh, Orestes, will you ever forgive me?

**ORESTES:** Forgive you?

**CLYTEMNESTRA:** I abandoned you. I sent you away. I didn't want to. But I couldn't— There was no— *[beat]* I did what I thought was best for you. We were a house in pain. And you were so young, so fragile. I didn't want to see you hurt and twisted like the rest of us. Can you understand that?

*[He looks away and nods slightly, thinks a minute. Then:]*

**ORESTES:** Electra says I should kill you.

*[Beat.]*

**CLYTEMNESTRA:** Electra... Electra is hurting. Yes, she is. She's hurt and she's angry. And she has every right to be. I'm not denying that at all. I haven't always been— a good mother. But I have tried. I've tried. And Electra has to... give me that. No, I'm not perfect. But I've done the best I could—under very difficult circumstances.

**ORESTES:** But you killed Daddy.

**CLYTEMNESTRA:** Yes. Yes, I did. But, Orestes, I want you to look at me and understand one thing. What happened between me and Daddy has nothing to do with you. It doesn't affect my love for you one iota. You and Electra—or Chrysothemis—must never feel that you did anything wrong. It was between me and Daddy. And I still love you all very, very much.

**ORESTES:** *[after considering this a moment]* Can I kill Aegisthus?

**CLYTEMNESTRA:** No, no. You mustn't do that.

**ORESTES:** Why not?

**CLYTEMNESTRA:** Because Mommy needs Aegisthus. Mommy has many enemies who'd like to tear her apart. And Aegisthus protects her. He keeps her safe. You wouldn't want anything to happen to me, would you?

**ORESTES:** N-no.

**CLYTEMNESTRA:** Orestes, do you know the thing that's made me happiest in I don't know how many years?

**ORESTES:** What?

**CLYTEMNESTRA:** To see you again.

**ORESTES:** Really?

**CLYTEMNESTRA:** Oh, yes. I thought I'd lost you, you see. And I've lost so much. And to see your face—those beautiful eyes that I could never in centuries forget—My heart— overflowed. I'd forgotten how deeply, deeply I loved you. Orestes? Will you remember that? Will you remember how much I love you?

**ORESTES:** Yes. Yes, I will. But—

**CLYTEMNESTRA:** But what?

**ORESTES:** I just— I just want to know why.

**CLYTEMNESTRA:** *[smiling at him with gentle irony]* Oh. Is that all? "Why" is a tangled skein. Just when you think you've got it all unraveled, you find another knot. *[She touches his cheek.]* I told you not to worry about that. Will you be good and stop worrying?

**ORESTES:** OK.

**CLYTEMNESTRA:** That's my lovely boy. *[She bends over and kisses him gently on the lips.]* Now let me go. I want to make sure they're making you a lovely homecoming dinner.

**ORESTES:** But—

*[She puts a finger to his lips and goes off. He sits alone, a puzzled expression on his face, as if he were trying to resolve some thorny mathematical problem.]*