

TUTOR

That's why I was sent here, and I'll tell you everything.
Orestes had gone to Delphi to compete for prizes
in the famous Pythian games.
When he heard the loud cry announcing the first race,
our distinguished Orestes entered the course
and was seen in his glory by everyone present.
He was as successful as he was handsome
and walked off with the coveted trophy.
To make a long story short, I don't know anyone
who could match him in skill or in achievement;
in every set event, he carried off the prize
and everyone cheered each time the announcement came:
'The Argive wins, Orestes, son of Agamemnon,
leader of the famous Greek army.' So that's how things were.
But if a god is up to no good, not even a strong man can escape.

Next day, at sunrise, was a swift-footed chariot race,
Which Orestes entered with other charioteers.
One was an Achaean; one from Sparta;
two from Libya driving yoked chariots.
Then came Orestes, fifth, with a team of Thessalian horses.
Sixth, was an Aetolian with sorrel colts;
a man from Magnesia seventh; the eighth, an Aenian,
had white horses; the ninth's from Athens, the city built by gods;
another from Boeotia drove the tenth chariot.
They lined up in the position the judges had assigned by lot.
A blast from the bronze trumpet was the signal to start,
and they were off like the wind.
The drivers shouted to their horses and shook their reins.
The whole course was filled with the rattle of hurtling chariots.
Dust rose to the sky and the chariots were crammed together;
no one spared the whip, each striving to get a wheel ahead
and pass the snorting horses alongside them.
Their backs and wheels were sprayed
with the foam of panting horses.

At each turning point, Orestes hugged the pillar,
scraping close to it, giving free rein to the outer trace-horse,
checking the inner one to block off the pursuer.
At first all the drivers stood securely in their chariots.
Then the ill-disciplined horses of the Aenian bolted

and, at the beginning of the seventh lap,
crashed head on into one of the Libyans.
Then one smashed against another creating total disaster.
Soon all the plain of Crisa was filled with wreckage.
The clever Athenian, seeing this, drove aside and slowed down.
This way he avoided crashing into the chariots
piled-up in the middle of the course.

Orestes was last at the time, holding back his team,
confident in the outcome. When he saw there was only one left,
he gave a sharp command into the ears of his swift horses,
and set off in pursuit. They were neck and neck,
now one ahead, now the other.
Through every lap so far, our poor Orestes
had kept his course steady and his chariot safe.
But this time as the horses rounded the turn
he slackened the left rein and before he knew it,
struck the edge of the pillar. The axle box shattered.
He went head first over the handrail, and got tangled in the reins.
As he hit the ground, the horses panicked and ran across the course.

The spectators saw him fall from his chariot
and cried out in pity for this young man
who'd had such success, but now such suffering,
first dragged across the ground, then bouncing, his feet in the air.
Charioteers managed to stop the runaway horses with difficulty.
They released his mangled body, covered with blood,
unrecognizable to even his closest friends.

They built a pyre and burnt him on it.
His huge body was reduced to miserable ashes
and placed in a small bronze urn.
Phocians were appointed to bring it here,
so he could be buried in the land of his fathers.
That is what happened, painful to put into words,
but worse for us that witnessed it.
In fact, it is the worst disaster I have ever seen.