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CONCORD
THEATRICALS

THIS RESTLESS HOUSE

THE BOUGH BREAKS
ELECTRA AND HER SHADOW
Based on Aeschylus' *Oresteia*

by Zinnie Harris

SAMUEL FRENCH

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ISBN 978-0-573-11680-3

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AUTHOR'S NOTE

The three plays that comprise *This Restless House* can be performed on their own or as part of a continuous evening. Together they run at 4.5 hours, and if performed in rep with each other, I suggest part one (*Agamemnon's Return*) plays on its own, then parts two and three (*The Bough Breaks* and *Electra And Her Shadow*) play as different parts of the same evening.

When we first performed this trilogy at the Citizens/National Theatre of Scotland we used ten actors in total plus four children. This meant that the chorus was made up of three actors. It would also work comfortably for larger casts, and then the chorus could be much more substantial. You can divide the chorus lines up however you wish, but they shouldn't speak as a whole group – rather as a bickering and discordant group of old and dishevelled men.

The style and staging is open to future directors; for the first production our references were the Balkan wars and the Eastern European revolutions of the late eighties; but whatever the setting, it should be messy and glamorous in a down-at-heel way and very bloody. There are various songs that should be sung by the chorus and /or the whole company. I have given lyrics, and these can be sung either to an original or existing tune – anything that feels folky and like it comes from the anarchic energy of the chorus.

All of the plays are about love in some way, and they work best if the love is there alongside all the darkness and hatred. Clytemnestra loves Agamemnon, and hence is so torn. Their scene on the hill, in the first play, is where they re-encounter that, and the question we had in rehearsal for that scene was whether or not these two people were ever going to be able to becomes lovers again. Equally in the second play, the starting point should be that Electra loves her mother, and the last thing she would ever do is to hurt her. Her journey is one of separation from her mother and seeing her as she is, rather than as she wants her to be. Also of course having to appease her father's ghost. (In Dominic Hill's production the ghost of Agamemnon was always visible, bloody and itchy in the

background, sometimes coming and sitting among the action; this was very effective, but however you stage it, Agamemnon's influence should never feel far away.) In the third play, love is there too – finally – and at the last moments the little girl comes back on to stage with her suitcase; it should feel as if all the characters remember that love and gentleness have been the things they lost.

Zinnie Harris

THIS RESTLESS HOUSE

This Restless House first performed at the Citizens Theatre in May 2016.

CAST

AGAMEMNON	George Anton
DOCTOR/JORDAN	Adam Best
CHORUS/ IAN	Cliff Burnett
BUTCHER/CHORUS/MICHAEL	George Costigan
AEGISTHUS/CHORUS	Keith Fleming
CLYTEMNESTRA	Pauline Knowles
ORESTES	Lorn Macdonald
ELECTRA	Olivia Morgan
CELIA/MEGAN	Itxaso Moreno
AUDREY	Anita Vettesse
YOUNG ELECTRA	Chloe Chambers
YOUNG ELECTRA	Orla Hay
IPHIGENIA	Rose Hughes
IPHIGENIA	Freya Kane
OWEN	Jonas Lennie
OWEN	Callum McGhie

with Rich McPherson, Mike Moran, Loretta Scott, Annette Stewart and Stevie Thomson-Fitch

CREATIVE TEAM

Writer – Zinnie Harris
Director – Dominic Hill
Designer – Colin Richmond
Composer – Nikola Kodjabashia
Lighting Designer – Ben Ormerod
Movement Director – EJ Boyle
Fight Director – Emma Claire Brightlyn
Assistant Director – Jack Nurse

CHARACTERS

BUTCHER
A SERVING WOMAN CALLED CELIA
CLYTEMNESTRA
ELECTRA
AEGISTHUS
A DOCTOR
ORESTES
AGAMEMNON
AUDREY
JORDAN
MICHAEL
MEGAN
IAN
OWEN
IPHIGENIA
CHORUS

THE BOUGH BREAKS

Scene One

The palace **BUTCHER** *comes on to stage.*

He starts making a cup of tea.

BUTCHER the doctor said perhaps she was too hot
so we opened all the windows in the room
the doctor said perhaps she was too cold so we lit a fire
the doctor said try a little soup
so we made soup
try a little cold compress on the skin, he said
try a hot compress on the skin
try needles beneath the fingernails
feathers on the feet
trumpets in the ear
nothing
not one twitch
not a single moment where she sat up and looked at us
the doctor at least is honest, I have never seen this before
he said, it's a mystery
I read all the books, then I read them again

Beat.

so the king starts – this has to be sorted now
he puts a sign up in the town
has to be careful,
no one really likes them out there

there was celebrating I heard, the queen won't wake
thank fuck
let's light a fire dance around it
let's hope she dies that way
but the king puts on his notice
a huge reward
anyone that can rouse her from her sleep
they came then, they lined up outside the palace
little old women
little old men
the young, the weird
the slap-bang ordinary
try this, it woke my child
pray to this god, it cured the lame
try this
a different potion, a different prayer for every hour
none of it worked, of course
the king, by now in a temper
get out you stupid cretins
get out get out, can no one wake my wife?

Beat.

I should have introduced myself
I am the butcher here
I was the butcher, been the butcher since the age of ten
most of the staff ran that night
most of them couldn't get out of here fast enough
blood on the flagstones, get gone
but me
well, where else had I to go?

I was the butcher before
what was I going to be after?
I am the cook, the cleaner now
anything needs doing
I make her a cup of tea every hour
on the hour so that when she wakes
well she'll be thirsty after a sleep like that.

A serving woman, **CELIA**, *comes in.*

She looks at the **BUTCHER**, *he looks at her.*

CELIA don't know why you bother

BUTCHER don't start

CELIA Seventeen days, the situation is clear

BUTCHER she'll wake up

CELIA tff.
you said that yesterday and the day before
if she was going to wake she would have done by now

CELIA *picks up a pile of sheets and goes out.*

you should be digging a grave not making the tea.

The **BUTCHER** *is left with the cup and saucer.*

Scene Two

In the Queen's bedroom.

The **BUTCHER** *brings in the cup of tea.*

ELECTRA *is watching her mother.*

The **BUTCHER** *puts down the tea.*

He starts to go.

ELECTRA please don't just leave

The **BUTCHER** *looks uncomfortable.*

BUTCHER where's the king?

ELECTRA the king is no use
you are the closest she's got to a friend

He looks at her.

I mean, I know I'm not supposed to talk to staff but
I've been here for ten hours
on my own
and
my mother is fond of you
I know you work in the kitchen

BUTCHER worked there all my life

ELECTRA I know that night five years ago
you cleaned the flagstones

Beat.

I know everyone else ran pretty much but you got out a bucket and cleaned the blood off the flagstones
you didn't need to

Beat.

and I know you put me to bed

I don't remember anything of that night, but my mum told me

she pointed you out in the garden one day when you were

dragging a calf and said that man there, he put you to bed

that night

that dreadful night

he is one you can trust

he lifted you up from the flagstones once he had finished

cleaning them and he carried you up to your room

Beat.

BUTCHER I only did

ELECTRA I just mean –

that was nice

I might have stayed out there all night if it wasn't for you

Beat.

you're different to the rest

oh they do what they are told but they

well you get the feeling they despise us

but you

for some reason you aren't like that

Beat.

she looks exactly the same doesn't she? No better no worse

BUTCHER stay hopeful

ELECTRA even the doctor –

BUTCHER everyone wakes up in the end

they'll sort it

ELECTRA it would be better if we were a normal family
things like this happen in a normal family and you can go, ok
this is something to do with the body
the blood or the veins something in the sinews
this belongs in the physical world
but in our family

BUTCHER the doctor will find a cure

ELECTRA the king is thinking of sacking the doctor
he has no patience
he will be imprisoned and beaten before long

BUTCHER he'll get another doctor, a better doctor

ELECTRA we both know what this is.
don't look at me like that I'm not an idiot
this is a haunting.

Beat.

BUTCHER Electra –

ELECTRA don't tell me it isn't
you of all people should know that
it started on the anniversary, three years to the day
I can't be the only one that noticed that

BUTCHER I think you should talk to the king

ELECTRA the king is stupid, can only see what the king sees
I say to him this is a haunting, he'll laugh in my face
you know where the grave is

BUTCHER Electra

ELECTRA I love my mother, I won't let her die
and the stupid doctor can't offer her anything

she needs us to end this

BUTCHER how?

ELECTRA by going to the grave
by calling the ghost

Beat.

BUTCHER you know talk of ghosts is out-lawed

ELECTRA I know

BUTCHER the gods don't like it.
once a spirit has crossed the river that is that. Men do not come back to earth to do ill

ELECTRA and yet you hear of it

BUTCHER those are stories, older stories.
the two are incompatible
your father is in the underworld
he cannot harm anyone

ELECTRA and yet he does.

Beat.

BUTCHER your mother in particular is very clear about the gods
she is a devout observer now. Look at the shrines to Athena she has here in her room

ELECTRA she wasn't always, she used to laugh at the gods
she told me about a ghost who sat on her shoulder once

Beat.

BUTCHER we couldn't even get to the grave
no one is allowed out of the palace grounds
you know you step out you might get killed

ELECTRA another objection

BUTCHER that the king has given these orders

ELECTRA the king again

BUTCHER there are enemies all around
people plotting –

ELECTRA we can be safe, we'll cover our heads
we'll go in disguise
if she would just bloody wake on her own ok, but
I have to go to the grave
listen you either believe it or not
you either see things in one way or another
I'm not asking you to believe it, I'm just asking you to take me to the grave

BUTCHER if I get caught, I am a servant here

ELECTRA I am no better

BUTCHER the king won't punish you

ELECTRA you think?
you don't know how cruel the king can be
it's an unmarked grave, I won't find it without you

He hesitates.

forget it then.
please excuse me, I thought you were someone you're not.
I have finished my tea.

She hands him back her cup.

BUTCHER I didn't say that

ELECTRA so what did you say?

AEGISTHUS *comes in.*

AEGISTHUS time for you to go

ELECTRA aren't you going to ask how she is?

He takes his shoes off and gets on to the bed.

AEGISTHUS a little worse by the looks of things

ELECTRA she is exactly the same

He looks at **CLYTEMNESTRA**.

AEGISTHUS a little worse
did you move my stuff off the bed?

ELECTRA no

AEGISTHUS my nightshirt, I sleep here
why is my stuff on the floor?

ELECTRA it fell

AEGISTHUS what, she rolled over and it fell?

ELECTRA I moved it a little, I thought she looked uncomfortable

AEGISTHUS don't touch her
I told you before, she isn't yours

AEGISTHUS *cuddles into her.*

she seems worse
what did you do to her?

ELECTRA nothing, I spoke to her that's all

AEGISTHUS you spoke to her?

ELECTRA yes. I spoke to her all day

AEGISTHUS what did you say then?
if it was words that did this, then they must have been poisonous

ELECTRA she is no different

AEGISTHUS I don't think you should be alone with her any more

ELECTRA what?

AEGISTHUS I think only the doctors and I should attend to her from now on

ELECTRA she is my mother

AEGISTHUS and she is my wife

I am in charge in this house

ELECTRA she is in charge

AEGISTHUS she is asleep

I think it's better if you stay away

you're making her worse by your presence, I don't know how but

ELECTRA she is exactly the same as this morning

AEGISTHUS are you arguing with me?

ELECTRA no

AEGISTHUS I'll decide what is best for her

thank you

stay away Electra or I will keep you out.

ELECTRA you can't do that

AEGISTHUS I am king here

you were tolerated while your mother was here, but now she's not.

ELECTRA she is here

AEGISTHUS she is asleep.

Beat.

and while she sleeps

ELECTRA I hate you.

AEGISTHUS I think I'll live

now get out of here before I call someone to remove you.

WAIT, THERE'S MORE!

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