

partners in every kind
of excellence. 845

How will this city
of sacred rivers
and safe passage for friends
keep a child-killer, you
unholy among the pure? 850

Think again about striking these children;
think whose blood you shed.
By your knees, we beseech you
in every possible way:
Do not slay your children! 855

Where will you find the audacity –
from your mind or from your children –
to lead your hand and heart
in such terrible daring?

How will you gaze at your children 860
without tears, embracing the destiny of murder?

As your children fall pleading,
you will not have the strength
to wet your hand in their blood
with rash and reckless heart. 865

SCENE FIVE:

Jason enters from City Path.

JASON

I've come as you asked. You won't fail in this
even though you dislike me. I will listen.

Woman, what new business do you wish of me?

MEDEA

Jason. I beg you to be understanding about
 what I said. One expects you to bear my moods, 870
 since our long love has prepared the soil.

I talked it over and scolded myself:

“Stubborn woman, why be mad and bear
 hard feelings against those who plan well?
 Why stand as an enemy to the ruler of the land 875

and to my husband, who acts most favorably for us,
 marrying a princess and fathering brothers
 for my children? Shall I not divorce my passion?
 What is wrong with me, when the gods provide so well?

Don't I have the boys, and don't I know that 880
 we are exiles from this land and lack friends?”

With this in mind, I realized that I have been
 misguided and pointlessly enraged.

So now I praise you and you seem to me sensible
 to make this alliance, and I thoughtless. 885

I ought to share in these plans and help out
 and stand by the bed, pleased to tend your bride.

Well, we women are such as we are –

I won't say exactly “wicked.”

Still, you should not match our wickedness, 890
 or pay back foolishness with foolishness.

I ask for pardon and claim that I reasoned wrongly
 then, but now reconsider for the better.

Oh boys, boys, come here, leave the house
 and come outside! Welcome your father 895

Children with Tutor enter from skenē.

and speak to him with me. Join mother
 in changing hate into friendship.

We made a truce and the rage is gone.

Clasp right hands . . .

(*Oimoi!* I'm thinking of hidden harm.

900

My boys, will you reach out your dear arms
like this your long life through? I am miserable,
close to tears and full of fear.)

My quarrel with your father over at last,
this tender sight fills me with tears.

905

CHORUS LEADER

A fresh tear falls from my eyes, too.

May greater harm not follow this one.

JASON

I approve, woman, and I don't blame you.

One expects females to get mad
when husbands smuggle in other marriages.

910

But your heart has changed for the better;
you recognize the winning plan at last.

These are actions of a sensible woman.

Sons, your father has most thoughtfully
created great security for you, gods willing.

915

I believe you will yet be among the elite
with your future brothers here in Korinth.

Grow up, and the rest your father will handle,
with whoever of the gods is kind.

May I see you when you've grown into strong,
young men, triumphant over my enemies.

920

Woman, why do you turn your pale cheek,
your eyes wet with fresh tears,
and not accept my words gladly?

MEDEA

It's nothing. I'm thinking about these children. 925

JASON

Now, take heart. I will arrange all things well for them.

MEDEA

I'll do that. I won't distrust your words.
But a woman is female and prone to tears.

JASON

Why so much moaning about these children?

MEDEA

I gave birth to them. When you prayed that the children 930
would live, pity washed over me. Will it happen?

Never mind, you came to speak with me for their sake:
Part I've said; the rest I will mention.

The royal family has decided to banish me.

I know well that this is best for me, too, 935
not to be underfoot for you or the rulers,
since I seem unfriendly to the palace.

All right, I will leave here for exile.

But ask Kreon not to drive your sons from this land
so that you may raise them with your own hand. 940

JASON

I might not persuade him, but I must try.

MEDEA

Then urge your wife to entreat her father
not to banish your sons from Korinth.

JASON

Certainly. And I do expect to persuade her,
if she is a woman like all the rest. 945

MEDEA

I, too, will help you in this task,
 by sending her gifts far more beautiful,
 I know, than any among mortals:
 a delicate dress and a golden tiara,
 which your sons will carry. One of the servants 950
 should quickly bring the pretty things here.

Servant hands Medea dress and tiara in a box or basket.

Your bride will be happy, not in one but myriad ways:
 She wins you for bedmate, the best of men,
 and the finery which my grandfather
 Helios once gave to his own descendents. 955
 Grasp the dowry, boys, in your hands
 and give it to the blessed princess bride.
 She will welcome these faultless gifts.

JASON

You fool, why empty your hands? Keep these riches.
 Do you suppose the royal palace lacks dresses 960
 or, do you suppose, gold? Don't give them away.
 If a wife considers me worthy of any account,
 I know that she'll rank me higher than rich goods.

MEDEA

No, they say "gifts persuade even gods."
 Gold is stronger to mortals than countless words. 965
 A lucky spirit favors her, now a god makes her fortune grow:
 She's young and a princess. I would trade my life,
 not just gold, to revoke the exile of my boys.
 Children, go to the wealthy palace
 to your father's new wife, my mistress. 970

Beseech her, beg her not to banish you,
 give her these pretty things. Take care that
 she receives these gifts into her own hands.

Medea gives them to the children.

Go quickly, and bring back the good news
 mother desires – of your success. 975

Jason, children, and Tutor exit City Path.

Fifth Song

CHORUS

Now we can no longer hope for the children's lives,
 not now, when they march off to their murder.

The bride will accept the golden headband,
 the poor girl will accept ruin.

Her own hands will set 980
 the finery of Hades
 upon her yellow hair.

Charm and the ambrosial gleam will persuade
 her to put on the dress and gold wrought crown.

Already she wears her bridal dress, 985
 a bride among the dead.

She will fall into such a trap,
 the destiny of death, poor girl.

She will not escape from ruin.

(To Jason)

You reckless, poorly wed 990
 son-in-law of royalty,
 ignorant that you bring
 destruction upon your children's lives,

and your wife a horrible death.

Unhappy man, how far you've strayed
from your destiny. 995

(To Medea)

Next, we mourn with your grief,
reckless mother of sons, who will murder
children for the sake of a bridal bed
because your husband lawlessly
abandoned you to join in another union. 1000

SCENE SIX:

Tutor enters with the children from City Path.

TUTOR

Mistress, your children have escaped exile,
and the royal bride gladly accepts the gifts
from their hands. There is peace for the boys.
What?

Why are you upset with good fortune? 1005

MEDEA

Ah, no!

TUTOR

That is not in tune with the news.

MEDEA

No, again!

TUTOR

Surely I'm not the messenger of misfortune
without knowing it? Was I wrong to think it good news? 1010

MEDEA

You brought the message – I don't blame you.

TUTOR

Then why are your eyes downcast? Why are you crying?

MEDEA

Necessity forces me, old man. I was thinking wrongly when I – and the gods – arranged these things.

TUTOR

Take heart. Your sons will bring you back yet. 1015

MEDEA

I will sooner bring down others, miserable me.

TUTOR

You are not alone in being parted from your children.
Human beings must lightly bear misfortunes.

MEDEA

So I will. But go inside the house
and prepare for the children's daily needs. 1020

Tutor exits skenē; children stay on stage.

Boys, my boys, this is your city and home
where you will live, forever deprived
of your mother, leaving me in misery.

I go to another land, a refugee,
before enjoying you and seeing you happy. 1025

Before prenuptial baths and wives, before
I adorn your wedding beds and raise the torches.

Most miserable from pleasing myself!

I raised you in vain, children, after all.

In vain, I labored and was torn with pains,
bearing cruel grief in childbirth. 1030

This unhappy woman once had many hopes in you,
that you would take care of me in old age,
and all would envy me when I die
since your own hands would shroud me. 1035

Now these sweet thoughts perish. Without you
I will lead a painful life, full of grief.

Your dear eyes will no longer see your mother
when you withdraw to another state of life.

Oh! Boys, why this look in your eyes? 1040
Why do you smile your last smile at me?

Ah! What shall I do? Women, my heart is utterly lost
looking into the bright eyes of my children.

I cannot do it – goodbye my plans.

I will take my boys from this land. 1045

Why should I hurt their father with their anguish,
and win twice as much anguish for myself?

No, I cannot. Goodbye plans.

And yet . . . why should I suffer? Do I want
to be mocked for not punishing my enemies? 1050

I must dare to do this. Such cowardice
to even admit soft words in my mind.

Children, into the house.

Children head toward skenē but are occupied by attendant by the doors.

Medea moves to where they cannot hear her.

Whoever thinks it not right to attend my sacrifice,
stay at your own risk. I will not weaken my hand. 1055

Ah! No truly, my heart, no, don't do it.
 Let them be, wretched heart! Spare the children.
 Living there with us, they will bring us joy.

No, no by Hades' avengers,
 this can never be, that I surrender 1060
 my boys to my enemies to abuse.
 Anyway, what's done is done.
 The royal bride won't escape.
 Now in the dress, with the crown
 on her head, she dies, I know. 1065
 Since I will travel the most miserable road
 and send them down one more miserable still,
 I wish to speak to the children.

Medea and children come together.

My boys, give, give mother
 your right hand to caress. 1070
 Dearest hand, children's mouth,
 noble form and face so dear to me.
 May you be happy, but *there*; your father
 took away life *here*. O sweet embrace,
 the soft skin and sweetest breath of children. 1075
 Go in, go! I can't look at you any longer
 while anguish defeats me.

Children exit skenē.

I understand what evil I intend to do,
 but my heart is master of my plans.
 That heart causes mortals the greatest evil. 1080

Chanted interlude in place of song.

CHORUS

Often we speak about subjects more subtle
and engage in debates greater
than womankind should seek.

For the sake of wisdom,

the Muses also speak

1085

with a few of us, not all,
maybe one among many.

Yet the Muses do inspire
a small group of women.

We say those who never bear children

1090

nor have anything to do with them
find greater happiness than parents.

Without trial and error,
the childless never discover

whether children bring pleasure or pain,
and so escape from many labors.

1095

But those with the sweet sprout
of children in their home, we see them
worn down by care every day.

How will they nurture the children?

1100

How to leave them a livelihood?

Even then, who knows

if they labor for bad children or good?

We must state the worst anguish of all
for every human being.

1105

Suppose parents find an adequate living
and the young bodies grow into youth

and the children truly are good.
 If Fate brings it about,
 Death flies off to Hades 1110
 with the children's bodies in tow.
 How is this most painful sorrow,
 piled onto the rest
 that gods inflict upon mortals,
 worthwhile for the sake of children? 1115

SCENE SEVEN:

MEDEA

My friends, after waiting so long, I'm watching
 to see how the affairs in the palace turn out.
 Look – a messenger approaches, a servant of Jason.
 His frantic breathing shows
 he must be bringing bad news. 1120
Messenger enters from City Path.

MESSENGER

Flee, Medea, flee! Neglect
 no transport by land or sea.

MEDEA

What has happened that merits my flight?

MESSENGER

Just now the royal princess and her father
 Kreon, too, perished from your poison. 1125

MEDEA

You tell the loveliest tidings. You'll be among
 my friends and benefactors from now on.

MESSENGER

What are you saying?

Woman, are you thinking straight, not mad?

You rejoice at the news and fear no consequences
after assaulting the hearth of the royal family? 1130

MEDEA

I could offer some kind of rebuttal.

But don't be hasty, friend.

Tell me: How did they die? You would please me
twice as much if they died horribly. 1135

MESSENGER

When the two children, your offspring, arrived
with their father, and entered the newlyweds' apartment,
we were pleased, we slaves who wearied of your
troubles. Straightaway our ears picked up the talk
that you and your husband had resolved your quarrel. 1140

One of us kissed a little hand, another a child's
blond head. I even followed the children
in pleasure into the women's quarters.

The mistress we honor now instead of you
eagerly kept her eye on Jason
until she saw your two children. 1145

Then she covered her eyes
and turned her pale cheek,

loathing the boys' entrance. Your husband,
to sooth the temper and rage of his bride, 1150
said: "You won't be unfriendly to family, will you?
End your anger and turn your head,
considering as kin anyone your husband does.
Won't you accept these gifts and for my sake

- ask your father to release my sons from exile?" 1155
 When she looked at the finery, she could not resist,
 but agreed with her husband on everything.
 Before father and sons had gone far from the palace,
 she put on the embroidered dress,
 and placing the golden tiara around her curls, 1160
 she arranged her hair in the shining mirror,
 smiling at the lifeless image of her body.
 Then rising from her chair, she walked about
 the house, her pale white feet stepping daintily.
 Utterly charmed by the gifts, her eyes 1165
 kept checking the hem, her ankle.
 After that, it truly was a terrible sight to behold:
 Her skin changing, her limbs trembling,
 she staggered, bent over,
 fell into a chair, nearly sinking to the ground. 1170
 An old servant entered and, thinking either
 divine possession by Pan or another god,
 raised a joyous cry – until she saw white foam
 frothing from her mouth, the pupils of her eyes
 rolling back, and her bloodless skin. 1175
 Then instead of the cry of joy, the old woman sang out
 a loud shriek. Straightaway one servant rushed
 to her father's quarters and another to her new husband
 to tell them of the bride's calamity.
 All the palace pounded with a flurry of running. 1180
 Before a fast sprinter could reach the finish line
 in the last leg of a stadium race,
 the poor girl, mute with eyes shut tight,
 started up, groaning terribly.
 A twofold pain attacked her: 1185

The golden tiara encircling her head
 shot forth a miraculous stream of all devouring fire,
 while the delicate dress ate the white flesh
 of the bedeviled girl – the gifts from your children.
 Rising from the chair, she fled, on fire, 1190
 shaking her hair and head every which way,
 desperate to throw off the crown. But the gold band
 held firmly, and the fire, after she shook
 her hair, blazed twice as fiercely as before.
 She fell to the ground conquered by disaster. 1195
 Only a parent could recognize her:
 The shape of her eyes and noble face
 distorted, as blood mixed with fire
 dripped down from the top of her head.
 Her flesh melted away from the bones, weeping 1200
 like pine resin from the poison's unseen jaws,
 a terrible sight. Everyone feared to touch
 the body, for we thought her fate a lesson.
 Her reckless father, ignorant of her misfortune,
 suddenly entered the room and fell upon the corpse. 1205
 He groaned, throwing his arms around her,
 kissed her, and said: "My poor daughter,
 what god destroyed you so dishonorably?
 Who makes childless an old man near his grave?
Oimoi! May I die with you, my child!" 1210
 When he stopped mourning and lamenting,
 he needed his aged body to rise,
 but he stuck to the delicate dress like ivy
 to shoots of laurel. They wrestled terribly
 as he tried to pull himself to his knees, 1215
 while she held him fast. When he applied force,

she ripped his old flesh from the bones.

In time he gave way and the doomed man surrendered

his life, no longer stronger than the poison.

The bodies lie together, daughter with old father, 1220

a calamity longing for tears.

I left your part out of the telling:

You will know your own punishment in turn.

Not for the first time, I think human life a shadow,

and I would say without fear that those people 1225

who seem to be clever and play with words

bring upon themselves the greatest folly.

Nobody human can be happy.

When wealth flows in, one man may

be luckier than another, but not happy, no. 1230

Messenger exits City Path.

CHORUS LEADER

A divinity seems to justly merge

many disasters for Jason in one day.

How we pity your misfortunes,

daughter of Kreon, vanished to Hades

because of marriage with Jason. 1235

MEDEA

My friends, I am determined to act:

kill the boys at once, then depart.

I must not, by lingering, give the children

to someone else to murder with a harsher hand.

It is necessary for them to die, and since they must, 1240

I who gave them birth will kill them.

Now arm yourself, my heart! Why delay

doing the terrible and necessary evil?

Yes, my reckless hand, take up the sword,
take it. Step up to the painful start of your life. 1245

Don't be cowardly, don't remember the children,
how very dear, how you gave them birth,
but for this brief day forget your sons,
then mourn. Even if you kill them, even so
they are dear – unfortunate woman that I am. 1250

Medea exits skenē to kill the children – her first exit.

Sixth Song

CHORUS

Earth and all-shining ray of Helios,
look down on the destructive woman,
before she attacks her children
with a bloody, kin-slaying hand.

She grew from your golden race, and now 1255
we dread that blood descended from a god
will spill upon the earth by mortal hands.

Zeus-born light, hold her,
stop her, rid the house of the reckless
and bloodstained avenging Fury. 1260

The labor of childbearing is lost, in vain.
Leaving the most inhospitable
strait of the dark Clashing Rocks,
you bore dear offspring in vain, after all.
Sorry creature, why does mind-oppressing 1265
rage fall on you and frenzied murder
follow these other deaths?

The stain of kindred blood is hard for humans;
 grief from the gods in due measure
 falls upon the house of murderers. 1270

Children speak from inside skenē.

CHILD

Oh, help me!

CHORUS (*speaks*)

Do you hear a shout? Hear the children?
 O reckless woman, evil fate!

CHILD A

Oimoi, what can I do? Where run from mother's hands?

CHILD B

I don't know, dearest brother – we're lost!

CHORUS (*sings*)

Shall I enter the house? I am determined
 to prevent the children's murder. 1275

CHILD A

Yes, by the gods, stop her in time!

CHILD B

We are so close now to the sword's trap.

CHORUS (*sings*)

Wretch, so you truly are rock or iron,
 since you will kill the crop of children
 you bore, their doom by your own hand. 1280

Children's screams stop abruptly.

Only one we've heard of, one woman before

who cast her hand against her own children.

When Zeus' wife Hera drove Ino mad

and sent her from the house in a daze,

1285

the miserable mother fell into the sea

for her children's unholy murder.

Stretching a foot over the sea cliff,

Ino perished, dying with her two sons.

What terrible act is still impossible?

1290

O women's marriage bed of many woes,

such evil you have already done to humankind!

SCENE EIGHT:

Jason enters City Path.

JASON

Women standing out here,

is she in the house? She's done terrible deeds.

Medea. Or has she already fled?

1295

She must be hidden beneath the earth

or her body aloft on wings into the high ether,

not to pay the just penalty to the royal palace.

Does she think she can escape from this house

unpunished after killing the rulers of the land?

1300

But forget her – my thoughts are for the children.

Those she harmed will do the same to her.

I came to save the lives of my sons,

fearing that the king's kin would act against us

to exact retribution for their mother's unholy murders.

1305

CHORUS LEADER

Miserable man. You do not know your troubles,

Jason, or you would not have said those words.

JASON

What is it? I expect she wishes to kill me, too?

CHORUS LEADER

Your sons are dead by their mother's hand.

JASON

Oimoi! What do you mean? Woman, you destroy me! 1310

CHORUS LEADER

Understand that your sons no longer live.

JASON

Where did she kill them? In the house or out?

CHORUS LEADER

Open the gates to view the murder of your children.

JASON

Unfasten the bar quickly, servants.

Release the lock, so I can see the double evil: 1315
the dead and her – to exact justice.

Medea enters on crane above stage in a dragon chariot (the deus ex machina).

MEDEA

Why knock about and try to pry open the gates,
searching for the corpses and me who did it?

Cease your labor. If you have need of me,
say what you want. Your hand will never touch me. 1320

Helios, father of my father, gave me this chariot,

a defense against an enemy hand.

JASON

Vile woman! The gods, I, and all
 the human race utterly despise you!
 You had the audacity to plunge a sword 1325
 into your children, destroying me, childless.
 Can you look upon the sun and earth,
 after daring this most monstrous deed?
 Damn you! I see now what I was blind to
 when I brought you from your barbarian 1330
 home to a Greek household: an abomination,
 traitor to your father and land that raised you.
 The gods have hurled your avenging spirit at me
 ever since you killed your brother by the hearth
 and set sail on *Argo*, my beautiful ship. 1335
 So you began. Even though you were married
 to me and had born me children, you murdered them.
 All because of sex and a marriage bed.
 No Greek woman exists who would ever
 dare this, yet I picked you to marry – 1340
 a hateful, destructive marriage for me –
 a lioness, not a woman, more savage
 than the Etruscan Scylla.
 But a million more insults would not bite into you,
 such boldness is your true nature. 1345
 Die, you shameless, polluted child-killer.
 What's left for me but to mourn my fate?
 I won't profit by my new bride
 and cannot speak to my sons alive,
 sons I bred and reared, and then lost. 1350

MEDEA

I would say much to refute your tale,
 if father Zeus did not know
 how you benefited from me and what you did.
 You could not dishonor my bed
 and live a delightful life mocking me. 1355
 The princess and Kreon, your marriage broker,
 could not have impunity to throw me out of here.
 That's the way it is. Go on, call me a lioness,
 if you wish, and Etruscan Scylla.
 I attacked your heart, as needed. 1360

JASON

You hurt yourself and share in the suffering.

MEDEA

True – but it's worth the pain to still your laughter.

JASON

Children, what an evil mother you had!

MEDEA

Boys, a sick father destroyed you.

JASON

No, my right hand did not destroy them. 1365

MEDEA

But your arrogance and new marriage did.

JASON

You thought it right to kill them over sex?

MEDEA

You think this a minor insult for a woman?

JASON

Yes, for a sensible one. You are pure evil.

MEDEA (*points at corpses*)

These here no longer live – that will bite at you.

1370

JASON

They live on – *oimoi* – as avengers for your head.

MEDEA

The gods know who began this calamity.

JASON

They know well your despicable mind.

MEDEA

So despise me. I loathe your bitter voice.

JASON

Just as I yours – so parting is easy.

1375

MEDEA

What shall I do? I'm ready and willing.

JASON

Let me bury these bodies and then weep.

MEDEA

No. I shall bury them with my own hand, bringing them to the sanctuary of Hera Akraia where no enemy can abuse them, digging up their graves. I shall establish for all time in this land of Sisyphus a hallowed festival and due rites for this unholy murder.

1380

I will depart for the land of Erechtheus

to live with Aigeus, son of Pandion, in Athens. 1385
 You will die badly, as a bad man deserves:
 struck on the head with a timber scrap from *Argo*,
 having seen the bitter end from my marriage.

Chanted from here to end.

JASON

May the children's Furies
 and deadly Justice destroy you. 1390

MEDEA

What god or spirit listens to you,
 oath liar and deceiver of allies?

JASON

Foul abomination! Child-killer!

MEDEA

Go home and bury your wife.

JASON

I go, deprived of two children. 1395

MEDEA

You don't mourn yet. Just wait for old age.

JASON

O dearest children.

MEDEA

Dearest to their mother, not you.

JASON

And so you killed them?

MEDEA

To hurt you.

JASON

Oimoi, the misery! How I long to press
my sons' dear mouths close to me.

1400

MEDEA

You speak to them now, embrace them now.
Back then you pushed them away.

JASON

By the gods, allow me
to touch the soft skin of my children.

MEDEA

Not possible. You fling words in vain.

Medea flies off.

JASON

Do you hear how I am driven away, Zeus,
and what I suffer from this foul,
child-killing lioness?

1405

With all my strength

I sing a dirge and invoke the gods
as my witness. Medea, you killed my children,

1410

then prevent my hands
from touching them, burying their bodies.

If only I never had them
to see them slain by you.

CHORUS

Zeus in Olympos oversees many things;

1415

much the gods accomplish despite our hopes.
The expected did not come to pass;
a god found a passage for the unexpected.
Thus ends this matter of Medea.