

MEDEA

Characters

NURSE of Medea

TUTOR to Medea's children

Medea's TWO CHILDREN

MEDEA

CREON, king of Corinth

JASON

AEGEUS, king of Athens

MESSENGER

CHORUS OF CORINTHIAN WOMEN

The action takes place outside MEDEA's house in Corinth. The NURSE comes out of the house.

NURSE. How I wish that the Argo had not flown through the dark Clashing Rocks on its sea-journey to the Colchians' land—that the pine had never fallen, hewn amid the glens of Mount Pelion, and furnished oars for the hands of those heroic men who went to win the golden fleece for Pelias.* Then my mistress Medea would never have sailed to the towers of the land of Iolkos, her heart unhinged in her love for Jason, she would not have persuaded the daughters of Pelias to kill their father* and would not now be living with her husband and children* in this land of Corinth, gladdening the citizens to whose country she has come in her exile, a woman totally in accord with Jason himself. And this is the greatest security of all—when a wife is not in disharmony with her husband.

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But now hatred has corroded everything and dearest love grows sick. Jason has betrayed his own children* and my mistress and beds down in a royal match.* He has married the daughter of Creon who rules this land. Unhappy Medea, thus dishonoured, cries out, 'His oaths!', invokes that weightiest pledge of his right hand, and calls the gods to witness how he has repaid her. She lies there eating nothing,

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surrendering her body to her sorrows, pining away in tears unceasingly since she saw that her husband had wronged her. She will not look up, will not lift her face from the ground, but listens to her friends as they give advice no more than if she were a rock or a wave of the sea—save that sometimes she turns away her pale, pale neck and bemoans to herself her dear father and her country and the home which she betrayed to come here with the man who now holds her in dishonour. Schooled by misfortune, the poor woman has learnt what it is to be parted from one's fatherland.

But she hates her children* and feels no joy in seeing them. I am afraid that she may be planning something we do not expect. Her temperament is dangerous and will not tolerate bad treatment. I know her, and I fear that she may go silently into the house where her bed is laid and drive a sharpened sword into their heart, or even that she may kill the princess and the bridegroom and then meet some greater disaster. For she is fearsome. No one who joins in conflict with her will celebrate an easy victory.

But here come the children. They've stopped running their races.* They take no thought for their mother's sorrows. A youngster's mind makes no habit of grieving.

*The TUTOR enters with MEDEA'S two children.**

TUTOR. Ancient servant of my mistress's house, why are you standing on your own like this at the gates, bewailing your sorrows to yourself? How comes it that Medea is willing to be left alone without you?

NURSE. Old attendant of the children of Jason, good slaves are sympathetic when their owners' fortunes fall out badly—their hearts too are affected. I have come to such a pitch of distress that a longing swept over me to come here and speak of my mistress's woes to the earth and sky.*

TUTOR. Has not the wretched woman yet ceased from her laments?

NURSE. You are in blissful ignorance. Her sorrows are at their outset, not yet halfway run.

TUTOR. Poor fool—if one may speak of one's mistress like that. She knows nothing of her more recent sorrows.

NURSE. What is it, old man? Don't refuse me an answer.

TUTOR. Nothing—I am sorry I said even that just now.

NURSE. I entreat you by your chin,* do not keep this from your fellow-slave. I'll cloak this matter in silence if I must.

TUTOR. When I came to the place where the old men sit playing draughts,* by the sacred waters of Peirene,* I eaves-dropped and heard someone saying that Creon, the ruler of this country, is intending to drive these children with their mother from the land of Corinth. I do not know if this information is true. I hope it isn't.

NURSE. And will Jason allow his children to suffer this fate—despite his quarrel with their mother?

TUTOR. Old ties take second place to new ones, and that man is no friend to this house.

NURSE. It is all over with us then if, before we have seen out our first disaster, we must now shoulder this new one too.

TUTOR. But you must keep silence—not a word: it is not the right time for our mistress to know this.

NURSE. O children, do you hear how your father is behaving towards you? Curse him—but no, he is my master. Yet he stands plainly convicted of being a traitor to his friends.

TUTOR. But is anyone different? Are you only now realizing that everyone loves himself more than his neighbour, some justifiably, others simply to improve their situation—seeing that their father no longer loves these children because of his new marriage?*

NURSE. Go inside the house, children—all will be well. As far as possible keep these boys on their own and don't bring them near their mother in her depression. For I saw her eye just now glinting at them like a bull's* as if she meant to do something to them. And she will not give up her rage—I know it clearly—before she swoops down on someone. But may she choose her enemies for some mischief, not her friends.

MEDEA [*chants off-stage*]. Oh,
how unhappy I am, how wretched my sufferings—
Oh, woe is me, I wish I could die!

NURSE [*chants*].
That's what I meant, dear children. Your mother

stirs her heart, stirs her rage.
Hurry quickly into the house
and do not approach near her sight,
but be on your guard
against her wild character, the hateful temper
of her wilful mind.

Go now, go quick as you can inside.
It is plain that soon she will make
the cloud of her laments which now begins to gather
flash forth as her passion grows.
Her heart is full of spirit, not easily to be soothed—
stung by these injuries, whatever will she do?

MEDEA [*chants*]. Aiai.

I have suffered in my wretchedness, suffered woes
which call for great laments. O accursed children
of a hateful mother, may you die
with your father, may the whole house fall in ruin.*

NURSE [*chants*]. Alas, I say. O, the cruel woman!
What share do you think your boys have
in their father's wrong-doing? Why hate them? Alas, chil-
dren;

how I grieve for you in my fear that some suffering may
await you.

Our royal masters have dangerous spirits* and, perhaps
because

they are subject to little control while their power is great,
their moods veer violently.

To accustom oneself to live on equal terms with others
is preferable. For my part, as long as my old age is secure
I shall be happy if it is far from greatness.

For first, I say, the name of Moderation*
has a better ring than that of Greatness, and in experience
it proves by far the best for men—

while Excess brings no profit to mortals
and, when the god has grown angry with the house,
it pays the penalty of greater ruin.

*The CHORUS OF CORINTHIAN WOMEN enters.**

CHORUS [*chants*]. I heard the voice, I heard the cry
of the wretched woman from Colchis. Is she

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not yet calm? Tell me, old woman.
For I heard her laments
inside her house through its double door.
And I do not rejoice, woman,
at the griefs of the house,
since it has come to be dear to me.

NURSE [*chants*]. There is no house. All that is over now.

A royal marriage keeps my master elsewhere,
while in her bedroom my mistress wastes away her life,
and her heart finds no comfort, none,
in the words of any of her friends.

MEDEA [*chants*]. Aiai!

Come, Zeus' bolt of lightning, and pierce my head!
What do I gain still by living?
Alas, alas! May I find rest in death,
leaving this hateful life.

CHORUS [*chants*]. O Zeus and Earth and Light,* did you hear
what a cry the wretched girl
sings out?

What love is this you have conceived, rash woman,
for the dread resting place?
Will you hurry on death's finality?
Do not pray for that.

If your husband is solemnizing his new marriage,
do not be cut with anger at him for that.
Zeus will be your advocate here.*

Do not wear yourself down so much in these laments for
the partner of your bed.

MEDEA [*chants*]. O great Themis and Lady Artemis,*

do you see what I suffer, though I bound
my accursed husband with great oaths?
May I one day see him and his bride
pounded to nothing, house and all,
since they have dared to wrong me unprovoked.
O father, o city, how shamefully I left you,
I, the killer of my brother.*

NURSE [*chants*].

Do you hear what she says, how she cries out upon
Themis, goddess of prayers, and Zeus,
acknowledged the protector of oaths among mortals?

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Certainly it will be by no trivial action
that my mistress will lay her anger to rest.

CHORUS [*chants*].

I wish that she could come to see us
and listen to the tone of our words
as we offer them.*

Perhaps she might then free her heart
from its mood of dangerous passion.

I hope that my wish to help
will never fail my friends.

Go and bring her here

from the house. Say that we here are her friends.

Hurry before she harms those inside.

This her grief has a terrible momentum.

NURSE [*chants*]. I shall do so. But in my fear I doubt
if I can persuade my mistress.

Still, I shall grant you this difficult favour.

Yet she darts on her servants

the wild glance of a lioness with young*

whenever any of them goes near to say something.

You would not be wrong if you denounced our ancestors
as fools and ignoramuses—

they discovered songs for festivities, banquets and feasts
to charm the ears and enhance our lives.

But no one has discovered how music and songs
with rich accompaniment of strings can put an end
to men's hateful sorrows—which lead to deaths
and dreadful misfortunes that overturn the house.

And yet it would be a gain if men

could cure these things with music.

Why do they pointlessly tune their sounds

to add a gloss of sumptuousness to the feast?*

The abundance of the food which is there

gives of itself delight to men. [*The NURSE goes into the house.*]

CHORUS [*chants*]. I heard the mournful sound of her laments,

as she shouts out shrilly her painful sorrows,

damning that traitor to her bed, her evil husband.

Victim of injustice, she calls upon the gods,

upon Themis, daughter of Zeus, goddess of oaths,

who brought her to Greece across the sea

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through the gloomy waters to the Hellespont,
the salty strait that locks the boundless Black Sea.

Enter MEDEA from the house.

MEDEA. Women of Corinth, I have come out of the house fearing
that you may find some fault with me. I know that many people
are proud, some of them away from men's eyes, others
publicly so. But others win a bad reputation for idleness from
their quiet tenor of life. Men do not judge justly with their eyes
when, before they know for sure the true nature of a person's
heart, they hate on sight, though they have suffered no grievance.
A foreigner especially must fall in with the city's ways,
and I do not praise a citizen who in his obstinacy proves a
thorn in his fellows' flesh through ignorant perversity.* 220

But in my case, this thing which has struck me so unexpectedly,
has broken my heart. I am lost, I have forfeited all
joy in living, my friends,* and I want to die. For well I know
that the man who was my everything has proved the vilest
of all—my husband.

Of everything that is alive and has a mind, we women are
the most wretched creatures. First of all, we have to buy a
husband with a vast outlay of money—we have to take a
master for our body. The latter is still more painful than the
former. And here lies the most critical issue—whether we
take a good husband or a bad. For divorce brings shame on
a woman's reputation and we cannot refuse a husband his
rights. We come to new ways of behaviour, to new customs—
and, since we have learnt nothing of such matters at
home, we need prophetic powers to tell us specifically what
sort of husband we shall have to deal with. And if we manage
this well and our husband lives with us and bears the yoke
of marriage lightly, then life is enviable. But if not,
death would be welcome. 230

As for a man, when he has had enough of life at home,
he can stop his heart's sickness by going out—to see one of
his friends or contemporaries. But we are forced to look to
one soul alone. Men say of us that we live a life free from
danger at home while they fight wars. How wrong they are!
I would rather stand three times in the battle line than bear
one child.* 240

However, the same reasoning does not apply to you and to me. You have this city, your father's house, a fulfilled life and the company of your friends, while I, a desolate woman without a city, shamefully injured by my husband who carried me as plunder from a foreign land, have no haven from this disaster, no mother, no brother, no relative at all.* So I shall ask you to grant me this favour and no more. If I can find some means, some scheme to take a just revenge for these evils on my husband and the man who gave his daughter to him and that daughter whom he married, I ask you to keep silence.* In all other respects a woman is full of fear and proves a coward at the sight of iron in the fight, but when she is wronged in her marriage bed, no creature has a mind more murderous.*

CHORUS. I shall do what you ask, since you will be right to exact vengeance from your husband.* Medea. I do not wonder that you grieve over what has happened.

Look, I see Creon now, king of this land, coming to tell you his new plans.

Enter CREON.

CREON. Medea, scowling there so enraged with your husband, I proclaim that you must go into exile from this land and take your children with you. No delay. There is no appeal against this command of mine, and I shall not go back home again before I cast you outside the borders of this land.*

MEDEA. Aiai! How wretched I am, ruined, utterly ruined. My enemies are sailing against me at top speed and there is no easy haven for me to land at and escape ruin.* My sufferings are bitter, but even so I shall ask you for what reason you are sending me from your land, Creon.

CREON. I am afraid of you—I mustn't beat about the bush—afraid that you may do my child an incurable hurt. There are many things I can point to which contribute to this. You are a clever woman,* skilled in many evil wiles. You are distressed at the breakdown of your marriage and the loss of your groom.* I hear that you are threatening—so they tell me—to take some action against the husband and his bride and me, who gave my daughter to him. And so I shall take precautions against these things before we fall victim to

them. It is better, woman, that I should be hated by you now than weaken and repent too late.

MEDEA. Alas, alas. Not now for the first time but often, Creon, my reputation has harmed me and done me great damage. Any man who is sensible should not have his children taught to be clever beyond the norm. For besides the indolence they get a name for, they also foment bitter animosity from the citizens. If you present stupid people with a wisdom that is new, you will strike them as useless and idiotic.* Then again, if you are considered superior to those who think they are subtly clever, you will be thought offensive in the city. I myself do not escape this ill feeling. I am clever, and so to some I am a butt for their odium, to others I seem wrapped up in myself, to others quite the opposite, and then again to others I appear anti-social—but I am not excessively clever. And so you fear me. What harsh evil are you afraid you may suffer at my hands? But it is not my way—have no fear of me, Creon—to offend a royal family. After all, how have you wronged me? You gave your daughter to the man to whom your heart directed you. It is my husband that I hate. In my opinion you were sensible to do what you did. And now I do not grudge it you that your fortunes smile. Let the marriage proceed—and good luck go with you all. But allow me to live in this land. Wronged I may be, but I am mastered by a stronger power and shall hold my peace.

CREON. Your words are soft to hear, but terror makes me shrink—you may be plotting something evil in your heart. And so I trust you that much less than before. A woman who is quick-tempered—a man too for that matter—is easier to guard against than one who is clever and keeps quiet. Leave my land with all possible speed. Stop this talk. My decision is irrevocable and no craft of yours will enable you, my enemy, to remain among us.

MEDEA. No, I beseech* you by your knees* and your newly married daughter.

CREON. You are wasting your words. You will never persuade me.

MEDEA. But will you drive me out and show no respect for my prayers?

CREON. Yes, for I love my family rather more than I love you.

MEDEA. O fatherland, how intensely I recall you now!

CREON. I understand: my children apart, I love my country far above all else.*

MEDEA. Alas, alas, how utterly disastrous is the effect of love on men. 330

CREON. In my view, that depends on the circumstances.

MEDEA. Zeus, do not let the man guilty of these evils escape your vigilance.

CREON. Off with you, you foolish woman, and trouble me no more.

MEDEA. I suffer troubles—no troubles do I lack.

CREON. You will soon be pushed out forcibly by my attendants' hands.

MEDEA. Not that, I beg you, but I beseech you, Creon . . .

CREON. It looks as if you're going to make a nuisance of yourself, woman.

MEDEA. I shall go into exile.* It's not this that I am supplicating you to grant me.

CREON. Why then are you being so aggressive and not simply letting go of my hand?*

MEDEA. Allow me to stay this one day and to think out how I can best go into exile and find a haven for my children, since their father does not trouble himself to make any plans for them. But pity them. You too are a father, you have children. You are likely to be sympathetic to mine. I take no thought for my situation should we be exiled, but I weep for them, the victims of ill fortune. 340

CREON. I am far from tyrannical by temperament and by showing mercy I have often come to grief. And now too I can see that I am making a mistake, woman, but nevertheless you will have what you ask for. But I tell you this, if the sun god's light tomorrow shall behold you and your children within the boundaries of this land, you shall die. This is my final word—I mean what I say. But now, if you must remain, stay for a single day, since you won't be able to do any of the terrible things which frighten me. 350

[Exit CREON.]

CHORUS [*chants*].

Alas, alas, you pitiable woman.

wretched in your sufferings.

Wherever can you turn?

Where can you find a host to welcome you,

what home, what country

to shield you from disaster? 360

For the god has brought you, Medea,

to an overwhelming sea of woes.*

MEDEA. It has all ended in disaster—who can deny it? But it has not come to that—do not think that yet! There are still struggles for the newly-weds and no small troubles for the man who made the match. Do you think that I would ever have fawned on this man were there no profit in it or were it not part of my scheming? No, I wouldn't even have spoken to him or touched him with my hands. But he has plummeted to such depths of stupidity* that, though it was possible for him to thwart my plots by throwing me out of the land, he has granted me this one day to stay here—a day in which I shall make three of my enemies corpses, the father, the daughter, and my husband.* Out of the many possible ways I have to kill them, I do not know what will be my first choice, my friends—should I set fire to the bridal house or go silently into the room where their bridal bed is laid and drive a sharpened sword through their hearts? But there is one thing that is against me. If I am caught as I enter the room to carry out my plot, I shall be killed and give my enemies the last laugh. It is best to take the direct route—here I am the supreme expert—and kill them with poison.* 370 380

Well then, suppose them dead. What city will take me in? What host will give me refuge in a land secure from attack, in a home where I can be safe, and will protect Medea? There's no one. And so I'll stay here a little time longer to see if some secure place of refuge comes to light for me, and I shall tread my path to this murder in scheming silence. But if misfortune is to drive me out, my plots frustrated, I shall myself take a sword, even if I am going to die, and I shall kill them—I shall proceed to an act of ruthless daring. For never, I swear by the mistress whom I revere above all gods and have chosen as my co-worker, Hecate,* who dwells in 390

a recess of my hearth, never shall any one of them grieve my heart and smile to see it. Bitter and grim shall I make their marriage for them, bitter the match and my exile from this land. 400

But come. Spare nothing of your expertise, Medea, as you plot and scheme. Go forward to your deed of terror. Now comes the trial of your courage. You see what you are suffering? You must not bring laughter on yourself through Jason's marriage into the house of that traitor Sisyphus,* you the daughter of a good father and grandchild of the Sun.* You have the skill—and what is more we are women, supremely helpless when there's good to be done, supreme in clever craftsmanship of all bad deeds.*

CHORUS [*sings*]. The waters of the holy rivers flow upstream* and Justice and the universe are turned upside down. It is men who plan trickery, and trust in the gods no longer stands firm. But what they say of a woman's life will change—I shall be celebrated.

Honour is coming to the female sex.
Women will be free from the bitter tongue of slander. 420

And the Muses of yesteryear's poets will cease to sing of my faithlessness. For Phoebus, lord of poetry, did not grant to woman's spirit the inspiration of lyre-song.* Otherwise I would have rung out my answer, singing against the male sex. The long expanse of time has much to tell of our side, yes, but much to tell of men as well. 430

You sailed from your father's house with frenzy in your heart, passing through the sea's twin rocks. You live in a foreign land, you have lost your marriage bed, you have no husband, poor woman, and are being driven from the land, an exile without honour.

The spell of reverence for oaths is no more, no longer does reverence abide in great Hellas—it has flown 440

up to the skies. You, wretched Medea, have no father's house to seek as a refuge from your toils. Another royal lady has displaced you as wife and now rules in the house.

Enter JASON.

JASON. I have noticed many times before, not only now,* how harsh passions lead to impossible deeds. After all, if you had borne the decisions of people who are stronger than you with a good grace, it would have been possible for you to stay in this land and in this house. As it is, because you pointlessly insisted on having your say, you will be banished. This doesn't matter to me. As far as I personally am concerned, you can go on for ever saying that Jason is an utter scoundrel. But, as for what you have said against the royal family, you should consider it all gain that you are being punished simply with exile. For my part, when their majesties' passions were roused, I always did my best to calm them and I wanted you to stay. But you would not moderate your foolish behaviour, and always spoke badly of them. And so you will be banished from the land. But nevertheless, even after this, I have not abandoned my friends and have come here because I am thinking about your future, my lady, and how you and the children can avoid being banished without any money—or in want of anything at all. Exile brings many evils in its train. The fact is that, even if you hate me, I could never feel badly towards you. 450

MEDEA. Vilest of traitors—yes, I can at least call you that, the most cutting insult against a man who is no man—so you have come to us have you, bitterest of enemies to us, to the gods, to me and the whole human race? It is not boldness or courage when one hurts one's friends, then looks them in the face, but the greatest of all human sicknesses, shamelessness. But you have done well to come, since I shall relieve my feelings by denouncing you and you will grieve to hear me. 470

I shall begin to speak at the beginning. I saved you, as all those Greeks who embarked together on that same ship, the Argo, know, when you were sent to master the fire-breathing

bulls with the yoke and to sow the field of death.* I killed the dragon which, ever unsleeping, guarded the all-golden fleece, encircling it with many folding coils, and held up for you the beacon of safety. I betrayed my father and my house and came with you—more passionate than wise—to Iolkos under Mount Pelion, and I killed Pelias* at the hands of his own children—the most grievous of all ways to die—and destroyed their whole house. And though, vilest of men, you reaped these benefits from me, you betrayed me, and made a new marriage—and this though we have children, since if you had still been without a child, it would have been pardonable for you to desire this match. No more is there any trusting to oaths, and I am at a loss to understand whether you think that the gods you swore by then no longer rule or that men now live by new standards of what is right—for well you know that you have not kept your oaths to me. Alas for this right hand which you often held, alas for these knees—touched by an evil man in an empty gesture—how we have missed our hopes.

Come now, I shall converse with you as if you were a friend. Yet what benefit can I think I shall receive at your hands?—but converse I shall nevertheless, for questions will show up your vileness still further. Where can I turn now? To my father's house? But I betrayed it, and my fatherland too, when I followed you here. Or to the wretched daughters of Pelias? How warmly they would welcome me in their house—I killed their father! For this is the situation: I have earned the hatred of those dear to me at my home, and have made enemies of those whom I should not have harmed by doing you a favour. In recompense for all this, in the eyes of many women of Greece you have made me happy indeed. What a wonderful husband, what a trustworthy one, I, wretched woman, have in you—if I am to be flung out of the land into exile, bereft of friends, my children and myself all, all alone—a fine reproach to the newly married man, that his children and I who saved you should wander round abegging.

O Zeus, why have you given men clear ways to recognize what gold is counterfeit, but on the body put no stamp* by which one should distinguish a bad man?

CHORUS. Passions are fierce and hard to cure when those close to each other join in strife.

JASON. I must, it seems, be no poor speaker, but escape the wearisome storm of your words, lady, like the trusty helmsman of a ship using the topmost edges of his sail.* Since you lay too great a stress on gratitude, I consider that it was Aphrodite* alone of gods and men who made safe my voyaging. You are a clever woman—but it would be invidious to spell out how Love forced you with his inescapable arrows to save me. But I shan't go into that in too much detail. You helped me and I'm pleased with the result. However by saving me you took more than you gave, as I shall tell you. First of all, you live in the land of Greece instead of a barbarian country, you understand the workings of justice and know what it is to live by rule of law and not at the whim of the mighty.* All Greeks saw that you were clever and you won a reputation. If you were living at the furthest limits of the earth, no one would have heard of you. I for my part would not want to have gold in my house or to sing a song more beautifully than Orpheus* if my good fortune did not become far-famed.

That is what I have to say to you about my labours. After all, it was you who provoked this war of words. As for your reproaches against me over my royal marriage, I shall show you first of all that I am sensible to make this match, as well as demonstrating good sense and in addition proving a powerful friend to you and my children. [MEDEA makes a gesture of impatience.] No, keep quiet. When I moved here from the land of Iolkos, dragging with me many hopeless troubles, what happier godsend could I have found than to marry the king's daughter, poor exile that I was. It was not—and this is what really gets under your skin—that I hated sleeping with you,* or that I was overwhelmed with desire for my new bride, or that I was eager to outdo our family by having a larger one. I have enough children already and I find no fault with them. My object was—and this is the most important thing—that we should live well and not be in want, for I know that everyone steers well clear of a friend in need—and that I should bring up our children in a manner worthy of my house, and by producing brothers to my

children by you, I should place them all on a level footing, unite them into one family and be prosperous. Why should you want more children? And it is in my interests to benefit those alive now by those that are to be born.* Surely I have not planned this out badly? You would agree with me if the matter of sex were not provoking you. But you women have sunk so low that, when your sex life is going well, you think that you have everything, but then, if something goes wrong with regard to your bed, you consider the best and happiest circumstances utterly repugnant. The human race should produce children from some other source and a female sex should not exist. Then mankind would be free from every evil.*

CHORUS. Jason, what you have said is superficially convincing. But none the less, even if I shall speak against what you think, you seem to me to be acting unjustly by betraying your wife.

MEDEA. Truth to tell, I often view matters differently from many people. In my opinion an unjust man who is a clever speaker incurs the greatest retribution, since if he is confident that his tongue can gloss over injustice cleverly, he has the audacity to stop at nothing. And so he is not so very clever. This is the case with you too. Do not then make a show of generous behaviour towards me with your skilful speaking, for one word will lay you flat. If you had not been a bad man you should have talked me round before making this marriage—not done it without your loved ones' knowledge.

JASON. Yes, I would have had your full backing for this plan, I think, if I'd spoken of the marriage to you—since even now you cannot bring yourself to soften your heart's great rage.

MEDEA. It wasn't that which stopped you, but your marriage with a barbarian was proving a source of no glory for you as you faced old age.

JASON. Rest assured of this then—it was not for the sake of the woman that I made the royal marriage in which I live now. As I have said already, I wanted to keep you safe and produce royal offspring to be brothers and sisters to our children and thus defend our house.

MEDEA. I hope I never have a wealthy life which brings me sorrow or the kind of happiness which galls my heart.

JASON. You must change your wish, you know, and then you will seem more sensible. You must never see what is to your benefit as distressing to you or think that fortune is against you when it smiles on you.

MEDEA. Go on insulting me. You have your escape route while I shall go in desolate exile from this land.

JASON. You yourself made this choice. You have no one else to blame.

MEDEA. What did I do to deserve it? Was it I who married and betrayed you?

JASON. You uttered unholy curses against the royal family.

MEDEA. Yes, and I am a curse to your house too.

JASON. Enough—I shall not discuss these matters with you any further. But, if you wish to receive any assistance from my resources for the children or yourself in your exile, tell me—for I am ready to give with unstinting hand, and to send tokens of introduction* to guest-friends of mine who will treat you well. And you will be foolish to refuse this offer, woman. If you lay aside your rage, you will do better for yourself.

MEDEA. We shall make no use of your guest-friends or accept any favours from you—do not try to give us anything. A bad man's gifts can bring no good.*

JASON. Well then, I call the gods to witness that I am willing to give every help to you and the children. But you recoil from what is good for you and in your obstinacy you drive away your friends. This will simply add to your sufferings.

MEDEA. Off with you. As you linger here away from home, desire of the girl you have just married overwhelms you. Go on with your marriage. For perhaps—with god's help it will be said—this will prove the kind of match which will bring you tears.

[JASON goes out.]

CHORUS [*sings*].

When love comes too violently to men,*
it gives them
no glory for moral virtue.
But if Cypris come in moderation,
no other goddess is so delightful.

Never, o mistress, may you anoint with desire
your golden bow's inescapable arrow and shoot it at me.

May temperance befriend me,
the gods' most lovely gift,
and may dread Cypris never madden my heart
with adulterous love
and attack me with quarrelsome anger
and insatiate feuding. May she give honour to unions free
from war
and prove a sharp judge* of women's marriages.

O my fatherland, o my home,
may I never be without my city,
trudging on life's difficult path
of helplessness—
the most pitiful of sorrows.
Before that may I have done with this light of life
laid low by death, by death.
Of all miseries none is worse
than to lose one's native land.

We have seen this for ourselves. Not as a story
heard from others do I tell it but at first hand.
For, Medea, no city and none of your friends
will pity you as you suffer
the most terrible of sufferings.
If a man cannot unlock a pure heart
and respect his friends,
may he perish without reward.
He will never be a friend of mine.

*Enter AEGEUS.**

AEGEUS. Medea, greetings. 'Greetings,' I say, because no one
knows a better way than this to start a conversation with
friends.

MEDEA. And greetings to you too, Aegeus, son of wise Pandion.
From where have you come to reach this land of Corinth?

AEGEUS. I'm on my way back from the ancient oracle of
Phoebus.*

MEDEA. Why did you set out to the navel of the earth* where
the god sings his prophecies?

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AEGEUS. I wanted to know how I could beget offspring.*

MEDEA. By the gods, have you led the whole of your life up till
now without children? 670

AEGEUS. I am childless by the stroke of some divine power.

MEDEA. Have you a wife or are you unmarried?

AEGEUS. I am not unmarried. I am paired with a wife.

MEDEA. What then did Phoebus say to you about children?

AEGEUS. His words were too clever for a mere man to interpret.

MEDEA. Is it right that I should know the god's response?

AEGEUS. Certainly—for a clever brain is certainly needed.

MEDEA. What was his oracle then? Tell me, if it is right for me
to hear.

AEGEUS. Not to unloose the wineskin's hanging foot . . .

MEDEA. Before you do what, or arrive at what land? 680

AEGEUS. Before I come again to the hearth of my fathers.*

MEDEA. What do you want that you have sailed to this country?

AEGEUS. There is a man called Pittheus, the king of the land of
Trozen.*

MEDEA. Yes, as they say, the son of Pelops, a most reverent man.

AEGEUS. I want to impart the oracle of the god to him.

MEDEA. Yes, for he is a clever man and experienced in such
matters.

AEGEUS. And he is the dearest to me of all my allies.

MEDEA. I wish you well and hope you meet with all that you
desire.

AEGEUS. But why are your eyes so dull and this your skin so
wasted?

MEDEA. Aegeus, I have the worst of all husbands.

AEGEUS. What are you saying? Tell me clearly what makes you
sad. 690

MEDEA. Jason wrongs me though I did him no harm.

AEGEUS. What has he done? Tell me more clearly.

MEDEA. He has a woman who supplants me* as mistress of his
house.

AEGEUS. Surely he has not been so brazen as to act in so
shameful a way?

MEDEA. Be assured of it—and we, his former friends, are now
dishonoured.

AEGEUS. Was he in love or couldn't he bear his relationship
with you?

MEDEA. Very much in love—he has proved a traitor to his dear ones.

AEGEUS. So let him go if, as you say, he is a bad man.

MEDEA. He conceived a passion to marry into the royal house. 700

AEGEUS. Who gave her to him? Tell me the whole story.

MEDEA. Creon, who rules over this land of Corinth.

AEGEUS. It is understandable that you are hurt.

MEDEA. It is all over with me. But it is not just that he is leaving me. I am being driven out of the country.

AEGEUS. By whom? Now you are telling me of yet another, fresh disaster.

MEDEA. Creon is driving me into exile from the land of Corinth.

AEGEUS. And does Jason consent? I do not approve of this either.

MEDEA. He says he doesn't, yet he is willing to endure it. But I beg you by this your beard and your knees*—now I am 710
your suppliant—pity, pity me in my wretchedness and do not look on as I go into desolate exile, but receive me in your country at the hearth of your palace. So may your desire for children with the gods' help find fulfilment and may you come to death a happy man. You do not know what a god-send you have found here in me. I shall put an end to your childlessness—through me you will beget children. I know the medicines for this.

AEGEUS. For many reasons, lady, I am eager to grant you this 720
favour, first because of the gods, then of the children whose birth you promise me—for in this matter I am totally at a loss. This is how I see things. If you come to my country, I shall try to protect you as I am in right bound to. However, this much I must state plainly in advance, lady: I shall not be willing to take you from this land. You must leave this country on your own initiative. But if you come to my palace yourself, you will stay there safe from harm and I shall not hand you over to anyone. I want to be without 730
blame in the eyes of my guests and my hosts alike.*

MEDEA. Excellent. But if I could have some pledge of this, I should be completely happy with your part in the affair.

AEGEUS. Don't you trust me? If it's not that, what makes you unhappy?

MEDEA. I trust you. But Creon and the house of Pelias hate me. If you are bound to me by oaths, you would not hand me

over to them if they tried to take me from the land. But if our compact is simply one of words, not ratified with oaths to the gods, you may perhaps listen to their overtures and become their friend. My situation is weak while they have 740
all the wealth of a royal house.

AEGEUS. You have shown a great deal of caution about the future in what you say. But if you think it a good idea, I do not refuse to do this. It is indeed safer for me* to have some pretext to offer your enemies, and your own situation will be the more assured. Name your gods.

MEDEA. Swear by the land of the Earth and the Father of my father, the Sun,* and each and every god in addition.

AEGEUS. To do or refuse to do what? Tell me.

MEDEA. Never to cast me out of your land yourself nor, if any 750
of my enemies wishes to take me, to hand me over willingly as long as you live.

AEGEUS. I swear by the Earth and the Sun's bright light and all the gods to abide by the words I hear you utter.

MEDEA. Enough. What are you to suffer if you do not abide by this oath?

AEGEUS. Such fates as befall impious mortals.

MEDEA. Go on your way and good luck go with you. All is well and I shall come to your city as quickly as possible—when I have done what I intend to do and got what I want.

CHORUS [*chants*].

May Hermes, son of Maia, the god of travel,
bring you home and may you achieve the purpose 760
you are so eager to gain,
for in my judgement, Aegeus,
you have appeared a noble man. [*AEGEUS goes out.*]

MEDEA. O Zeus and Justice, daughter of Zeus, and light of the Sun,* now, my friends, I shall win a glorious victory over my enemies. Now I am on the way. Now I can hope that my enemies will pay a just price. For this man—in that dilemma where we were foundering most—has appeared as a haven 770
to save my plans. To him I shall fasten my stern cable* by going to Athens, city of Pallas.

Now I shall tell you all my plans. Don't expect to receive my words with pleasure.* I shall send one of my servants to

Jason to ask him to come to see me. When he arrives I shall speak soft words to him, saying that I too think these things are good, that it is well that he has made this royal marriage and betrayed me, that all is for the best, all has been well thought out. I approve of the marriage he has made to the princess by betraying me. And I shall ask him to let my children stay. Not that I would leave my children in a hostile country for my enemies to insult. No, my purpose is to kill the king's daughter with trickery. For I shall send them holding gifts in their hands, and bringing them to the bride to win repeal from exile from this land—a delicate robe and a golden garland. And if she takes these adornments and puts them on her flesh, she will die horribly—as will anyone who touches the girl, with such drugs shall I anoint the gifts.

But that is enough of that. I cry out when I think what kind of deed I must do afterwards. For I shall kill the children, my own ones.* Nobody is going to take them away from me. My heart steeled to the unholyest of deeds, I shall wreak havoc on the whole house of Jason and leave the land in flight from the charge of murder, the bloody murder of my beloved children.

Laughter from my enemies is not to be endured, my friends. Come what may come! What do I have to gain by living? I have no fatherland, no house, no refuge from calamity. It was then that I made my mistake—when I left my father's house, persuaded by the words of a Greek man who with god's help will pay me the penalty. He will never see his sons born of me alive again and he will have no son by his newly wed bride, since that wretched creature must die a wretched death from my drugs.

Let no one think of me as weak and submissive, a cipher—but as a woman of a very different kind, dangerous to my enemies and good to my friends.* Such people's lives win the greatest renown.

CHORUS. Since you have shared these words with us and I wish both to help you and to support men's laws, I forbid you to do this.*

MEDEA. There is no other way. I can pardon you for saying this for you do not suffer cruelly as I do.

CHORUS. But will you bring yourself to kill the fruit of your womb, lady?

MEDEA. Yes, for this would be the best way to hurt my husband.

CHORUS. But you would become the most miserable of women.

MEDEA. On with it! Until the deed is done, all words are wasted. [to the NURSE] But now, go and bring Jason here. I employ you in all matters of trust. But say nothing of what I have determined on if you care about your mistress and are a true woman.

[The NURSE goes out.]

CHORUS [sings]. Descendants of Erechtheus, happy for so long,* children of the blessed gods, sprung from a holy and unconquered land, feeding your fill of most glorious knowledge, ever moving with easy grace under the brightest of skies, where they say that once the nine Muses, the sacred maidens of Pieria, gave birth to golden-haired Harmony—

and dwelling by the waters of the fair-flowing Cephissus, which, as the story goes, Aphrodite drew and breathed upon the land the gentle and sweet breath of her breezes. And always, as she casts fragrant garlands of roses on her hair, the Loves escort her, the companions of Knowledge and inspirers of all the arts.

How then shall the city of sacred rivers or the land which gives safe conduct to friends receive you, the child-murderer, the unholy one, and give you a home? Think what it is to stab your children, think what kind of killing you undertake. Do not, we beg you by your knees unreservedly, in every way, do not kill your children.

Where will you find so bold a spirit or such dreadful courage for your heart and hand

as you bring them against your children?
 And how, when you cast your eyes upon them, 860
 will you hold fast to their fate of death
 and not weep? When your boys
 fall in supplication, you will not be able
 to wet your hand in their blood
 with unflinching heart.

Enter JASON.

JASON. I have come as you told me to. For the fact is that,
 though you are my enemy, you will not fail to win this. I
 shall listen to you. What new thing is it that you want from
 me, lady?

MEDEA. Jason,* I beg you to pardon what I said before. It is
 only reasonable that you should bear with my passionate 870
 moods, since we have exchanged many acts of loving kind-
 ness. I have debated the matter with myself and have
 reproached myself: 'What lunacy makes me so stubborn,
 why do I bear ill will to those whose counsels are good, why
 do I make myself hateful to the rulers of this land and to my
 husband who is pursuing the course that is most advanta-
 geous to us in marrying a princess and producing brothers
 for my children? Shall I not be rid of my anger? What is
 wrong with me when the gods are providing well for me? 880
 Do I not have children? Am I not aware that we are going
 into exile from this land and need friends badly?'

I thought over these things and saw that I was being very
 foolish and that my rage was needless. And so now I
 applaud you. You seem to me to show good sense in mak-
 ing this marriage in addition to ours—and I seem idiotic. I
 ought to be sharing in these plans and helping to bring them
 to fulfilment, standing beside the marriage bed and taking
 pleasure in waiting upon your bride.

But we are what we are—I won't call us evil—we 890
 women. And so you should not be like us in our weaknesses
 nor match folly with folly. I ask for your good will and admit
 that I viewed the business wrongly before but now have
 come to see it with better judgement. O children, children,
 come here, leave the house. [*The CHILDREN enter with the*
TUTOR.] Come out here and embrace your father and talk to

him with me. Be like your mother and as you greet him be
 reconciled from your previous hatred towards one who loves
 you. We have made peace—anger has given way. Take his
 right hand.—Ah me! One of my hidden troubles comes to 900
 my mind.—Children, will you live a long life and stretch
 forth your loving arms at your father's grave? How quick I
 am to weep, unhappy woman, and how full of fear! At last
 I have brought our quarrel with your father to an end and
 these my soft eyes fill with tears.*

CHORUS. A pale tear starts from my eyes too. There is trouble
 enough now. Pray god it goes no further.

JASON. I approve of what you say, woman, and I find no fault
 with your former attitude either. It is fair enough that one
 of your sex, a woman, should fly into a passion with a hus- 910
 band who traffics in contraband love.* But your heart now
 follows a better course. You have taken your time, but you
 have now come to a wiser view. This is the behaviour of a
 sensible woman. And, as for you, my children, your father
 has not been thoughtless but has furnished great hope of
 safety if the gods so wish. I think that you will yet live to
 prove the chief citizens of this land of Corinth with your
 brothers-to-be. Only grow up. Your father and any of the
 gods who is kindly will bring about the rest. I pray to see 920
 you thriving as you reach the fullness of youth, triumphant
 over my enemies.

But you, Medea, why do you bedew your eyes with pale
 tears and turn away your ashen face? Aren't you glad to
 hear what I have just said?*

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

JASON. Have no fear then. I shall make all well for them.

MEDEA. I shall do as you say. I do not mistrust your words. But
 a woman is a delicate creature, ever prone to tears.

JASON. Yes, but why do you cry so very much for these chil-
 dren?

MEDEA. I gave them birth, and when you prayed that they 930
 should live, pity swept over me as I wondered whether your
 prayer would be granted.

But as to the matters you have come here to discuss
 with me, some of them we have dealt with, and now I shall
 mention others. Since the royal family has decided to send me

from the land—and it is best for me, as I now well understand, not to give annoyance to you and the lords of this country by living here, for I appear to be an enemy to their house—I shall leave the land as an exile, but you must beg Creon that our children should not go into exile from this country so that they can receive their education at your hands. 940

JASON. I do not know whether I am likely to persuade him, but I must try.

MEDEA. At least bid your wife to entreat her father that the children should not go into exile from this land.

JASON. Certainly, and, if she is like the rest of her sex, I think I shall persuade her.*

MEDEA. I too shall give you assistance in this task. I shall send the children to her bearing gifts which I know are the most beautiful in the world by far, a delicate robe and a golden garland. Let one of the servants bring the adornments here as quickly as possible. She will win not one but countless blessings—in you she has gained the best of men as her husband and she has received the adornments which once the Sun, the father of my father, gave to his children. Take these bridal gifts into your hands,* children, carry and bring them to the royal bride, that happy woman. These are no contemptible gifts that she will receive. 950

JASON. Why, foolish woman, are you emptying your own hands of these things? Do you really think that a royal palace is in need of robes or of gold? Keep them, do not give them away. If my wife values me at all, I am confident that she will put me before mere possessions. 960

MEDEA. No! No! They say that gifts persuade even the gods. Gold has more power with men than an infinity of words. Hers is the fortune, hers the life god now exalts, she is young and a princess. To save my children from exile I would give up not only gold but my life.

Now, children, go into that rich house and supplicate your father's new wife, my mistress, begging her that you may not be exiled, and give her these adornments. For it is vital that she takes these gifts into her hands. Go with all speed. I pray that you succeed and return with good tidings for your mother of what she longs to achieve. 970

[JASON and the TUTOR go out with the CHILDREN.]

CHORUS [sings].

No longer have I any hope now for the children's lives,
no longer. Already they are going to their death.
The bride will accept the golden headband,
will accept, poor woman, the destruction it conceals.
She herself with her own hands will put the ornament
of Death around her golden hair. 980

The loveliness and divine brightness of the robe
and the golden garland will persuade her to put them on.
Now she will adorn herself as a bride for the dead below.
Such is the trap, such the deadly fate
into which she, miserable creature, will fall.
She will find no escape from ruin.

And you, wretched man, both bridegroom
and curse for your new royal family, 990
without knowing it you are bringing destruction
on your children's lives,
bringing hateful death on your wife.
Miserable man, how far you have strayed
from the future you foresaw.

I share with your grief, I grieve for your pain, unhappy
mother of boys,
you who will murder your own children
to avenge your bridal bed
which your husband abandoned,
hurting you against all his oaths, 1000
to live in marriage with another bedfellow.

The TUTOR enters with the CHILDREN.

TUTOR. Mistress, these children, I tell you, are no longer to be exiled and the royal bride was delighted to take your gifts into her hands. There it is all peace for them.* But what's this? Why are you standing there with such a desperate look when things are going well for you? Why have you turned your face away? Aren't you glad to hear what I have just said?

MEDEA. Alas!

TUTOR. Your reaction is out of harmony with what I have told you.

MEDEA. Alas, I say again.

TUTOR. Can it be that I am announcing some misfortune without knowing it? Am I wrong to think I have brought you 1010 good news?

MEDEA. Your news is as it is. I find no fault with you.

TUTOR. But why are your eyes downcast, and why do you shed these tears?

MEDEA. I cannot but weep, old man—the gods and I planned all this, my evil plan.

TUTOR. Be of good cheer. One of these days your children will bring you home.

MEDEA. I shall bring others to peace* before I, poor creature that I am, come back.

TUTOR. You are not the only woman who has been separated from her children. Since we are human, we must bear our troubles lightly.

MEDEA. Yes, and I shall do so. But go into the house and 1020 get ready what the children need to see them through the day.

[The TUTOR goes into the house.]

O children, children, you have a city and a home. You can leave me, your mother, in my misery and pass your whole lives far away from me. And I shall go to another land as an exile before I can reap my reward from you and see you prosperous, before I can get ready the lustral water and deck the marriage bed at your weddings and adorn your wife and hold up the torches. O, what misery my wilfulness is bringing me! It was in vain then, my children, that I nursed you, in vain that I toiled for you and wore myself down with the 1030 strain, barren the births pangs that I endured. Many indeed were the hopes that I, poor fool, placed in you once. I trusted that you would care for me in my old age and that your hands would wrap my body duly in my shroud when I died, an enviable lot for mankind.* But now that sweet thought is lost. Deprived of you, I shall lead a life full of grief and pain for me. You will look upon your mother with loving eyes no longer when your way of life has been changed.

Alas! Alas! Why do you look at me like this, my children? 1040 Why do you smile this final smile of all? Aiai, what can I do? My heart's steel shattered, women, when I saw my chil-

dren's bright eyes. I could never do the deed. Goodbye to my former plans. I shall take my children from the land. Why should I, as I seek to pain their father through their sufferings, win twice as much agony for myself? I will not do it. Goodbye to my plans.

But what is wrong with me? Do I want to make myself ridiculous by letting my enemies go unpunished? I must face 1050 the deed. Shame on my cowardice in even letting my mind dally with these weak thoughts. Go into the house, children. Those for whom it is not right to be present at my sacrifice—that is a matter for them.* My hand will not weaken.

Ah, Ah, do not, my heart, do not do this.* Let them be, poor heart—spare the children. Alive with us in Athens, they will make you happy. By the avenging fiends below in Hades, it will never come to pass that I leave my children for 1060 my enemies to insult. There's no alternative—they must die.* And since they must, I who gave them birth shall kill them. In any case, the thing is done and the princess will not escape. Even now the garland is on her head, in the robe the royal bride is dying, I know it well. But I shall start on the cruellest of journeys and I shall send these children on one that's crueller still. And so I wish to speak to them.

Give your right hands, children, give them to your mother 1070 to kiss. O dearest of hands, dearest of lips to me, o children, so noble in appearance and so beautiful, may you find joy—but elsewhere.* Your father took away your chance of happiness here. O the sweet pressure of my children's embraces, o the softness of your skin and the delicious fragrance of your breath. Away with you; go! [The CHILDREN go out.] I can no longer look upon you but I am overwhelmed by the evils which surround me. And I know what evil deeds I am about to do, but my fury against Jason is stronger than my counsels of softness, and it is fury that leads to the greatest evils 1080 for mankind.*

CHORUS [chants]. Often before now I have traced
subtler thoughts and confronted
greater dilemmas than the female sex
ought to explore.*
But I found a way, for we too have a muse

which journeys with us to give us wisdom,
 but not with all of us—small is the number of women
 (perhaps you could find one among many)
 who are not strangers to the muse.
 And I say that those of mortals who have not had children* 1090
 and have no knowledge of this, none at all,
 win greater happiness
 than those who are parents.
 The childless, who have not discovered
 whether children prove in the end a delight
 or a sorrow for men—for they have no experience of
 them—,
 are freed from many troubles.
 But as for those in whose homes sweet children are born,
 I see them in a state of ceaseless torment as they anx- 1100
 iously wonder
 first how they can bring them up well
 and in what way they can leave a means of support
 for their children.
 And then besides this, it is unclear
 whether they are toiling for worthless children
 or for good ones.
 And now I shall tell one trouble, the worst of all,
 which is common to all mortals.
 For suppose they have found sufficient sustenance,
 and their children have grown up to the fullness of youth,
 and they have proved to be good.
 If their fortune falls out like that, Death has gone 1110
 to Hades, taking with him the children's bodies.
 How then can it profit a man that,
 on top of all his other griefs, the gods
 should afflict him with this, the most painful grief of all,
 as a price for the blessings of his children?

MEDEA. My friends, I have long been waiting to find out what
 has happened. I have been waiting on Fortune to find out
 how events in the palace will turn out. And now I see here
 one of Jason's attendants on his way. His panting breath
 shows that he has a fresh disaster to announce. 1120

The MESSENGER enters.

MESSENGER. Medea, unholy author of a dreadful deed, take
 flight, take flight, by land or sea. Use any means of transport
 you can find.*

MEDEA. What has happened to make me flee?

MESSENGER. The princess has just died—and her father
 Creon—from your poisons.

MEDEA. What glorious news you bring! Henceforth I shall
 number you among my benefactors and friends.

MESSENGER. What are you saying? Are you in your right mind,
 not mad, lady, when you have wreaked this outrage upon 1130
 the royal family and rejoice to hear of it? Do you feel no fear
 at what it involves?

MEDEA. I do have something to say in answer to your words.
 But take your time,* my friend, and tell me how they lost
 their lives. For you will give me double the pleasure if I hear
 that they have died the foulest of deaths.

MESSENGER. When your two children arrived with their father
 and entered the bride's home, those of us servants who had
 been distressed at your troubles were delighted. At once a
 buzz of news spread through the house—you and your hus- 1140
 band had made up your former quarrel. One of us kissed
 your boys' hands, another their golden hair. As for myself,
 my joy led me to follow the children into the women's quar-
 ters. The mistress whom we now honour instead of you,
 before she noticed your two sons, kept her eager eyes fixed
 upon Jason. But then, when she saw the boys come in, she
 put a veil over her eyes and turned away her pale cheek in
 disgust. Your husband, however, tried to allay the girl's 1150
 angry mood with these words: 'You must not be an enemy
 to those dear to me. Lay aside your anger and turn your face
 this way again. Look upon your husband's friends as your
 own. Accept the gifts and beg your father to remit the sen-
 tence of exile on these boys for my sake.' And when she saw
 the adornments, she could not resist* but promised her hus-
 band all he asked, and before your boys and their father had
 gone far from the house, she took the finely woven robe and
 put it on and, placing the golden garland around her curls, 1160
 she arranged her hair as she looked in a shining mirror,*
 laughing at the lifeless picture of her body. And then she
 stood up from her throne and walked through the house,

stepping delicately on her pale white feet, utterly thrilled by the gifts, again and again standing on tiptoe to admire the way the robe fell.

But what came next was a fearful sight to behold. She changed colour and staggered back sideways, her limbs trembling, and just managed to collapse on the throne, not fall to the ground. And one of the old maidservants, perhaps thinking that the frenzy of Pan or some other god had come upon her,* raised an ecstatic cry—but then she saw the white foam coming from her lips, her eyes starting from their sockets and her flesh drained of all its blood. Then she changed her former cry to something very different—a great howl. Immediately one servant rushed to her father's house, another to the new husband to report the disaster that had befallen the girl. The whole house resounded as everyone ran this way and that. There passed the time in which a swift runner could have completed the final two-hundred-yard stretch of the race track, and now she recovered the use of her voice and sight, regaining consciousness, poor woman, with a dreadful groan. For a double calamity was advancing upon her. The golden garland set upon her head was sending forth a wonder, a stream of all-consuming fire, while the delicate robe, the gift of your children, was feeding on the wretched girl's pale flesh. Leaping from her throne, she fled, all on fire, shaking her hair and her head now this way, now that, in her wish to throw off the garland. But the gold kept its hold firm and fast, and when she shook her hair the fire blazed forth twice as much as before. Overcome by calamity she fell to the ground, so misshapen that only a loving parent would find it easy to recognize her. Her eyes had lost their usual clear and settled look, her face its loveliness. Blood mingled with fire dripped from the top of her head, her flesh melted from her bones like teardrops of resin as your poisons gnawed invisibly. It was a fearful sight.

Everyone was afraid to touch the corpse. We had what had happened to teach us. But her poor father, still unaware of the calamity, suddenly came into the house and fell upon the corpse. At once he cried out in his grief, threw his hands round her and kissed her as he spoke these words. 'Poor

child, which of the gods has destroyed you and done such dishonour to your wedding day? Which of them has taken you away from your old father, now more dead than alive? Ah me, let me die with you, my child.* But when he had stopped his lamentations, and wished to raise his aged body, he stuck to the subtle robe as ivy clings to the shoots of the bay tree—and a terrible struggle ensued; for he wanted to lift his knee while she kept clinging to him. And if he pulled violently, he kept tearing his old flesh from his bones. But after a time the flame of his life was extinguished and the ill-fated man breathed out his spirit. No longer could he master catastrophe. They lie there corpses, the girl and her old father, near to each other, a calamity to welcome tears.

I shall say nothing of how this affects you. You will experience for yourself the penalty which will turn upon you. I have long thought that man's life is merely a shadow, and I should not fear to say that those who seem to be wise as they anxiously ponder their words of wisdom convict themselves of the greatest folly. For no man is ever truly happy. One may have better luck than another if wealth pours in—but that is not real happiness.

CHORUS. It seems to be with justice that the god has clamped so many disasters upon Jason on this day. O daughter of Creon, you wretched girl, how we pity you in your catastrophe—for your marriage with Jason has brought you to the house of Hades.

MEDEA. My friends, I have now decided what to do—with all haste I shall kill my children and leave this country. I shall not delay and so surrender them to other, crueller hands to kill. There's no escape from it, none at all. They must die. And since they must, I who bore them, shall kill them. But come, my heart, arm yourself. Why do I delay to do the terrible but necessary crime? Come, my cruel hand, take the sword, take it, go forward to where life's pain begins.* Do not prove a coward, do not think how very much you love your children, how you gave them birth. Forget your feelings for them for this one brief day and then lament. For even if you will kill them, still they were born your dear children—and I am an ill-fated woman.

[Exit MEDEA.]

CHORUS [*sings*]. O Earth and radiant brightness
 of the Sun,* look down, look on
 this accursed woman before she lays her murderous hands
 on her children and kills her own flesh and blood.
 For it was from your golden stock
 that she sprang, and now I fear that your divine blood
 may fall on the ground, spilt by a mortal.
 But, O Zeus-born light, hold her back,
 stop her, drive from the house
 this Fury,* made cruel and deadly by fiends. 1260

Vain were your pangs in childbirth for your children, all
 for nothing,
 in vain, Medea, you bore children you loved,
 after you left the most unhospitable strait
 of the dark-blue Clashing Rocks, the Symplegades.
 You wretched woman, why has this anger fallen on you
 and oppressed your heart, and why does
 raging murder follow on murder?
 The pollution of blood shed on the ground from kin,
 I know, bears hard on mortals, and woes in answer fall
 from the gods
 on the house of the kin-slayers. 1270

CHILD [*off-stage*]. Help! Help!

CHORUS [*sings*]. Do you hear the children's cry, do you hear it?
 O woman, hard of heart, ill-fated!

CHILD A. Alas what am I to do? Where can I run to from my
 mother's hands?

CHILD B. I do not know, my dearest brother. This is our death.

CHORUS [*sings*].

Should I go into the house? I think I should defend
 the children from death.

CHILD A. Yes, by the gods, defend us. We need your help.

CHILD B. How near we are now to the sword's snare!

CHORUS [*sings*]. Cruel woman, you must be stone
 or iron*—for you will kill your children,
 the fruit your womb bore, 1280
 bringing their doom on them with your own hand.

I have heard of one woman of those of old,
 one who laid her hands on her dear children,

Ino,* who was driven mad by the gods,
 when the wife of Zeus sent her wandering from her house.
 The wretched woman flung herself into the sea
 because of the impious murder of her children;
 she stepped over a sea-cliff,
 and killed herself, dying together with her two boys.
 After that, what horror could surprise us?
 O love of women with its many troubles, 1290
 how vast a history of catastrophe
 have you brought upon men!

Enter JASON

JASON. You women who are standing near this house, is Medea
 who has done these terrible things, still inside this house or
 has she fled away? She must surely hide herself below the
 earth or fly with winged body into the deep heaven if she is
 not to pay the penalty to the royal family. Does she really
 believe that she can kill the rulers of the land and get away 1300
 from this house scot-free? However, I'm not concerned about
 her so much as the children. Those whom she harmed will
 harm her—but it is my children's life that I have come to
 save,* in case the relations of the dead do something to them
 in vengeance for their mother's blasphemous act of murder.

CHORUS. Unhappy man, you do not know how far into cata-
 strophe you have come, Jason. Otherwise you would not
 have said these words.

JASON. What is it? Can she be wanting to kill me too?

CHORUS. Your children have died at their mother's hand.

JASON. Alas, what can you mean? Your words are death to 1310
 me, woman.

CHORUS. You must believe that your children are no longer.

JASON. Where did she kill them? In or out of the house?

CHORUS. If you open the doors, you will see your children's
 corpses.

JASON. Undo the bolts with all speed, attendants, release the
 fastenings so that I can see a double disaster, those two dead
 children—and take a just revenge on her.

MEDEA appears above the palace in a chariot drawn by dragons.
 The CHILDREN's corpses are on the chariot.*

MEDEA. Why are you shaking these doors and trying to force them open as you search for the bodies and for me, the doer of the deed? You can cease your labours. If you have 1320 need of me, speak if you wish, but you shall never lay a hand on me. Such is the chariot that the Sun, father of my father, has given me* to defend me against my enemies' hands.

JASON. You loathsome creature, hateful beyond all other women to the gods, to me and to the whole human race—you have had the ruthlessness to drive a sword into the children whom you bore. You have destroyed me and left me childless. You have done these things—and yet can you look upon the sun and earth,* you, cruel perpetrator of the most unholy of all deeds? My curse on you. My mind is clear now but it was not clear when I brought you from your home in 1330 a barbarian land to a house in Greece, disaster that you are, traitor to your father and the land that nurtured you. The gods have launched on me the curse which should have punished you, swooping down on me. It was after killing your brother by your hearth* that you embarked on the Argo, that fair-prowed ship.* That was how you began, and then, after you had become my bride and borne me children, you killed them because our sex life was over. There is no Greek woman who could ever have brought herself to do 1340 this—and yet I chose you before all of them as a fitting wife for me. A hateful marriage it proved and it has destroyed me. You are no woman but a lioness, more savage by nature than Etruscan Scylla.* But I could not wound you, however many insults I hurl at you, such is your brazen audacity. Away with you, you artist in obscenity, you polluted murderess of your children. All I can do is lament my evil destiny, for I shall reap no benefit from my new marriage, and I shall not have the children I begat and brought up to speak 1350 to while they are still alive—for I have lost them.

MEDEA. I would have given a long-drawn-out answer in response to what you have said, did not father Zeus know how you have repaid me and what you have done. You were never going to shame our bed and lead a pleasant life and laugh at me—nor was the princess, or Creon, the man who made this marriage for you—he was not going to

throw me out of this land and get away with it. So now call me a lioness even, if you want, and Scylla who took her abode on the Etruscan rock. I have done what I had to—I 1360 have stung your heart.

JASON. And you too feel pain and you share in the catastrophe.*

MEDEA. You are right, but my sorrow is well repaid if you cannot laugh at me.

JASON. O children, what evil you met with in your mother!

MEDEA. My boys, how sick your father's baseness which destroyed you!

JASON. But it was not my right hand that killed them.

MEDEA. No—it was your insulting arrogance and your new marriage.

JASON. Did you really think my marriage a good enough reason to kill them?

MEDEA. Do you think that this is a small hurt for a woman?*

JASON. Not a woman who knows self-control. But to you it is all the evil in the world.

MEDEA. These children are no more. This will hurt you. 1370

JASON. They live on, alas, as spirits of vengeance upon your life.

MEDEA. The gods know who began all this woe.

JASON. Yes, they know your detestable spirit.

MEDEA. Hate on. I loathe your bitter snarling.

JASON. Yes, and I loathe yours. But it is easy for us to part company.

MEDEA. How? What shall I do? I too am eager to part.

JASON. Let me bury these bodies and lament them.

MEDEA. No, I will not, for I shall carry them to the precinct of Hera, goddess of the Acropolis, and bury them with these my hands—so that none of my enemies can tear up their 1380 tombs and make sport with their bodies. In this land of Sisyphus* I shall institute a holy festival and sacred rites for times to come in recompense for this impious murder.* I myself shall go to the land of Erechtheus to live with Aegeus, the son of Pandion. And you, you bad man, will—as befits you—die a humiliating death, struck on the head by a fragment of the Argo,* and see the bitter conclusion to your marriage with me.

The rest of the play is chanted.

JASON. I pray that the Fury* roused by our children
and Justice, the avenger of bloodshed, may destroy you. 1390

MEDEA. But which god or divine power listens to you,
the oath-breaker, the treacherous host?*

JASON. Ah, ah, you foully polluted woman, murderer of your
children!

MEDEA. Go to your house and bury your wife.

JASON. I am going. I have lost both my children too.

MEDEA. You are still a novice in grief. Wait till you grow old.*

JASON. O my dearest children.

MEDEA. Dearest to their mother, not to you.

JASON. So why did you kill them?

MEDEA. To cause you pain.

JASON. Alas, I long to kiss my children's dear lips,
poor wretch that I am.* 1400

MEDEA. Now you want to speak to them and embrace them,
though then you pushed them away.

JASON. In the gods' name, let me touch
the soft skin of my children.

MEDEA. Never. Your words are wasted on the empty air.

JASON. Zeus, do you hear how I am being driven away
and how I suffer as the victim
of this foul lioness, the killer of her children?
But I still lament my sorrow as much as my plight allows,
as much as I am able, calling on the gods 1410
to witness how you have killed my children for me
and yet prevent me
from touching their bodies with my hands,* or burying them.
I wish I had never begot them
to see them slaughtered by you.

[MEDEA flies off in her chariot. JASON goes out.]

CHORUS. Zeus on Olympus dispenses many things
and the gods bring many things to pass against our expect-
ation.

What we thought would happen remains unfulfilled,
while the god has found a way to accomplish the unex-
pected.

And that is what has happened here.*

[The CHORUS goes out.]

HIPPOLYTUS

Characters

APHRODITE, goddess of love

HIPPOLYTUS, illegitimate son of Theseus

SERVANT of Hippolytus

NURSE of Phaedra

PHAEDRA, wife of Theseus and stepmother to Hippolytus

THESEUS, king of Athens and Trozen

Another SERVANT of Hippolytus

ARTEMIS, goddess of hunting

CHORUS OF SERVANTS OF HIPPOLYTUS

CHORUS OF WOMEN OF TROZEN

*Outside the royal palace in Trozen. On one side of the stage there
is a statue of Aphrodite, on the other one of Artemis. Enter*

APHRODITE.*

APHRODITE. I am called Cypris,* a powerful goddess and not
without fame among mortals and in heaven. And of all who
dwell between the Black Sea and the bounds of Atlas* and
look on the light of the sun, I give precedence to those who
revere my power, but those who are arrogant towards me I
cast down. For this is characteristic of gods as well as mor-
tals—they take pleasure in receiving honour from men.

Soon I shall show the truth of these words. Alone of all
the citizens of this land of Trozen, Hippolytus, the son of
Theseus, the child of the Amazon and pupil of revered
Pittheus,* says that I am the vilest of the gods. He spurns sex
and keeps clear of marriage. It is Artemis, sister of Phoebus
and daughter of Zeus, that he honours, holding her the
greatest of the gods. He spends all his time in the green
woods with the virgin goddess* as he empties the land of its
wild animals with his swift hounds—and it is no mere mor-
tal that keeps him company. For that I bear him no ill will.
Why should I? But for his offences against me I shall in the
course of this day take revenge on Hippolytus. I have long

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