

EURIPIDES

Medea

IF MEDEA HAD not fallen in love with Jason and helped him when he was in quest of the Golden Fleece in far-off Colchis, Jason would never have survived. To enable him to escape she forsook her royal heritage and murdered her brother, and again when the pair returned to Greece she committed murder for his sake. Now after years of marriage and after she has borne him two children whom he loved dearly, Jason is casting her off in order to marry the princess of Corinth. We should surely condemn Jason's conduct, and so would Euripides' audience also—after they had seen his play, but hardly before. In Athens children of an alien mother did not enjoy the protection of citizenship and Jason was doubtless sincere in declaring that he wished to ensure his children's future by giving them royal half-brothers. When Medea taxes him with ingratitude Jason says that if he owes any gratitude it is to Aphrodite, for Medea only did what is expected of women in love. Furthermore, he adds, he gave more than he received, for Medea was only an alien and he had brought her to the civilization of Greece. What Euripides is attacking, then, is Athenian smugness in their conventional superiority to foreigners and to women. But in nature foreigners and women are as human as Greeks and deserve the same consideration. When they are denied it, the results may be as tragic as they prove to be in the *Medea*. It is not that Euripides approves Medea's behavior or thinks she should escape punishment:

the god out of the machine who saves her in the end is intended to be as incredible as it is improbable. It is rather that Euripides condemns the conventional attitudes which make such conduct on the part of a passionate woman inevitable.

CHARACTERS

NURSE
 CREON, KING OF CORINTH
 CHILDREN OF MEDEA
 MEDEA
 TUTOR
 JASON

CHORUS, *Corinthian women*
 AGEUS, *king of Athens*
 MESSENGER

SCENE: The home of Medea at Corinth

Translated by M. HADAS and J. McLEAN

(Enter NURSE.)

NURSE: How I wish that the ship *Argo* had never winged its way through the gray Clashing Rocks to the land of the Colchians! How I wish the pines had never been hewn down in the glens of Pelion, to put oars into the hands of the Heroes who went to fetch for Pelias the Golden Fleece! Then Medea my mistress would not have sailed to the towers of Iolcus, her heart pierced through and through with love for Jason, would not have prevailed on the daughters of Pelias to murder their father, would not now be dwelling here in Corinth with her husband and children. When she fled here she found favor with the citizens to whose land she had come and was herself a perfect partner in all things for Jason. (And therein lies a woman's best security, to avoid conflict with her husband.) But now there is nothing but enmity, a blight has come over their great love.

Jason has betrayed his own children and my mistress to sleep beside a royal bride, the daughter of Creon who rules this land, while Medea, luckless Medea, in her desolation invokes the promises he made, appeals to the pledges in which she put her deepest trust, and calls Heaven to witness the sorry recompense she has from Jason. Ever since she realized her husband's perfidy, she has been lying there

prostrated, eating no food, her whole frame subdued to sorrow, wasting away with incessant weeping. She has not lifted an eye nor ever turned her face from the floor. The admonitions of her friends she receives with unhearing ears, like a rock or a wave of the sea. Only now and then she turns her white neck and talks to herself, in sorrow, of her dear father and her country and the home which she betrayed to come here with a husband who now holds her in contempt. Now she knows, from bitter experience, how sad a thing it is to lose one's fatherland. She hates her own children and has no pleasure at the sight of them. I fear she may form some new and horrible resolve. For hers is a dangerous mind, and she will not lie down to injury. I know her and she frightens me lest she make her way stealthily into the palace where his couch is spread and drive a sharp sword into his vitals or even kill both the king and the bridegroom and then incur some greater misfortune. She is cunning. Whoever crosses swords with her will not find victory easy, I tell you.

But here come the children, their playtime over. Little thought have they of their mother's troubles. Children do not like sad thoughts.

(Enter TUTOR, with Boys.)

TUTOR: Ancient household chattel of my mistress, why are you standing here all alone at the gates, muttering darkly to yourself? What makes Medea want you to leave her alone?

NURSE: Aged escort of Jason's children, when their master's affairs go ill, good slaves find not only their misfortune but also their heart's grief. My sorrow has now become so great that a longing came over me to come out here and tell to earth and sky the story of my mistress' woes.

TUTOR: What? Is the poor lady not yet through with weeping?

NURSE: I wish I had your optimism. Why, her sorrow is only beginning, it's not yet at the turning point.

TUTOR: Poor foolish woman!—if one may speak thus of one's masters. Little she knows of the latest ills!

NURSE: What's that, old man? Don't grudge me your news.

TUTOR: It's nothing at all. I'm sorry I even said what I said.

NURSE: Please, I beg of you, don't keep it from a fellow slave I'll keep it dark, if need be.

TUTOR: I had drawn near the checkerboards where the old

men sit, beside the sacred water of Pirene, and there, when nobody thought I was listening, I heard somebody say that Creon the ruler of this land was planning to expel these children and their mother from Corinth. Whether the tale is true or not I do not know. I would wish it were not so.

NURSE: But will Jason ever allow his children to be so treated, even if he is at variance with their mother?

TUTOR: Old loves are weaker than new loves, and that man is no friend to this household.

NURSE: That's the end of us then, if we are to ship a second wave of trouble before we are rid of the first.

TUTOR: Meanwhile you keep quiet and don't say a word.

THIS is no time for the mistress to be told.

NURSE: O children, do you hear what love your father bears you? Since he is my master, I do not wish him dead, but he is certainly proving the enemy of those he should love.

TUTOR: Like the rest of the world. Are you only now learning that every man loves himself more than his neighbor? Some justly, others for profit, as now for a new bride their father hates these children.

NURSE: Inside, children, inside. It will be all right. (To the TUTOR.) And you keep them alone as much as you can, and don't let them near their mother when she's melancholy. I have already noticed her casting a baleful eye at them as if she would gladly do them mischief. She'll not recover from her rage, I know well, till the lightning of her fury has struck somebody to the ground. May it be enemies, not loved ones, that suffer!

MEDEA (within): Oh! My grief! The misery of it all! Why can I not die?

NURSE: What did I tell you, dear children? Your mother's heart is troubled, her anger is roused. Hurry indoors, quick. Keep out of her sight, don't go near her. Beware of her fierce manner, her implacable temper. Hers is a self-willed nature. Go now, get you inside, be quick. Soon, it is clear, her sorrow like a gathering cloud will burst in a tempest of fury. What deed will she do then, that impetuous, indomitable heart, poisoned by injustice?

(Exeunt CHILDREN with TUTOR.)

MEDEA (within): O misery! the things I have suffered, cause enough for deep lamentations! O you cursed sons of a hateful mother, a plague on you! And on your father! Ruin seize the whole household!

NURSE: Ah me, unhappy me! Why will you have your sons partake of their father's guilt? Why hate them? Ah children, your danger overwhelms me with anxiety. The souls of royalty are vindictive; they do not easily forget their resentment, possibly because being used to command they are seldom checked. It is better to be used to living among equals. For myself, at any rate, I ask not greatness but a safe old age. Moderation! Firstly, the very name of it is excellent; to practice it is easily the best thing for mortals. Excess avails to no good purpose for men, and if the gods are provoked, brings greater ruin on a house.

(Enter CHORUS.)

CHORUS: I heard a voice, I heard a cry. It was the unhappy Colchian woman's. She is not yet calm. Pray tell us, old woman. From the court outside I heard her cries within. I do not rejoice, woman, in the griefs of this house. Dear, dear it is to me.

NURSE: It is a home no more; the life has gone out of it. Its master a princess' bed enthalls, while the mistress in her chamber is pining to death, and her friends have no words to comfort her heart.

MEDEA (within): Oh! Would that a flaming bolt from Heaven might pierce my brain! What is the good of living any longer? O Misery! Let me give up this life I find so hateful. Let me seek lodging in the house of death.

CHORUS: O Zeus, O Earth, O Light, hear what a sad lament the hapless wife intones. What is this yearning, rash woman, after that fearful bed? Will you hasten to the end that is Death? Pray not for that. If your husband worships a new bride, it is a common event; be not exasperated. Zeus will support your cause. Do not let grief for a lost husband waste away your life.

MEDEA (within): Great Zeus and Lady Themis, see you how I am treated, for all the strong oaths with which I bound my cursed husband? May I live to see him and his bride, palace and all, in one common destruction, for the wrongs that they inflict, unprovoked, on me! O father, O country, that I forsook so shamefully, killing my brother, my own!

NURSE: Hear what she says, how she cries out to Themis of Prayers and to Zeus whom mortals regard as the steward of oaths. With no small revenge will my mistress bate her rage.

CHORUS: I wish she would come into our presence and hear

the sound of the words we would speak. Then she might forget the resentment in her heart and change her purpose. May my zeal be ever at the service of my friends. But bring her here, make her come forth from the palace. Tell her that here too are friends. Make haste before she does any harm to those within. Furious is the surge of such a sorrow.

NURSE: *I shall do so, though I am not hopeful of persuading the mistress. But I freely present you with the gift of my labor. Yet she throws a baleful glare, like a lioness with cubs, at any servant who approaches her as if to speak. Blunderers and fools! that is the only proper name for the men of old who invented songs to bring the joy of life to feasts and banquets and festive boards, but never discovered a music of song or sounding lyre to dispel the weary sorrows of humanity, that bring death and fell havoc and destruction of homes. Yet what a boon to man, could these ills be cured by some! At sumptuous banquets why raise a useless strain? The food that is served and the satisfaction that comes to full men, that in itself is pleasure enough.* (Exit.)

CHORUS: *I hear a cry of grief and deep sorrow. In piercing accents of misery she proclaims her woes, her ill-starred marriage and her love betrayed. The victim of grievous wrongs, she calls on the daughter of Zeus, even Themis, Lady of Vows, who led her through the night by difficult straits across the briny sea to Hellas.*

(Enter MEDEA.)

MEDEA: Women of Corinth, do not criticize me, I come forth from the palace. Well I know that snobbery is a common charge, that may be leveled against recluse and busy man alike. And the former, by their choice of a quiet life, acquire an extra stigma: they are deficient in energy and spirit. There is no justice in the eyes of men; a man who has never harmed them they may hate at sight, without ever knowing anything about his essential nature. An alien, to be sure, should adapt himself to the citizens with whom he lives. Even the citizen is to be condemned if he is too self-willed or too uncouth to avoid offending his fellows. So I . . . but this unexpected blow which has befallen me has broken my heart.

It's all over, my friends; I would gladly die. Life has lost its savor. The man who was everything to me, well he

knows it, has turned out to be the basest of men. Of all creatures that feel and think, we women are the unhappiest species. In the first place, we must pay a great dowry to a husband who will be the tyrant of our bodies (that's a further aggravation of the evil); and there is another fearful hazard: whether we shall get a good man or a bad. For separations bring disgrace on the woman and it is not possible to renounce one's husband. Then, landed among strange habits and regulations unheard of in her own home, a woman needs second sight to know how best to handle her bedmate. And if we manage this well and have a husband who does not find the yoke of intercourse too galling, ours is a life to be envied. Otherwise, one is better dead. When the man wearies of the company of his wife, he goes outdoors and relieves the disgust of his heart having recourse to some friend or the companions of his own age, but we women have only one person to turn to.

They say that we have a safe life at home, whereas men must go to war. Nonsense! I had rather fight three battles than bear one child. But be that as it may, you and I are not in the same case. You have your city here, your paternal homes; you know the delights of life and association with your loved ones. But I, homeless and forsaken, carried off from a foreign land, am being wronged by a husband, with neither mother nor brother nor kinsman with whom I might find refuge from the storms of misfortune. One little boon I crave of you, if I discover any ways and means of punishing my husband for these wrongs: your silence. Woman in most respects is a timid creature, with no heart for strife and aghast at the sight of steel; but wronged in love, there is no heart more murderous than hers.

LEADER: Do as you say, Medea, for just will be your vengeance. I do not wonder that you bemoan your fate. But I see Creon coming, the ruler of this land, bringing tidings of new plans.

(Enter CREON.)

CREON: You there, Medea, looking black with rage against your husband; I have proclaimed that you are to be driven forth in exile from this land, you and your two sons. Immediately. I am the absolute judge of the case, and I shall not go back to my palace till I have cast you over the frontier of the land.

Ah! Destruction, double destruction is my unhappy

lot. My enemies are letting out every sail and there is no harbor into which I may flee from the menace of their attack. But ill-treated and all, Creon, still I shall put the question to you: Why are you sending me out of the country?

CREON: I am afraid of you—there's no need to hide behind a cloak of words—afraid you will do my child some irreparable injury. There's plenty of logic in that fear. You are a wizard possessed of evil knowledge. You are stung by the loss of your husband's love. And I have heard of your threats—they told me of them—to injure bridegroom and bride and father of the bride. Therefore before anything happens to me, I shall take precautions. Better for me now to be hateful in your eyes than to relent and rue it greatly later.

MEDEA: Alas! Alas! Often ere now—this is not the first time—my reputation has hurt me and done me grievous wrong. If a man's really shrewd, he ought never to have his children taught too much. For over and above a name for uselessness that it will earn them, they incur the hostility and envy of their fellow men. Offer clever reforms to dullards, and you will be thought a useless fool yourself. And the reported wisacres, feeling your superiority, will dislike you intensely. I myself have met this fate. Because I have skill, some are jealous of me, others think me unsociable. But my wisdom does not go very far. However, you are afraid you may suffer something unpleasant at my hands, aren't you? Fear not, Creon; it is not my way to commit my crimes against kings. What wrong have you done me? You have only bestowed your daughter on the suitor of your choice. No, it is my husband I hate. You, I dare say, knew what you were doing in the matter. And now I don't grudge success to your scheme. Make your match, and good luck to you. But allow me to stay in this country. Though foully used, I shall keep my peace, submitting to my masters.

CREON: Your words are comforting to hear, but inside my heart there is a horrible fear that you are plotting some mischief, which makes me trust you even less than before. The hot-tempered woman, like the hot-tempered man, is easier to guard against than the cunning and silent. But off with you at once, make no speeches. My resolve is fixed; for all your skill you will not stay amongst us to hate me.

MEDEA: Please no, I beseech you, by your knees, by the young bride . . .

CREON: You are wasting your words; you will never convince me.

MEDEA: Will you drive me out and have no respect for my prayers?

CREON: Yes, for I love you less than I love my own family.

MEDEA: O fatherland, how strongly do I now remember you!

CREON: Yes, apart from my children, that is *my* dearest love.

MEDEA: Alas! the loves of men are a mighty evil.

CREON: In my opinion, that depends on the circumstances.

MEDEA: O Zeus, do not forget the author of this wickedness.

CREON: On your way, vain woman, and end my troubles.

MEDEA: The troubles are mine, I have no lack of troubles.

CREON: In a moment you will be thrust out by the hands of servants.

MEDEA: No, no, not that. But Creon, I entreat you. . . .

CREON: You seem to be bent on causing trouble, woman.

MEDEA: I shall go into exile. It is not *that* I beg you to grant me.

CREON: Why then are you clinging so violently to my hand?

MEDEA: Allow me to stay for this one day to complete my plans for departure and get together provision for my children, since their father prefers not to bother about his own sons. Have pity on them. You too are the father of children. It is natural that you should feel kindly. Stay or go, I care nothing for myself. It's them I weep for in their misfortune.

CREON: My mind is not tyrannical enough; mercy has often been my undoing. So now, though I know that it is a mistake, woman, you will have your request. But I give you warning: if tomorrow's divine sun sees you and your children inside the borders of this country, you die. True is the word I have spoken. Stay, if you must, this one day. You'll not have time to do what I dread. (Exit.)

CHORUS: *Hapless woman! overwhelmed by sorrow! Where will you turn? What stranger will afford you hospitality? God has steered you, Medea, into an unmanageable surge of troubles.*

MEDEA: Ill fortune's everywhere, who can gainsay it? But it is not yet as bad as that, never think so. There is still

heavy weather ahead for the new bride and groom, and no little trouble for the maker of the match. Do you think I would ever have wheedled the king just now except to further my own plans? I would not even have spoken to him, nor touched him either. But he is such a fool that though he might have thwarted my plans by expelling me from the country he has allowed me to stay over for this one day, in which I shall make corpses of three of my enemies, father and daughter and my own husband.

My friends, I know several ways of causing their death, and I cannot decide which I should turn my hand to first. Shall I set fire to the bridal chamber or make my way in stealthily to where their bed is laid and drive a sword through their vitals? But there is one little difficulty. If I am caught entering the palace or devising my bonfire I shall be slain and my enemies shall laugh. Better take the direct way and the one for which I have the natural gift. Poison. Destroy them with poison. So be it.

But suppose them slain. What city will receive me? Whose hospitality will rescue me and afford me a land where I shall be safe from punishment, a home where I can live in security? It cannot be. I shall wait, therefore, a little longer and if any tower of safety shows up I shall carry out the murders in stealth and secrecy. However, if circumstances drive me to my wits' end, I shall take a sword in my own hands and face certain death to slay them. I shall not shirk the difficult adventure. Not by Queen Hecate who has her abode in the recesses of my hearth—her I revere above all gods and have chosen to assist me—never shall any one of them torture my heart with impunity. I shall make their marriage a torment and grief to them. Bitterly shall they rue the match they have made and the exile they inflict on me.

But enough! Medea, use all your wiles; plot and devise. Onward to the dreadful moment. Now is the test of courage. Do you see how you are being treated? It is not right that the seed of Sisyphus and Aeson should gloat over you, the daughter of a noble sire and descendant of the Sun. But you realize that. Moreover, by our mere nature we women are helpless for good, but adept at contriving all manner of wickedness.

CHORUS: *Back to their sources flow the sacred rivers. The world and morality are turned upside-down. The hearts of*

men are treacherous; the sanctions of Heaven are undermined. The voice of time will change, and our glory will ring down the ages. Womankind will be honored. No longer will ill-sounding report attach to our sex.

The strains of ancient minstrelsy will cease, that hymned our faithlessness. Would that Phoebus, Lord of Song, had put into woman's heart the inspired song of the lyre. Then I would have sung a song in answer to the tribe of males. History has much to tell of the relations of men with women.

You, Medea, in the mad passion of your heart sailed away from your father's home, threading your way through the twin rocks of the Euxine, to settle in a foreign land. Now, your bed empty, your lover lost, unhappy woman, you are being driven forth in dishonor into exile.

Gone is respect for oaths. Nowhere in all the breadth of Hellas is honor any more to be found; it has vanished into the clouds. Hapless one, you have no father's house to which you might fly for shelter from the gales of misfortune; and another woman, a princess, has charmed your husband away and stepped into your place.

(Enter JASON.)

JASON: Often and often ere now I have observed that an intractable nature is a curse almost impossible to deal with. So with you. When you might have stayed on in this land and in this house by submitting quietly to the wishes of your superiors, your forward tongue has got you expelled from the country. Not that your abuse troubles me at all. Keep on saying that Jason is a villain of the deepest dye. But for your insolence to royalty consider yourself more than fortunate that you are only being punished by exile. I was constantly mollifying the angry monarch and expressing the wish that you be allowed to stay. But in unabated folly you keep on reviling the king. That is why you are to be expelled.

But still, despite everything, I come here now with unwearied goodwill, to contrive on your behalf, madam, that you and the children will not leave this country lacking money or anything else. Exile brings many hardships in its wake. And even if you do hate me, I could never think cruelly of you.

MEDEA: Rotten, heart-rotten, that is the word for you. Words, words, magnificent words. In reality a craven. You

come to me, you come, my worst enemy! This isn't bravery, you know, this isn't valor, to come and face your victims. No! it's the ugliest sore on the face of humanity, shamelessness. But I thank you for coming. It will lighten the weight on my heart to tell your wickedness, and it will hurt you to hear it. I shall begin my tale at the very beginning.

I saved your life, as all know who embarked with you on the *Argo*, when you were sent to master with the yoke the fire-breathing bulls and to sow with dragon's teeth that acre of death. The dragon, too, with wreathed coils, that kept safe watch over the Golden Fleece and never slept—I slew it and raised for you the light of life again. Then, forsaking my father and my own dear ones, I came to Iolcus where Pelias reigned, came with you, more than fond and less than wise. On Pelias too I brought death, the most painful death there is, at the hands of his own children. Thus I have removed every danger from your path.

And after all those benefits at my hands, you basest of men, you have betrayed me and made a new marriage, though I have borne you children. If you were still childless, I could have understood this love of yours for a new wife. Gone now is all reliance on pledges. You puzzle me. Do you believe that the gods of the old days are no longer in office? Do you think that men are now living under a new dispensation? For surely you know that you have broken all your oaths to me. Ah my hand, which you so often grasped, and oh my knees, how all for nothing have we been defiled by this false man, who has disappointed all our hopes.

But come, I shall confide in you as though you were my friend, not that I expect to receive any benefit from you. But let that go. My questions will serve to underline your infamy. As things are now, where am I to turn? Home to my father? But when I came here with you, I betrayed my home and my country. To the wretched daughters of Pelias? They would surely give me a royal welcome to their home; I only murdered their father. For it is how it is. My loved ones at home have learned to hate me; the others, whom I need not have harmed, I have made my enemies to oblige you. And so in return for these services you have made me envied among the women of Hellas! A wonderful, faithful husband I have in you, if I must be expelled from the country into exile, deserted by my friends, alone with my friendless children! A fine story to tell of

the new bridegroom, that his children and the woman who saved his life are wandering about in aimless beggary! O Zeus, why O why have you given to mortals sure means of knowing gold from tinsel, yet men's exteriors show no mark by which to descry the rotten heart?

LEADER: Horrible and hard to heal is the anger of friend at strife with friend.

JASON: It looks as if I need no small skill in speech if, like a skillful steersman riding the storm with close-reefed sheets, I am to escape the howling gale of your verbosity, woman. Well, since you are making a mountain out of the favors you have done me, I'll tell you what I think. It was the goddess of Love and none other, mortal or immortal, who delivered me from the dangers of my quest. You have indeed much subtlety of wit, but it would be an invidious story to go into, how the inescapable shafts of Love compelled you to save my life. Still, I shall not put too fine a point on it. If you helped me in some way or other, good and well. But as I shall demonstrate, in the matter of my rescue you got more than you gave.

In the first place, you have your home in Greece, instead of in a barbarian land. You have learned the blessings of Law and Justice, instead of the caprice of the strong. And all the Greeks have realized your wisdom, and you have won great fame. If you had been living on the edges of the earth, nobody would ever have heard of you. May I have neither gold in my house nor skill to sing a sweeter song than Orpheus if my fortune is to be hid from the eyes of men. That, then, is my position in the matter of the fetching of the Fleece. (It was you who proposed the debate.)

There remains my wedding with the princess, which you have cast in my teeth. In this connection I shall demonstrate, one, my wisdom; two, my rightness; three, my great service of love to you and my children. (Be quiet, please.) When I emigrated here from the land of Iolcus, dragging behind me an unmanageable chain of troubles, what greater windfall could I have hit upon, I an exile, than a marriage with the king's daughter? Not that I was weary of your charms (that's the thought that galls you) or that I was smitten with longing for a fresh bride; still less that I wanted to outdo my neighbors in begetting numerous children. Those I have are enough, there I have no criticism

to make. Not what I wanted, first and foremost, was a good home where we would lack for nothing (well I knew that the poor man is shunned and avoided by all his friends); and secondly, I wanted to bring up the children in a style worthy of my house, and, begetting other children to be brothers to the children born of you, to bring them all together and unite the families. Then my happiness would be complete. What do *you* want with more children? As for me, it will pay me to advance the children I have by means of those I intend to beget. Surely that is no bad plan? You yourself would admit it, if jealousy were not pricking you.

You women have actually come to believe that, lucky in love, you are lucky in all things, but let some mischance befall that love, and you will think the best of all possible worlds a most loathsome place. There ought to have been some other way for men to beget their children, dispensing with the assistance of women. Then there would be no trouble in the world.

LEADER: Jason, you arrange your arguments very skillfully. And yet in my opinion, like it or not, you have acted unjustly in betraying your wife.

MEDEA: Yes! I do hold many opinions that are not shared by the majority of people. In my opinion, for example, the plausible scoundrel is the worst type of scoundrel. Confident in his ability to trick out his wickedness with fair phrases he shrinks from no depth of villainy. But there is a limit to his cleverness. As there is also to yours. You may as well drop that fine front with me, and all that rhetoric. One word will floor you. If you had been an honorable man, you would have sought my consent to the new match and not kept your plans secret from your own family.

JASON: And if I had announced to you my intention to marry, I am sure I would have found you a most enthusiastic accomplice. Why! even now you cannot bring yourself to master your heart's deep resentment.

MEDEA: That's not what grieved you. Not your foreign wife was passing into an old age that did you little credit.

JASON: Accept my assurance, it was not for the sake of a woman that I made the match I have made. As I told you once already, I wanted to save you and to beget princes to be brothers to my own sons, thereby establishing our family.

MEDEA: May it never be mine . . . a happiness that hurts, a blessedness that frets my soul.

JASON: Do you know how to change your prayer to show better sense? "May I regard nothing useful as grievous, no good fortune as ill."

MEDEA: Insult me. *You* have a refuge, but I am helpless, faced with exile.

JASON: It was your own choice. Don't blame anyone else.

MEDEA: What did I do? Did I betray you and marry somebody else?

JASON: You heaped foul curses on the king.

MEDEA: And to your house also I shall prove a curse.

JASON: Look here, I do not intend to continue this discussion any further. If you want anything of mine to assist you or the children in your exile, just tell me. I am ready to give it with an ungrudging hand and to send letters of introduction to my foreign friends who will treat you well. If you reject this offer, woman, you will be a great fool. Forget your anger, and you will find it greatly to your advantage.

MEDEA: I would not use your friends on any terms or accept anything of yours. Do not offer it. The gifts of the wicked bring no profit.

JASON: At any rate, heaven be my witness that I am willing to render every assistance to you and the children. But you do not like what is good for you. Your obstinacy repulses your friends; it will only aggravate your suffering.

MEDEA: Be off with you. As you loiter outside here, you are burning with longing for the girl who has just been made your wife. Make the most of the union. Perhaps, god willing, you are making the kind of marriage you will some day wish unmade.

(Exit JASON.)

CHORUS: *Love may go too far and involve men in dishonor and disgrace. But if the goddess comes in just measure, there is none so rich in blessing. May you never launch at me, O Lady of Cyprus, your golden bow's passion-poisoned arrows, which no man can avoid.*

May Moderation content me, the fairest gift of Heaven. Never may the Cyprian pierce my heart with longing for another's love and bring on me angry quarrelings and never-ending recriminations. May she have respect for har-

monious unions and with discernment assort the matings of women.

O Home and Fatherland, never, never, I pray, may I be cityless. It is an intolerable existence, hopeless, piteous, grievous. Let me die first, die and bring this life to a close. There is no sorrow that surpasses the loss of country.

My eyes have seen it; not from hearsay do I speak: You have neither city nor friend to pity you in your most terrible trials. Perish, abhorred, the man who never brings himself to unbolt his heart in frankness to some honored friends! Never shall such a man be a friend of mine.

(Enter AEGEUS, in traveler's dress.)

AEGEUS: Medea, good health to you. A better prelude than that in addressing one's friends, no man knows.

MEDEA: Good health be yours also, wise Pandion's son, Aegeus. Where do you come from to visit this land?

AEGEUS: I have just left the ancient oracle of Phoebus.

MEDEA: What sent you to the earth's oracular hub?

AEGEUS: I was enquiring how I might get children.

MEDEA: In the name of Heaven, have you come thus far in life still childless?

AEGEUS: By some supernatural influence I am still without children.

MEDEA: Have you a wife or are you still unmarried?

AEGEUS: I have a wedded wife to share my bed.

MEDEA: Tell me, what did Phoebus tell you about offspring?

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

MEDEA: Is it lawful to tell me the answer of the god?

AEGEUS: Surely. For, believe me, it requires a cunning mind to understand.

MEDEA: What then was the oracle? Tell me, if I may hear it.

AEGEUS: I am not to open the cock that projects from the skin. . . .

MEDEA: Till you do what? Till you reach what land?

AEGEUS: Till I return to my ancestral hearth.

MEDEA: Then what errand brings your ship to this land?

AEGEUS: There is one Pittheus, king of Troezen. . . .

MEDEA: The child of Pelops, as they say, and a most pious man.

AEGEUS: To him I will communicate the oracle of the god.

MEDEA: Yes, he is a cunning man and well-versed in such matters.

AEGEUS: Yes, and of all my comrades in arms the one I love most.

MEDEA: Well, good luck to you, and may you win your heart's desire.

AEGEUS: Why, what's the reason for those sad eyes, that wasted complexion?

MEDEA: Aegeus, I've got the basest husband in all the world.

AEGEUS: What do you mean? Tell me the reason of your despondency, tell me plainly.

MEDEA: Jason is wronging me; I never did him wrong.

AEGEUS: What has he done? Speak more bluntly.

MEDEA: He has another wife, to lord it over me in our home.

AEGEUS: You don't mean that he has done so callous, so shameful a deed!

MEDEA: Indeed he did. Me that used to be his darling he now despises.

AEGEUS: Has he fallen in love? Does he hate your embraces?

MEDEA: Yes, it's a grand passion! He was born to betray his loved ones.

AEGEUS: Let him go, then, since he is so base, as you say.

MEDEA: He became enamored of getting a king for a father-in-law.

AEGEUS: Who gave him the bride? Please finish your story.

MEDEA: Creon, the ruler of this Corinth.

AEGEUS: In that case, madam, I can sympathize with your resentment.

MEDEA: My life is ruined. What is more, I am being expelled from the land.

AEGEUS: By whom? This new trouble is hard.

MEDEA: Creon is driving me out of Corinth into exile.

AEGEUS: And does Jason allow this? I don't like that either.

MEDEA: He says he does not, but he'll stand it. Oh! I beseech you by this beard, by these knees, a suppliant I entreat you, show pity, show pity for my misery. Do not stand by and see me driven forth to a lonely exile. Receive me into your land, into your home and the shelter of your hearth. So may the gods grant you the children you desire, to throw joy round your deathbed. You do not know what a lucky path you have taken to me. I shall put an end to your childlessness. I shall make you beget heirs of your blood. I know the magic potions that will do it.

AEGEUS: Many things make me eager to do this favor for you, madam. Firstly, the gods, and secondly, the children that you promise will be born to me. In that matter I am quite at my wits' end. But here is how I stand. If you yourself come to Athens, I shall try to be your champion, as in duty bound. This warning, however, I must give you! I shall not consent to take you with me out of Corinth. If you yourself come to my palace, you will find a home and a sanctuary. Never will I surrender you to anybody. But your own efforts must get you away from this place. I wish to be free from blame in the eyes of my hosts also.

MEDEA: And so you shall. But just let me have a pledge for these services, and I shall have all I could desire of you.

AEGEUS: Do you not trust me? What is your difficulty?

MEDEA: I do trust you. But both the house of Pelias and Creon are my enemies. Bound by oaths, you would never hand me over to them if they tried to extradite me. But with an agreement of mere words, unfettered by any sacred pledge, you might be won over by their diplomatic advances to become *their* friend. For I have no influence or power, whereas they have the wealth of a royal palace.

AEGEUS: You take great precautions, madam. Still, if you wish, I will not refuse to do your bidding. For me too it will be safer that way, if I have some excuse to offer to your enemies, and *you* will have more security. Dictate the oath.

MEDEA: Swear by the Floor of Earth, by the Sun my father's father, by the whole family of the gods, one and all—

AEGEUS: To do or not do what? Say on.

MEDEA: Never yourself to cast me out of your country and never, willingly, during your lifetime, to surrender me to any of my foes that desire to seize me.

AEGEUS: I swear by the Earth, by the holy majesty of the Sun, and by all the gods, to abide by the terms you propose.

MEDEA: Enough! And if you abide not by your oath, what punishment do you pray to receive?

AEGEUS: The doom of sacrilegious mortals.

MEDEA: Go and fare well. All is well. I shall arrive at your city as soon as possible, when I have done what I intend to do, and obtained my desire.

LEADER (*as AEGEUS departs*): May Maia's son, the Lord of Journeys, bring you safe to Athens, and may you achieve

the desire that hurries you homeward; for you are a generous man in my esteem.

MEDEA: O Zeus and his Justice, O Light of the Sun! The time has come, my friends, when I shall sing songs of triumph over my enemies. I am on my way. Now I can hope that my foes will pay the penalty. Just as my plans were most storm-tossed at sea, this man has appeared, a veritable harbor, where I shall fix my moorings, when I get to the town and citadel of Pallas.

Now I shall tell you all my plans; what you hear will not be said in fun. I shall send one of my servants to ask Jason to come and see me. When he comes, I shall make my language submissive, tell him I approve of everything else and am quite contented with his royal marriage and his betrayal of me, that I agree it is all for the best; I shall only ask him to allow my children to remain. Not that I wish to leave them in a hostile land for my enemies to insult. No! I have a cunning plan to kill the princess. I shall send them with gifts to offer to the bride, to allow them to stay in the land—a dainty robe and a headdress of beaten gold. If she takes the finery and puts it on her, she will die in agony. She and anyone who touches her. So deadly are the poisons in which I shall steep my gifts.

But now I change my tone. It grieves me sorely, the horrible deed I must do next. I shall murder my children, these children of mine. No man shall take them away from me. Then when I have accomplished the utter overthrow of the house of Jason, I shall flee from the land, to escape the consequences of my own dear children's murder and my other accursed crimes. My friends, I cannot bear being laughed at by my enemies.

So be it. Tell me, what has life to offer them. They have no father, no home, no refuge from danger.

My mistake was in leaving my father's house, won over by the words of a Greek. But, as god is my ally, he shall pay for his crime. Never, if I can help it, shall he behold his sons again in this life. Never shall he beget children by his new bride. She must die by my poisons, die the death she deserves. Nobody shall despise *me* or think me weak or passive. Quite the contrary. I am a good friend, but a dangerous enemy. For that is the type the world delights to honor.

LEADER: You have confided your plan in me, and I should like to help you, but since I also would support the laws of mankind, I entreat you not to do this deed.

MEDEA: It is the only way. But I can sympathize with your sentiments. You have not been wronged like me.

LEADER: Surely you will not have the heart to destroy your own flesh and blood?

MEDEA: I shall. It will hurt my husband most that way.

LEADER: But it will make you the unhappiest woman in the world.

MEDEA: Let it. From now on all words are superfluous.

(*To the NURSE.*) Go now, please, and fetch Jason. Whenever loyalty is wanted, I turn to you. Tell him nothing of my intentions, as you are a woman and a loyal servant of your mistress.

(*Exit NURSE.*)

CHORUS: *The people of Erechtheus have been favored of Heaven from the beginning. Children of the blessed gods are they, sprung from a hallowed land that no foeman's foot has trodden. Their food is glorious Wisdom. There the skies are always clear, and lightly do they walk in that land where once on a time blond Harmony bore nine chaste daughters, the Muses of Pieria.*

Such is the tale, which tells also how Aphrodite sprinkled the land with water from the fair streams of Cephissus and breathed over it breezes soft and fragrant. Ever on her hair she wears a garland of sweet-smelling roses, and ever she sends the Loves to assist in the court of Wisdom. No good thing is wrought without their help.

How then shall that land of sacred rivers, that hospitable land receive you the slayer of your children? It would be sacrilege for you to live with them. Think. You are stabbing your children. Think. You are earning the name of murderess. By your knees we entreat you, by all the world holds sacred, do not murder your children.

Whence got you the hardihood to conceive such a plan? And in the horrible act, as you bring death on your own children, how will you steel your heart and hand? When you cast your eyes on them, your own children, will you not weep that you should be their murderess? When your own children fall at your feet and beg for mercy, you will never be able to dye your hands with their blood. Your heart will not stand it.

(*Enter JASON, followed by the NURSE.*)

JASON: I come at your bidding. Though you hate me, I shall not refuse you an audience. What new favor have you to ask of me, woman?

MEDEA: Jason, please forgive me for all I said. After all the services of love you have rendered me before, I can count on you to put up with my fits of temper. I have been arguing the matter out with myself. Wretched woman (thus I scolded myself), why am I so mad as to hate those that mean me well, to treat as enemies the rulers of this land and my husband who, in marrying a princess and getting brothers for my children, is only doing what is best for us all? What is the matter with me? Why am I still furious, when the gods are showering their blessings on me? Have I not children of my own? Am I forgetting that I am an exile from my native land, in sore need of friends? These reflections let me see how very foolish I have been and how groundless is my resentment. Now, I want to thank you. I think you are only doing the right thing in making this new match. I have been the fool. I ought to have entered into your designs, helped you to accomplish them, even stood by your nuptial couch and been glad to be of service to the new bride. But I am what I am . . . to say no worse, a woman. You ought not therefore to imitate me in my error or to compete with me in childishness. I beg your pardon, and confess that I was wrong then. But now I have taken better counsel, as you see.

Children, children, come here, leave the house, come out and greet your father as I do. Speak to him. Join your mother in making friends with him, forgetting our former hate. It's a truce; the quarrel is over. Take his right hand. Alas! my imagination sickens strangely. My children, will you stretch out loving arms like that in the long hereafter? My grief! How quick my tears are! My fears brim over. It is that long quarrel with your father, now done with, that fills my tender eyes with tears.

LEADER: From my eyes, too, the burning tears gush forth. May Sorrow's advance proceed no further.

JASON: That is the talk I like to hear, woman. The past I can forgive. It is only natural for your sex to show resentment when their husbands contract another marriage. But your heart has now changed for the better. It took time, to be sure, but you have now seen the light of reason. That's

the action of a wise woman. As for you, my children, your father has not forgotten you. God willing, he has secured your perfect safety. I feel sure that you will yet occupy the first place here in Corinth, with your brothers. Merely grow up. Your father, and any friends he has in heaven, will see to the rest. May I see you, sturdy and strong, in the flower of your youth, triumphant over my enemies.

You there, why wet your eyes with hot tears, and avert your pale cheek? Why are you not happy to hear me speak thus?

MEDEA: It's nothing. Just a thought about the children here.

JASON: Why all this weeping over the children? It's too much.

MEDEA: I am their mother. Just now when you were wishing them long life, a pang of sorrow came over me, in case things would not work out that way.

JASON: Cheer up, then. I shall see that they are all right.

MEDEA: Very well, I shall not doubt your word. Women are frail things and naturally apt to cry.

But to return to the object of this conference, something has been said, something remains to be mentioned. Since it is their royal pleasure to expel me from the country—oh yes! it's the best thing for me too, I know well, not to stay on here in the way of you and the king; I am supposed to be their bitter enemy—I then shall go off into exile. But see that the children are reared by your own hand, ask Creon to let *them* stay.

JASON: I don't know if he will listen to me, but I shall try, as I ought.

MEDEA: At least you can get your wife to intercede with her father on their behalf.

JASON: Certainly, and I imagine I shall persuade her.

MEDEA: If she is a woman like the rest of us. In this task, I too shall play my part. I shall send the children with gifts for her, gifts far surpassing the things men make today, a fine robe, and a headdress of beaten gold. Be quick there. Let one of my maids bring the finery here. What joy will be hers, joys rather, joys innumerable, getting not only a hero like you for a husband, but also raiment which the Sun, my father's father, gave to his children. (MEDEA takes the casket from a maid who has brought it, and hands it to the CHILDREN.) Here, my children, take

these wedding gifts in your hands. Carry them to the princess, the happy bride, and give them to her. They are not the kind of gifts she will despise.

JASON: Impetuous woman! Why leave yourself thus empty-handed? Do you think a royal palace lacks for raiment and gold? Keep these things for yourself, don't give them away. If my wife has any regard for me at all, she will prefer me to wealth, I'm sure.

MEDEA: Please let me. They say that gifts persuade even the gods, and gold is stronger than ten thousand words. Hers is the fortune of the hour; her now is god exalting. She has youth, and a king for a father. And to save my children from exile, I would give my very life, let alone gold.

Away, my children, enter the rich palace and entreat your father's young wife, my mistress, to let you stay in Corinth. Give her the finery. That is most important. She must take these gifts in her hands. Go as fast as you can. Success attend your mission, and may you bring back to your mother the tidings she longs to hear.

(*Exeunt CHILDREN with TUTOR, and JASON.*)

CHORUS: *Now are my hopes dead. The children are doomed. Already they are on the road to death. She will take it, the bride will take the golden diadem, and with it will take her ruin, luckless girl. With her own hands she will put the precious circlet of death on her blond hair.*

The beauty of it, the heavenly sheen, will persuade her to put on the robe and the golden crown. It is in the halls of death that she will put on her bridal dress forthwith. Into that fearful trap she will fall. Death will be her portion, hapless girl. She cannot overleap her doom.

And you, poor man. Little luck your royal father-in-law is bringing you. Unwittingly, you are bringing death on your children, and on your wife an awful end. Ill-starred man, what a way you are from happiness.

And now I weep for your sorrow, hapless mother of these children. You will slaughter them to avenge the dishonor of your bed betrayed, criminally betrayed by your husband who now sleeps beside another bride.

(*Enter CHILDREN with their TUTOR.*)

TUTOR: Mistress, here are your children, reprieved from exile. Your gifts the royal bride took gladly in her hands. The children have made their peace with her. What's the

matter? Why stand in such confusion, when fortune is smiling? Why do you turn away your cheek? Why are you not glad to hear my message?

MEDEA: Misery!

TUTOR: That note does not harmonize with the news I have brought.

MEDEA: Misery, and again Misery!

TUTOR: Have I unwittingly brought you bad news? I thought it was good. Was I mistaken?

MEDEA: Your message was . . . your message. It is not you I blame.

TUTOR: Why then are your eyes downcast and your tears flowing?

MEDEA: Of necessity, old man, of strong necessity. This is the gods' doing, and mine, in my folly.

TUTOR: Have courage. Some day your children will bring you too back home.

MEDEA: Ah me! Before that day I shall bring others to another home.

TUTOR: You are not the first woman to be separated from her children. We are mortals and must endure calamity with patience.

MEDEA: That I shall do. Now go inside and prepare their usual food for the children.

(Exit TUTOR.)

O my children, my children. For you indeed a city is assured, and a home in which, leaving me to my misery, you will dwell forever, motherless. But I must go forth to exile in a strange land, before I have ever tasted the joy of seeing your happiness, before I have got you brides and bedecked your marriage beds and held aloft the bridal torches. Alas! my own self-will has brought me to misery. Was it all for nothing, my children, the rearing of you, and all the agonizing labor, all the fierce pangs I endured at your birth? Ah me, there was a time when I had strong hopes, fool as I was, that you would tend my old age and with your own hands dress my body for the grave, a fate that the world might envy. Now the sweet dream is gone. Deprived of you, I shall live a life of pain and sorrow. And you, in another world altogether will never again see your mother with your dear, dear eyes.

O the pain of it! Why do your eyes look at me, my children? Why smile at me that last smile? Ah! What can

I do? My heart is water, women, at the sight of my children's bright faces. I could never do it. Good-bye to my former plans. I shall take my children away with me. Why should I hurt their father by their misfortunes, only to reap a double harvest of sorrow myself? No! I cannot do it. Good-bye to my plans.

And yet . . . what is the matter with me? Do I want to make myself a laughingstock by letting my enemies off scot-free? I must go through with it. What a coward heart is mine, to admit those soft pleas. Come, my children, into the palace. Those that may not attend my sacrifices can see to it that they are absent. I shall not let my hand be unnerved.

Ah! Ah! Stop, my heart. Do not you commit this crime. Leave them alone, unhappy one, spare the children. Even if they live far from us, they will bring you joy. No! by the unforgetting dead in hell, it cannot be! I shall not leave my children for my enemies to insult. In any case they must die. And if die they must, I shall slay them, who gave them birth. My schemes are crowned with success. She shall not escape. Already the diadem is on her head; wrapped in the robe the royal bride is dying, I know it well. And now I am setting out on a most sorrowful road and shall send these on one still more sorrowful. I wish to speak to my children. Give your mother your hands, my children, give her your hands to kiss.

O dear, dear hand. O dear, dear mouth, dear shapes, dear noble faces, happiness be yours, but not here. Your father has stolen this world from you. How sweet to touch! The softness of their skin, the sweetness of their breath, my babies! Away, away, I cannot bear to see you any longer. (CHILDREN retire within.) My misery overwhelms me. O I do realize how terrible is the crime I am about, but passion overrules my resolutions, passion that causes most of the misery in the world.

CHORUS: Often ere now I have grappled with subtle subjects and sounded depths of argument deeper than woman may plumb. But, you see, we also have a Muse who teaches us philosophy. It is a small class—perhaps you might find one in a thousand—the women that love the Muse.

And I declare that in this world those who have had no experience of paternity are happier than the fathers of children. Without children a man does not know whether

they are a blessing or a curse, and so he does not miss a joy he has never had and he escapes a multitude of sorrows. But them that have in their home young, growing children that they love, I see them consumed with anxiety, day in day out, how they are to rear them properly, how they are to get a livelihood to leave to them. And, after all that, whether the children for whom they toil are worth it or not, who can tell?

And now I shall tell you the last and crowning sorrow for all mortals. Suppose they have found livelihood enough, their children have grown up, and turned out honest. Then, if it is fated that way, death carries their bodies away beneath the earth. What then is the use, when the love of children brings from the gods this crowning sorrow to top the rest?

MEDEA: My friends, all this time I have been waiting for something to happen, watching to see what they will do in the royal palace. Now I see one of Jason's attendants coming this way. His excited breathing shows that he has a tale of strange evils to tell.

(Enter MESSENGER.)

MESSENGER: What a horrible deed of crime you have done, Medea. Flee, flee. Take anything you can find, sea vessel or land carriage.

MEDEA: Tell me, what has happened that I should flee.

MESSENGER: The princess has just died. Her father Creon, too, killed by your poisons.

MEDEA: Best of news! From this moment and forever you are one of my friends and benefactors.

MESSENGER: What's that? Are you sane and of sound mind, woman? You have inflicted a foul outrage on a king's home, yet you rejoice at the word of it and are not afraid.

MEDEA: I too have a reply that I might make to you. But take your time, my friend. Speak on. How did they die? You would double my delight, if they died in agony.

MESSENGER: When your children, both your offspring, arrived with their father and entered the bride's house, we rejoiced, we servants who had been grieved by your troubles. Immediately a whisper ran from ear to ear that you and your husband had patched up your earlier quarrel. And one kisses your children's hands, another their yellow hair. I myself, in my delight, accompanied the children to the women's rooms. The mistress, whom we now respect in your

place, did not see the two boys at first, but cast a longing look at Jason. Then, however, resenting the entrance of the children, she covered her eyes with a veil and averted her white cheek.

Your husband tried to allay the maiden's angry resentment, saying, "You must not hate your friends. Won't you calm your temper, and turn your head this way? You must consider your husband's friends your own. Won't you accept the gifts and ask your father to recall their sentence of exile, for my sake?" Well, when she saw the finery, she could not refrain, but promised her husband everything, and before Jason and your children were far away from the house she took the elaborate robes and put them on her. She placed the golden diadem on her clustering locks and began to arrange her coiffure before a shining mirror, smiling at her body's lifeless reflection. Then she arose from her seat and walked through the rooms, stepping delicately with her fair white feet, overjoyed with the gifts. Time and time again, standing erect, she gazed with all her eyes at her ankles.

But then ensued a fearful sight to see. Her color changed, she staggered, and ran back, her limbs all atremble, and only escaped falling by sinking upon her chair. An old attendant, thinking, I suppose, it was a panic fit, or something else of divine sending, raised a cry of prayer, until she saw a white froth drooling from her mouth, saw her rolling up the pupils of her eyes, and all the blood leaving her skin. Then, instead of a cry of prayer, she let out a scream of lamentation. Immediately one maid rushed to Creon's palace, another to the new bridegroom, to tell of the bride's misfortune. From end to end, the house echoed to hurrying steps. A quick walker, stepping out well, would have reached the end of the two-hundred-yard track, when the poor girl, lying there quiet, with closed eyes, gave a fearful groan and began to come to. A double plague assailed her. The golden diadem on her head emitted a strange flow of devouring fire, while the fine robes, the gifts of your children, were eating up the poor girl's white flesh. All aflame, she jumped from her seat and fled, shaking her head and hair this way and that, trying to throw off the crown. But the golden band held firmly, and after she had shaken her hair more violently, the fire began to blaze twice as fiercely. Overcome by the

agony she fell on the ground, and none but her father could have recognized her. The position of her eyes could not be distinguished, nor the beauty of her face. The blood, clotted with fire, dripped from the crown of her head, and the flesh melted from her bones, like resin from a pine tree, as the poisons ate their unseen way. It was a fearful sight. All were afraid to touch the corpse, taught by what had happened to her.

But her father, unlucky man, rushed suddenly into the room, not knowing what had happened, and threw himself on the body. At once he groaned, and embracing his daughter's form he kissed it and cried, "My poor, poor child, what god has destroyed you so shamefully? Who is it deprives this aged tomb of his only child? Ah! let me join you in death, my child." Then, when he ceased his weeping and lamentation and sought to lift his aged frame upright, he stuck to the fine robes, like ivy to a laurel bush. His struggles were horrible. He would try to free a leg, but the girl's body stuck to his. And if he pulled violently, he tore his shrunken flesh off his bones. At last his life went out; doomed, he gave up the ghost. Side by side lie the two bodies, daughter and old father. Who would not weep at such a calamity?

It seems to me . . . I need not speak of what's in store for you; you yourself will see how well the punishment fits the crime . . . it's not the first time the thought has come, that the life of man is a shadow. I might assert with confidence that the mortals who pass for philosophers and subtle reasoners are most to be condemned. No mortal man has lasting happiness. When the tide of fortune flows his way, one man may have more prosperity than another, but happiness never.

(Exit.)
LEADER: It seems that this day Fate is visiting his sins on Jason. Unfortunate daughter of Creon, we pity your calamity. The love of Jason has carried you through the gates of death.

MEDEA: My friends, I am resolved to act, and act quickly to slay the children and depart from the land. I can delay no longer, or my children will fall into the murderous hands of those that love them less than I do. In any case they must die. And if they must, I shall slay them, who gave them birth. Now, my heart, steel yourself. Why do we still hold back? The deed is terrible, but necessary.

Come, my unhappy hand, seize the sword, seize it. Before you is a course of misery, lifelong misery; on now to the starting post. No flinching now, no thinking of the children, the darling children, that call you mother. This day, this one short day, forget your children. You have all the future to mourn for them. Aye, to mourn. Though you mean to kill them, at least you loved them. Oh! I am a most unhappy woman.

(Exit.)

CHORUS: O Earth, O glorious radiance of the Sun, look and behold the accursed woman. Stop her before she lays her bloody, murderous hands on her children. Sprung are they from your golden race, O Sun, and it is a fearful thing that the blood of a god should be spilt by mortals. Nay, stop her, skyborn light, prevent her. Deliver the house from the misery of slaughter, and the curse of the unforgetting dead.

Gone, gone for nothing, are your maternal pangs. For nothing did you bear these lovely boys, O woman, who made the inhospitable passage through the gray Clashing Rocks! Why let your spleen poison your heart? Why this murderlust, where love was? On the man that spills the blood of kinsmen the curse of heaven descends. Go where he may, it rings ever in his ears, bringing sorrows and tribulations on his house.

(The CHILDREN are heard within.)

Listen, listen. It is the cry of the children. O cruel, ill-starred woman.

ONE OF THE CHILDREN (within): Ah me! What am I to do?

Where can I escape my mother's murderous hands?

THE OTHER (within): I know not, my dear, dear brother. She is killing us.

CHORUS: Should we break in? Yes! I will save them from death.

ONE OF THE CHILDREN (within): Do, for god's sake. Save us. We need your help.

THE OTHER (within): Yes, we are already in the toils of the sword.

CHORUS: Heartless woman! Are you made of stone or steel? Will you slaughter the children, your own seed, slaughter them with your own hands?

Only one woman, only one in the history of the world, laid murderous hands on her children, Ino whom the gods made mad, driven from home to a life of wandering by the

wife of Zeus. Hapless girl, bent on that foul slaughter, she stepped over a precipice by the shore and fell headlong into the sea, killing herself and her two children together. What crime, more horrible still, may yet come to pass? O the loves of women, fraught with sorrow, how many ills ere now have you brought on mortals!

(Enter JASON, attended.)

JASON: You women there, standing in front of this house, is Medea still within, who wrought these dreadful deeds? Or has she made her escape? I tell you, she had better hide under the earth or take herself off on wings to the recesses of the sky, unless she wishes to give satisfaction to the family of the king. Does she think she can slay the rulers of the land and get safely away from this house? But I am not so anxious about her as I am about the children. The victims of her crimes will attend to her. It's my own children I am here to save, in case the relatives of the king do them some injury, in revenge for the foul murders their mother has committed.

LEADER: Jason, poor Jason, you do not know the sum of your sorrows, or you would not have said these words.

JASON: What is it? She does not want to kill me too, does she?

LEADER: Your children are dead, slain by their mother's hand.

JASON: For pity's sake, what do you mean? You have slain me, woman.

LEADER: Your children are dead, make no mistake.

JASON: Why, where did she slay them? Indoors or out here?

LEADER: Open the doors and you will see their bodies.

JASON: Quick, servants, loosen the bolts, undo the fastenings.

Let me see the double horror, the dead bodies of my children, and the woman who . . . oh! let me punish her.

(MEDEA appears aloft in a chariot drawn by winged dragons. She has the bodies of the CHILDREN.)

MEDEA: What's all this talk of battering and unbarring?

Are you searching for the bodies and me who did the deed? Spare yourself the trouble. If you have anything to ask of me, speak if you will, but never shall you lay a hand on me. I have a magic chariot, given me by the Sun, my father's father, to protect me against my enemies.

JASON: You abominable thing! You most loathsomest woman, to the gods and me and all mankind. You had the heart

to take the sword to your children, you their mother, leaving me childless. And you still behold the earth and the sun, you who have done this deed, you who have perpetrated this abominable outrage. My curses on you! At last I have come to my senses, the senses I lost when I brought you from your barbarian home and country to a home in Greece, an evil plague, treacherous alike to your father and the land that reared you. There is a fiend in you, whom the gods have launched against me. In your own home you had already slain your brother when you came aboard the *Argo*, that lovely ship. Such was your beginning. Then you married me and bore me children, whom you have now destroyed because I left your bed. No Greek woman would ever have done such a deed. Yet I saw fit to marry you, rather than any woman of Greece, a wife to hate me and destroy me, not a woman at all, but a tigress, with a disposition more savage than Tuscan Scylla. But why all this? Ten thousand reproaches could not sting you; your impudence is too engrained. The devil take you, shameless, abominable murderess of your children. I must bemoan my fate; no joy shall I have of my new marriage, and I shall never see alive the children I begot and reared and lost.

MEDEA: I might have made an elaborate rebuttal of the speech you have made, but Zeus the Father knows what you received at my hands and what you have done. You could not hope, nor your princess either, to scorn my love, make a fool of me, and live happily ever after. Nor was Creon, the matchmaker, to drive me out of the country with impunity. Go ahead, then. Call me tigress if you like, or Scylla that haunts the Tuscan coast. I don't mind, now I have got properly under your skin.

JASON: You too are suffering. You have your share of the sorrow.

MEDEA: True, but it's worth the grief, since you cannot scoff.

JASON: O children, what a wicked mother you got!

MEDEA: O children, your father's sins have caused your death.

JASON: Yet it was not *my* hand that slew them.

MEDEA: No, it was your lust, and your new marriage.

JASON: Because your love was scorned you actually thought it right to murder.

MEDEA: Do you think a woman considers that a small injury?

JASON: Good women do. But you are wholly vicious.

MEDEA: The children here are dead. That will sting you.

JASON: No! they live to bring fierce curses on your head.

MEDEA: The gods know who began it all.

JASON: They know, indeed, they know the abominable wickedness of your heart.

MEDEA: Hate me then. I despise your bitter words.

JASON: And I yours. But it is easy for us to be quit of each other.

MEDEA: How, pray? Certainly I am willing.

JASON: Allow me to bury these bodies and lament them.

MEDEA: Certainly not. I shall bury them with my own hands, taking them to the sanctuary of Hera of the Cape, where no enemy may violate their tombs and do them insult. Here in the land of Sisyphus we shall establish a solemn festival, and appoint rites for the future to expiate their impious murder. I myself shall go to the land of Erechtheus, to live with Aegeus, the son of Pandion. You, as is proper, will die the death you deserve, struck on the head by a fragment of the *Argo*, now you have seen the bitter fruits of your new marriage.

JASON: May you be slain by the curse of your children, and Justice that avenges murder!

MEDEA: What god or power above will listen to you, the breaker of oaths, the treacherous guest?

JASON: Oh! abominable slayer of children.

MEDEA: Get along to the palace and bury your wife.

JASON: I go, bereft of my two sons.

MEDEA: You have nothing yet to bemoan. Wait till you are old.

JASON: My dear, dear children!

MEDEA: Yes, dear to their mother, not to you.

JASON: And yet you slew them.

MEDEA: I did, to hurt you.

JASON: Alas! my grief! I long to kiss their dear mouths.

MEDEA: Now you speak to them, now you greet them, but in the past you spurned them.

JASON: For god's sake, let me touch my children's soft skin.

MEDEA: No! You have gambled and lost.

JASON: O Zeus, do you hear how I am repelled, how I am wronged by this foul tigress, that slew her own children?

But such lament as I may and can make, I hereby make. I call upon the gods. I invoke the powers above to bear me witness that you slew my children and now prevent me from embracing their bodies and giving them burial. Would that I had never begotten them, to live to see them slain at your hands.

CHORUS: Zeus on Olympus hath a wide stewardship. Many things beyond expectation do the gods fulfill. That which was expected has not been accomplished; for that which was unexpected has god found the way. Such was the end of this story.

(*Exeunt.*)