

AIGEUS: Until I return again to my hearth and house.  
 MEDEA: And for what purpose have you journeyed to this land?  
 AIGEUS: There is a man called Pittheus, king of Troezen.<sup>1</sup>  
 MEDEA: A son of Pelops, they say, a most righteous man.  
 AIGEUS: With him I wish to discuss the reply of the god.  
 MEDEA: Yes. He is wise and experienced in such matters.  
 AIGEUS: And to me also the dearest of all my spear-friends.<sup>2</sup>  
 MEDEA: Well, I hope you have good luck, and achieve your will.  
 AIGEUS: But why this downcast eye of yours, and this pale cheek?  
 MEDEA: O Aigeus, my husband has been the worst of all to me.  
 AIGEUS: What do you mean? Say clearly what has caused this grief.  
 MEDEA: Jason wrongs me, though I have never injured him.  
 AIGEUS: What has he done? Tell me about it in clearer words.  
 MEDEA: He has taken a wife to his house, supplanting me.  
 AIGEUS: Surely he would not dare to do a thing like that.  
 MEDEA: Be sure he has. Once dear, I now am slighted by him.  
 AIGEUS: Did he fall in love? Or is he tired of your love?  
 MEDEA: He was greatly in love, this traitor to his friends.  
 AIGEUS: Then let him go, if, as you say, he is so bad.  
 MEDEA: A passionate love,—for an alliance with the king.  
 AIGEUS: And who gave him his wife? Tell me the rest of it.  
 MEDEA: It was Kreon, he who rules this land of Corinth.  
 AIGEUS: Indeed, Medea, your grief was understandable.  
 MEDEA: I am ruined. And there is more to come: I am banished.  
 AIGEUS: Banished? By whom? Here you tell me of a new wrong.  
 MEDEA: Kreon drives me an exile from the land of Corinth.  
 AIGEUS: Does Jason consent? I cannot approve of this.  
 MEDEA: He pretends not to, but he will put up with it.  
     Ah, Aigeus, I beg and beseech you, by your beard  
     And by your knees I am making myself your suppliant,  
     Have pity on me, have pity on your poor friend,  
     And do not let me go into exile desolate,  
     But receive me in your land and at your very hearth.  
     So may your love, with God's help, lead to the bearing  
     Of children, and so may you yourself die happy.  
     You do not know what a chance you have come on here.  
     I will end your childlessness, and I will make you able  
     To beget children. The drugs I know can do this.  
 AIGEUS: For many reasons, woman, I am anxious to do  
     This favor for you. First, for the sake of the gods,  
     And then for the birth of children which you promise,  
     For in that respect I am entirely at my wits' end.  
     But this is my position: if you reach my land,  
     I, being in my rights, will try to befriend you.  
     But this much I must warn you of beforehand:  
     I shall not agree to take you out of this country;

1. In the Peloponnese. Pittheus was Aigeus' father-in-law. Corinth was on the way from Delphi to Troezen. 2. Allies in war, companions in fighting.

But if you by yourself can reach my house, then you  
 Shall stay there safely. To none will I give you up.  
 But from this land you must make your escape yourself,  
 For I do not wish to incur blame from my friends.  
 MEDEA: It shall be so. But, if I might have a pledge from you  
 For this, then I would have from you all I desire. 715  
 AIGEUS: Do you not trust me? What is it rankles with you?  
 MEDEA: I trust you, yes. But the house of Pelias hates me,  
 And so does Kreon. If you are bound by this oath,  
 When they try to drag me from your land, you will not  
 Abandon me; but if our pact is only words, 720  
 With no oath to the gods, you will be lightly armed,  
 Unable to resist their summons. I am weak,  
 While they have wealth to help them and a royal house.  
 AIGEUS: You show much foresight for such negotiations. 725  
 Well, if you will have it so, I will not refuse.  
 For, both on my side this will be the safest way  
 To have some excuse to put forward to your enemies,  
 And for you it is more certain. You may name the gods.  
 MEDEA: Swear by the plain of Earth, and Helios, father 730  
 Of my father, and name together all the gods. . . .  
 AIGEUS: That I will act or not act in what way? Speak.  
 MEDEA: That you yourself will never cast me from your land,  
 Nor, if any of my enemies should demand me,  
 Will you, in your life, willingly hand me over. 735  
 AIGEUS: I swear by the Earth, by the holy light of Helios,  
 By all the gods, I will abide by this you say.  
 MEDEA: Enough. And, if you fail, what shall happen to you?  
 AIGEUS: What comes to those who have no regard for heaven.  
 MEDEA: Go on your way. Farewell. For I am satisfied, 740  
 And I will reach your city as soon as I can,  
 Having done the deed I have to do and gained my end.  
     [AIGEUS goes out.]  
 CHORUS: May Hermes, god of travelers,  
 Escort you, Aigeus, to your home!  
 And may you have the things you wish 745  
 So eagerly; for you  
 Appear to me to be a generous man.  
 MEDEA: God, and God's daughter, justice, and light of Helios!  
 Now, friends, has come the time of my triumph over  
 My enemies, and now my foot is on the road. 750  
 Now I am confident they will pay the penalty.  
 For this man, Aigeus, has been like a harbor to me  
 In all my plans just where I was most distressed.  
 To him I can fasten the cable of my safety  
 When I have reached the town and fortress of Pallas.<sup>3</sup> 755  
 And now I shall tell to you the whole of my plan.

3. Athens, city of Pallas Athene.



Listen to these words that are not spoken idly.  
 I shall send one of my servants to find Jason  
 And request him to come once more into my sight.  
 And when he comes, the words I'll say will be soft ones.  
 I'll say that I agree with him, that I approve  
 The royal wedding he has made, betraying me.  
 I'll say it was profitable, an excellent idea.  
 But I shall beg that my children may remain here:  
 Not that I would leave in a country that hates me  
 Children of mine to feel their enemies' insults,  
 But that by a trick I may kill the king's daughter.  
 For I will send the children with gifts in their hands  
 To carry to the bride, so as not to be banished,—  
 A finely woven dress and a golden diadem.  
 And if she takes them and wears them upon her skin  
 She and all who touch the girl will die in agony;  
 Such poison will I lay upon the gifts I send.  
 But there, however, I must leave that account paid.  
 I weep to think of what a deed I have to do  
 Next after that; for I shall kill my own children.  
 My children, there is none who can give them safety.  
 And when I have ruined the whole of Jason's house,  
 I shall leave the land and flee from the murder of my  
 Dear children, and I shall have done a dreadful deed.  
 For it is not bearable to be mocked by enemies.  
 So it must happen. What profit have I in life?  
 I have no land, no home, no refuge from my pain.  
 My mistake was made the time I left behind me  
 My father's house, and trusted the words of a Greek,  
 Who, with heaven's help, will pay me the price for that.  
 For those children he had from me he will never  
 See alive again, nor will he on his new bride  
 Beget another child, for she is to be forced  
 To die a most terrible death by these my poisons.  
 Let no one think me a weak one, feeble-spirited,  
 A stay-at-home, but rather just the opposite,  
 One who can hurt my enemies and help my friends;  
 For the lives of such persons are most remembered.

CHORUS: Since you have shared the knowledge of your plan with us,  
 I both wish to help you and support the normal  
 Ways of mankind, and tell you not to do this thing.

MEDEA: I can do no other thing. It is understandable  
 For you to speak thus. You have not suffered as I have.

CHORUS: But can you have the heart to kill your flesh and blood?

MEDEA: Yes, for this is the best way to wound my husband.

CHORUS: And you too. Of women you will be most unhappy.

MEDEA: So it must be. No compromise is possible.

[*She turns to the NURSE.*]

Go, you, at once, and tell Jason to come to me.

You I employ on all affairs of greatest trust.  
 Say nothing of these decisions which I have made,  
 If you love your mistress, if you were born a woman.

CHORUS: From of old the children of Erechtheus<sup>4</sup> are  
 Splendid, the sons of blessed gods. They dwell  
 In Athens' holy and unconquered land,<sup>5</sup>  
 Where famous Wisdom feeds them and they pass gaily  
 Always through that most brilliant air where once, they say,  
 That golden Harmony gave birth to the nine  
 Pure Muses of Pieria.<sup>6</sup>

And beside the sweet flow of Cephisos' stream,  
 Where Cypris<sup>7</sup> sailed, they say, to draw the water,  
 And mild soft breezes breathed along her path,  
 And on her hair were flung the sweet-smelling garlands  
 Of flowers of roses by the Lovers, the companions  
 Of Wisdom, her escort, the helpers of men  
 In every kind of excellence.

How then can these holy rivers  
 Or this holy land love you,  
 Or the city find you a home,  
 You, who will kill your children,  
 You, not pure with the rest?  
 O think of the blow at your children  
 And think of the blood that you shed.  
 O, over and over I beg you,  
 By your knees I beg you do not  
 Be the murderess of your babes!

O where will you find the courage  
 Or the skill of hand and heart,  
 When you set yourself to attempt  
 A deed so dreadful to do?  
 How, when you look upon them,  
 Can you tearlessly hold the decision  
 For murder? You will not be able,  
 When your children fall down and implore you,  
 You will not be able to dip  
 Steadfast your hand in their blood.

[*Enter JASON with attendants.*]

JASON: I have come at your request. Indeed, although you are  
 Bitter against me, this you shall have: I will listen  
 To what new thing you want, woman, to get from me.

MEDEA: Jason, I beg you to be forgiving towards me

4. An early king of Athens, a son of Hephaestus. 5. It was the Athenians' boast that their descent from the original settlers was uninterrupted by an invasion. There is a topical reference here, for the play was produced in 431 B.C., in a time of imminent war. 6. A fountain in Boeotia where the Muses were supposed to live. The sentence means that the fortunate balance (*Harmony*) of the elements and the genius of the people produced the cultivation of the arts (*the nine Pure Muses*). 7. The goddess of love and, therefore, of the principle of fertility. Cephisos is an Athenian river.



For what I said. It is natural for you to bear with  
 My temper, since we have had much love together.  
 I have talked with myself about this and I have  
 Reproached myself. "Fool" I said, "why am I so mad?  
 Why am I set against those who have planned wisely?  
 Why make myself an enemy of the authorities  
 And of my husband, who does the best thing for me  
 By marrying royalty and having children who  
 Will be as brothers to my own? What is wrong with me?  
 Let me give up anger, for the gods are kind to me.  
 Have I not children, and do I not know that we  
 In exile from our country must be short of friends?"  
 When I considered this I saw that I had shown  
 Great lack of sense, and that my anger was foolish.  
 Now I agree with you. I think that you are wise  
 In having this other wife as well as me, and I  
 Was mad. I should have helped you in these plans of yours,  
 Have joined in the wedding, stood by the marriage bed,  
 Have taken pleasure in attendance on your bride.  
 But we women are what we are,—perhaps a little  
 Worthless; and you men must not be like us in this,  
 Nor be foolish in return when we are foolish.  
 Now I give in, and admit that then I was wrong.  
 I have come to a better understanding now.  
*[She turns towards the house.]*  
 Children, come here, my children, come outdoors to us!  
 Welcome your father with me, and say goodbye to him,  
 And with your mother, who just now was his enemy,  
 Join again in making friends with him who loves us.  
*[Enter the CHILDREN, attended by the TUTOR.]*  
 We have made peace, and all our anger is over.  
 Take hold of his right hand,—O God, I am thinking  
 Of something which may happen in the secret future.  
 O children, will you just so, after a long life,  
 Hold out your loving arms at the grave? O children,  
 How ready to cry I am, how full of foreboding!  
 I am ending at last this quarrel with your father,  
 And, look, my soft eyes have suddenly filled with tears.  
 CHORUS: And the pale tears have started also in my eyes.  
 O may the trouble not grow worse than now it is!  
 JASON: I approve of what you say. And I cannot blame you  
 Even for what you said before. It is natural  
 For a woman to be wild with her husband when he  
 Goes in for secret love. But now your mind has turned  
 To better reasoning. In the end you have come to  
 The right decision, like the clever woman you are.  
 And of you, children, your father is taking care.  
 He has made, with God's help, ample provision for you.  
 For I think that a time will come when you will be

The leading people in Corinth with your brothers.  
 You must grow up. As to the future, your father  
 And those of the gods who love him will deal with that.  
 I want to see you, when you have become young men,  
 Healthy and strong, better men than my enemies.  
 Medea, why are your eyes all wet with pale tears?  
 Why is your cheek so white and turned away from me?  
 Are not these words of mine pleasing for you to hear?  
 MEDEA: It is nothing. I was thinking about these children.  
 JASON: You must be cheerful. I shall look after them well.  
 MEDEA: I will be. It is not that I distrust your words,  
 But a woman is a frail thing, prone to crying.  
 JASON: But why then should you grieve so much for these children?  
 MEDEA: I am their mother. When you prayed that they might live  
 I felt unhappy to think that these things will be.  
 But come, I have said something of the things I meant  
 To say to you, and now I will tell you the rest.  
 Since it is the king's will to banish me from here,—  
 And for me too I know that this is the best thing,  
 Not to be in your way by living here or in  
 The king's way, since they think me ill-disposed to them,—  
 I then am going into exile from this land;  
 But do you, so that you may have the care of them,  
 Beg Kreon that the children may not be banished.  
 JASON: I doubt if I'll succeed, but still I'll attempt it.  
 MEDEA: Then you must tell your wife to beg from her father  
 That the children may be reprieved from banishment.  
 JASON: I will, and with her I shall certainly succeed.  
 MEDEA: If she is like the rest of us women, you will.  
 And I too will take a hand with you in this business,  
 For I will send her some gifts which are far fairer,  
 I am sure of it, than those which now are in fashion,  
 A finely-woven dress and a golden diadem,  
 And the children shall present them. Quick, let one of you  
 Servants bring here to me that beautiful dress.  
*[One of her attendants goes into the house.]*  
 She will be happy not in one way, but in a hundred,  
 Having so fine a man as you to share her bed,  
 And with this beautiful dress which Helios of old,  
 My father's father, bestowed on his descendants.  
*[Enter attendant carrying the poisoned dress and diadem.]*  
 There, children, take these wedding presents in your hands.  
 Take them to the royal princess, the happy bride,  
 And give them to her. She will not think little of them.  
 JASON: No, don't be foolish, and empty your hands of these.  
 Do you think the palace is short of dresses to wear?  
 Do you think there is no gold there? Keep them, don't give them  
 Away. If my wife considers me of any value,  
 She will think more of me than money, I am sure of it.



MEDEA: No, let me have my way. They say the gods themselves  
 Are moved by gifts, and gold does more with men than words;  
 Hers is the luck, her fortune that which god blesses;  
 She is young and a princess; but for my children's reprieve  
 I would give my very life, and not gold only.  
 Go children, go together to that rich palace,  
 Be suppliants to the new wife of your father,  
 My lady, beg her not to let you be banished.  
 And give her the dress,—for this is of great importance,  
 That she should take the gift into her hand from yours.  
 Go, quick as you can. And bring your mother good news  
 By your success of those things which she longs to gain.

[JASON goes out with his attendants, followed by the TUTOR and the  
 CHILDREN carrying the poisoned gifts.]

CHORUS: Now there is no hope left for the children's lives.  
 Now there is none. They are walking already to murder.  
 The bride, poor bride, will accept the curse of the gold,  
 Will accept the bright diadem.  
 Around her yellow hair she will set that dress  
 Of death with her own hands.  
 The grace and the perfume and glow of the golden robe  
 Will charm her to put them upon her and wear the wreath,  
 And now her wedding will be with the dead below,  
 Into such a trap she will fall,  
 Poor thing, into such a fate of death and never  
 Escape from under that curse.  
 You too, O wretched bridegroom, making your match with kings,  
 You do not see that you bring  
 Destruction on your children and on her,  
 Your wife, a fearful death.  
 Poor soul, what a fall is yours!

In your grief too I weep, mother of little children,  
 You who will murder your own,  
 In vengeance for the loss of married love  
 Which Jason has betrayed  
 As he lives with another wife.

[Enter the TUTOR with the CHILDREN.]

TUTOR: Mistress, I tell you that these children are reprieved,  
 And the royal bride has been pleased to take in her hands  
 Your gifts. In that quarter the children are secure.  
 But come,  
 Why do you stand confused when you are fortunate?  
 Why have you turned round with your cheek away from me?  
 Are not these words of mine pleasing for you to hear?

MEDEA: Oh! I am lost!

TUTOR: That word is not in harmony with my tidings.

MEDEA: I am lost, I am lost!

TUTOR: Am I in ignorance telling you

Of some disaster, and not the good news I thought?

MEDEA: You have told what you have told. I do not blame you.

TUTOR: Why then this downcast eye, and this weeping of tears?

MEDEA: Oh, I am forced to weep, old man. The gods and I,

I in a kind of madness have contrived all this.

TUTOR: Courage! You too will be brought home by your children.

MEDEA: Ah, before that happens I shall bring others home.

TUTOR: Others before you have been parted from their children.

Mortals must bear in resignation their ill luck.

MEDEA: That is what I shall do. But go inside the house,

And do for the children your usual daily work.

[The TUTOR goes into the house. MEDEA turns to her CHILDREN.]

O children, O my children, you have a city,

You have a home, and you can leave me behind you,

And without your mother you may live there for ever.

But I am going in exile to another land

Before I have seen you happy and taken pleasure in you,

Before I have dressed your brides and made your marriage beds

And held up the torch at the ceremony of wedding.

Oh, what a wretch I am in this my self-willed thought!

What was the purpose, children, for which I reared you?

For all my travail and wearing myself away?

They were sterile, those pains I had in the bearing of you.

O surely once the hopes in you I had, poor me,

Were high ones: you would look after me in old age,

And when I died would deck me well with your own hands;

A thing which all would have done. O but now it is gone,

That lovely thought. For, once I am left without you,

Sad will be the life I'll lead and sorrowful for me.

And you will never see your mother again with

Your dear eyes, gone to another mode of living.

Why, children, do you look upon me with your eyes?

Why do you smile so sweetly that last smile of all?

Oh, Oh, what can I do? My spirit has gone from me,

Friends, when I saw that bright look in the children's eyes.

I cannot bear to do it. I renounce my plans

I had before. I'll take my children away from

This land. Why should I hurt their father with the pain

They feel, and suffer twice as much of pain myself?

No, no, I will not do it. I renounce my plans.

Ah, what is wrong with me? Do I want to let go

My enemies unhurt and be laughed at for it?

I must face this thing. Oh, but what a weak woman

Even to admit to my mind these soft arguments.

Children, go into the house. And he whom law forbids

To stand in attendance at my sacrifices,

Let him see to it. I shall not mar my handiwork.

Oh! Oh!

Do not, O my heart, you must not do these things!



Poor heart, let them go, have pity upon the children.  
 If they live with you in Athens they will cheer you.  
 Not! By Hell's avenging furies it shall not be, —  
 This shall never be, that I should suffer my children  
 To be the prey of my enemies' insolence.  
 Every way is it fixed. The bride will not escape.  
 No, the diadem is now upon her head, and she,  
 The royal princess, is dying in the dress, I know it.  
 But, — for it is the most dreadful of roads for me  
 To tread, and them I shall send on a more dreadful still —  
 I wish to speak to the children.

[*She calls the CHILDREN to her.*]

Come, children, give  
 Me your hands, give your mother your hands to kiss them.  
 O the dear hands, and O how dear are these lips to me,  
 And the generous eyes and the bearing of my children!  
 I wish you happiness, but not here in this world.  
 What is here your father took. O how good to hold you!  
 How delicate the skin, how sweet the breath of children!  
 Go, go! I am no longer able, no longer  
 To look upon you. I am overcome by sorrow.

[*The CHILDREN go into the house.*]

I know indeed what evil I intend to do,  
 But stronger than all my afterthoughts is my fury,  
 Fury that brings upon mortals the greatest evils.

[*She goes out to the right, towards the royal palace.*]

CHORUS: Often before

I have gone through more subtle reasons,  
 And have come upon questionings greater  
 Than a woman should strive to search out.  
 But we too have a goddess to help us  
 And accompany us into wisdom.  
 Not all of us. Still you will find  
 Among many women a few,  
 And our sex is not without learning.  
 This I say, that those who have never  
 Had children, who know nothing of it,  
 In happiness have the advantage  
 Over those who are parents.  
 The childless, who never discover  
 Whether children turn out as a good thing  
 Or as something to cause pain, are spared  
 Many troubles in lacking this knowledge.  
 And those who have in their homes  
 The sweet presence of children, I see that their lives  
 Are all wasted away by their worries.  
 First they must think how to bring them up well and  
 How to leave them something to live on.  
 And then after this whether all their toil

Is for those who will turn out good or bad,  
 Is still an unanswered question.  
 And of one more trouble, the last of all,  
 That is common to mortals I tell.  
 For suppose you have found them enough for their living,  
 Suppose that the children have grown into youth  
 And have turned out good, still, if God so wills it,  
 Death will away with your children's bodies,  
 And carry them off into Hades.  
 What is our profit, then, that for the sake of  
 Children the gods should pile upon mortals  
 After all else  
 This most terrible grief of all?

[*Enter MEDEA, from the spectators' right.*]

MEDEA: Friends, I can tell you that for long I have waited  
 For the event. I stare towards the place from where  
 The news will come. And now, see one of Jason's servants  
 Is on his way here, and that labored breath of his  
 Shows he has tidings for us, and evil tidings.

[*Enter, also from the right, the MESSENGER.*]

MESSENGER: Medea, you who have done such a dreadful thing,  
 So outrageous, run for your life, take what you can,  
 A ship to bear you hence or chariot on land.

MEDEA: And what is the reason deserves such flight as this?

MESSENGER: She is dead, only just now, the royal princess,  
 And Kreon dead too, her father, by your poisons.

MEDEA: The finest words you have spoken. Now and hereafter  
 I shall count you among my benefactors and friends.

MESSENGER: What! Are you right in the mind? Are you not mad,  
 Woman? The house of the king is outraged by you.  
 Do you enjoy it? Not afraid of such doings?

MEDEA: To what you say I on my side have something too  
 To say in answer. Do not be in a hurry, friend,  
 But speak. How did they die? You will delight me twice  
 As much again if you say they died in agony.

MESSENGER: When those two children, born of you, had entered in,  
 Their father with them, and passed into the bride's house,  
 We were pleased, we slaves who were distressed by your wrongs.  
 All through the house we were talking of but one thing,  
 How you and your husband had made up your quarrel.  
 Some kissed the children's hands and some their yellow hair,  
 And I myself was so full of my joy that I  
 Followed the children into the women's quarters.  
 Our mistress, whom we honor now instead of you,  
 Before she noticed that your two children were there,  
 Was keeping her eye fixed eagerly on Jason.  
 Afterwards however she covered up her eyes,  
 Her cheek paled and she turned herself away from him,  
 So disgusted was she at the children's coming there.



But your husband tried to end the girl's bad temper,  
 And said "You must not look unkindly on your friends.  
 Cease to be angry. Turn your head to me again.  
 Have as your friends the same ones as your husband has.  
 And take these gifts, and beg your father to reprieve  
 These children from their exile. Do it for my sake."  
 She, when she saw the dress, could not restrain herself.  
 She agreed with all her husband said, and before  
 He and the children had gone far from the palace,  
 She took the gorgeous robe and dressed herself in it,  
 And put the golden crown around her curly locks,  
 And arranged the set of the hair in a shining mirror,  
 And smiled at the lifeless image of herself in it.  
 Then she rose from her chair and walked about the room,  
 With her gleaming feet stepping most soft and delicate,  
 All overjoyed with the present. Often and often  
 She would stretch her foot out straight and look along it.  
 But after that it was a fearful thing to see.  
 The color of her face changed, and she staggered back,  
 She ran, and her legs trembled, and she only just  
 Managed to reach a chair without falling flat down.  
 An aged woman servant who, I take it, thought  
 This was some seizure of Pan<sup>8</sup> or another god,  
 Cried out "God bless us," but that was before she saw  
 The white foam breaking through her lips and her rolling  
 The pupils of her eyes and her face all bloodless.  
 Then she raised a different cry from that "God bless us,"  
 A huge shriek, and the women ran, one to the king,  
 One to the newly wedded husband to tell him  
 What had happened to his bride; and with frequent sound  
 The whole of the palace rang as they went running.  
 One walking quickly round the course of a race-track  
 Would now have turned the bend and be close to the goal,  
 When she, poor girl, opened her shut and speechless eye,  
 And with a terrible groan she came to herself.  
 For a two-fold pain was moving up against her.  
 The wreath of gold that was resting around her head  
 Let forth a fearful stream of all-devouring fire,  
 And the finely-woven dress your children gave to her,  
 Was fastening on the unhappy girl's fine flesh.  
 She leapt up from the chair, and all on fire she ran,  
 Shaking her hair now this way and now that, trying  
 To hurl the diadem away; but fixedly  
 The gold preserved its grip, and, when she shook her hair,  
 Then more and twice as fiercely the fire blazed out.  
 Till, beaten by her fate, she fell down to the ground,

8. As the god of wild nature he was supposed to be the source of the sudden, apparently causeless terror that solitude in wild surroundings may produce and hence of all kinds of sudden madness (compare the English word *panic*).

Hard to be recognized except by a parent.  
 Neither the setting of her eyes was plain to see,  
 Nor the shapeliness of her face. From the top of  
 Her head there oozed out blood and fire mixed together.  
 Like the drops on pine-bark, so the flesh from her bones  
 Dropped away, torn by the hidden fang of the poison.  
 It was a fearful sight; and terror held us all  
 From touching the corpse. We had learned from what had happened.  
 But her wretched father, knowing nothing of the event,  
 Came suddenly to the house, and fell upon the corpse,  
 And at once cried out and folded his arms about her,  
 And kissed her and spoke to her, saying, "O my poor child,  
 What heavenly power has so shamefully destroyed you?  
 And who has set me here like an ancient sepulchre,  
 Deprived of you? O let me die with you, my child!"  
 And when he had made an end of his wailing and crying,  
 Then the old man wished to raise himself to his feet;  
 But, as the ivy clings to the twigs of the laurel,  
 So he stuck to the fine dress, and he struggled fearfully.  
 For he was trying to lift himself to his knee,  
 And she was pulling him down, and when he tugged hard  
 He would be ripping his aged flesh from his bones.  
 At last his life was quenched and the unhappy man  
 Gave up the ghost, no longer could hold up his head.  
 There they lie close, the daughter and the old father,  
 Dead bodies, an event he prayed for in his tears.  
 As for your interests, I will say nothing of them,  
 For you will find your own escape from punishment.  
 Our human life I think and have thought a shadow,  
 And I do not fear to say that those who are held  
 Wise amongst men and who search the reasons of things  
 Are those who bring the most sorrow on themselves.  
 For of mortals there is no one who is happy.  
 If wealth flows in upon one, one may be perhaps  
 Luckier than one's neighbor, but still not happy.

[Exit.]

CHORUS: Heaven, it seems, on this day has fastened many  
 Evils on Jason, and Jason has deserved them.  
 Poor girl, the daughter of Kreon, how I pity you  
 And your misfortunes, you who have gone quite away  
 To the house of Hades because of marrying Jason.

MEDEA: Women, my task is fixed: as quickly as I may  
 To kill my children, and start away from this land,  
 And not, by wasting time, to suffer my children  
 To be slain by another hand less kindly to them.  
 Force every way will have it they must die, and since  
 This must be so, then I, their mother, shall kill them.  
 O arm yourself in steel, my heart! Do not hang back  
 From doing this fearful and necessary wrong.



O come, my hand, poor wretched hand, and take the sword,  
 Take it, step forward to this bitter starting point,  
 And do not be a coward, do not think of them,  
 How sweet they are, and how you are their mother. Just for  
 This one short day be forgetful of your children,  
 Afterwards weep; for even though you will kill them,  
 They were very dear, — O, I am an unhappy woman!  
 [*With a cry she rushes into the house.*]

CHORUS: O Earth, and the far shining  
 Ray of the sun, look down, look down upon  
 This poor lost woman, look, before she raises  
 The hand of murder against her flesh and blood.  
 Yours was the golden birth from which  
 She sprang, and now I fear divine  
 Blood may be shed by men.  
 O heavenly light, hold back her hand,  
 Check her, and drive from out the house  
 The bloody Fury raised by fiends of Hell.

Vain waste, your care of children;  
 Was it in vain you bore the babes you loved,  
 After you passed the inhospitable strait  
 Between the dark blue rocks, Symplegades?  
 O wretched one, how has it come,  
 This heavy anger on your heart,  
 This cruel bloody mind?  
 For God from mortals asks a stern  
 Price for the stain of kindred blood  
 In like disaster falling on their homes.

[*A cry from one of the CHILDREN is heard.*]

CHORUS: Do you hear the cry, do you hear the children's cry?  
 O you hard heart, O woman fated for evil!

ONE OF THE CHILDREN: [*From within.*]

What can I do and how escape my mother's hands?

ONE OF THE CHILDREN: [*From within.*] O my dear brother, I cannot tell.  
 We are lost.

CHORUS: Shall I enter the house? O surely I should  
 Defend the children from murder.

A CHILD: [*From within.*]

O help us, in God's name, for now we need your help.

Now, now we are close to it. We are trapped by the sword.

CHORUS: O your heart must have been made of rock or steel,  
 You who can kill  
 With your own hand the fruit of your own womb.  
 Of one alone I have heard, one woman alone  
 Of those of old who laid her hands on her children,  
 Ino, sent mad by heaven when the wife of Zeus  
 Drove her out from her home and made her wander;  
 And because of the wicked shedding of blood

Of her own children she threw  
 Herself, poor wretch, into the sea and stepped away  
 Over the sea-cliff to die with her two children.  
 What horror more can be? O women's love, 1265  
 So full of trouble,  
 How many evils have you caused already!

[*Enter JASON, with attendants.*]

JASON: You women, standing close in front of this dwelling,  
 Is she, Medea, she who did this dreadful deed,  
 Still in the house, or has she run away in flight? 1270  
 For she will have to hide herself beneath the earth,  
 Or raise herself on wings into the height of air,  
 If she wishes to escape the royal vengeance.  
 Does she imagine that, having killed our rulers,  
 She will herself escape uninjured from this house? 1275  
 But I am thinking not so much of her as for  
 The children, — her the king's friends will make to suffer  
 For what she did. So I have come to save the lives  
 Of my boys, in case the royal house should harm them  
 While taking vengeance for their mother's wicked deed. 1280

CHORUS: O Jason, if you but knew how deeply you are  
 Involved in sorrow, you would not have spoken so.

JASON: What is it? That she is planning to kill me also?

CHORUS: Your children are dead, and by their own mother's hand.

JASON: What! This is it? O woman, you have destroyed me. 1285

CHORUS: You must make up your mind your children are no more.

JASON: Where did she kill them? Was it here or in the house?

CHORUS: Open the gates and there you will see them murdered.

JASON: Quick as you can unlock the doors, men, and undo  
 The fastenings and let me see this double evil, 1290  
 My children dead and her, — O her I will repay.

[*His attendants rush to the door. MEDEA appears above the house in a chariot drawn by dragons. She has the dead bodies of the CHILDREN with her.*]

MEDEA: Why do you batter these gates and try to unbar them,  
 Seeking the corpses and for me who did the deed?  
 You may cease your trouble, and, if you have need of me,  
 Speak, if you wish. You will never touch me with your hand, 1295  
 Such a chariot has Helios, my father's father,  
 Given me to defend me from my enemies.

JASON: You hateful thing, you woman most utterly loathed  
 By the gods and me and by all the race of mankind,  
 You who have had the heart to raise a sword against 1300  
 Your children, you, their mother, and left me childless, —  
 You have done this, and do you still look at the sun  
 And at the earth, after these most fearful doings?  
 I wish you dead. Now I see it plain, though at that time  
 I did not, when I took you from your foreign home 1305  
 And brought you to a Greek house, you, an evil thing,



A traitress to your father and your native land.  
 The gods hurled the avenging curse of yours on me.  
 For your own brother you slew at your own hearthside;  
 And then came aboard that beautiful ship, the Argo.  
 And that was your beginning. When you were married  
 To me, your husband, and had borne children to me,  
 For the sake of pleasure in the bed you killed them.  
 There is no Greek woman who would have dared such deeds,  
 Out of all those whom I passed over and chose you  
 To marry instead, a bitter destructive match,  
 A monster not a woman, having a nature  
 Wilder than that of Scylla<sup>9</sup> in the Tuscan sea.  
 Ah! no, not if I had ten thousand words of shame  
 Could I sting you. You are naturally so brazen.  
 Go, worker in evil, stained with your children's blood.  
 For me remains to cry aloud upon my fate,  
 Who will get no pleasure from my newly-wedded love,  
 And the boys whom I begot and brought up, never  
 Shall I speak to them alive! Oh, my life is over!

MEDEA: Long would be the answer which I might have made to  
 These words of yours, if Zeus the father did not know  
 How I have treated you and what you did to me.  
 No, it was not to be that you should scorn my love,  
 And pleasantly live your life through, laughing at me;  
 Nor would the princess, nor he who offered the match,  
 Kreon, drive me away without paying for it.  
 So now you may call me a monster, if you wish,  
 Or Scylla housed in the caves of the Tuscan sea  
 I too, as I had to, have taken hold of your heart.

JASON: You feel the pain yourself. You share in my sorrow.  
 MEDEA: Yes, and my grief is gain when you cannot mock it.  
 JASON: O children, what a wicked mother she was to you!  
 MEDEA: They died from a disease they caught from their father.  
 JASON: I tell you it was not my hand that destroyed them.  
 MEDEA: But it was your insolence, and your virgin wedding.  
 JASON: And just for the sake of that you chose to kill them.  
 MEDEA: Is love so small a pain, do you think, for a woman?  
 JASON: For a wise one, certainly. But you are wholly evil.  
 MEDEA: The children are dead. I say this to make you suffer.  
 JASON: The children, I think, will bring down curses on you.  
 MEDEA: The gods know who was the author of this sorrow.  
 JASON: Yes, the gods know indeed, they know your loathsome heart.  
 MEDEA: Hate me. But I tire of your barking bitterness.  
 JASON: And I of yours. It is easier to leave you.  
 MEDEA: How then? What shall I do? I long to leave you too.  
 JASON: Give me the bodies to bury and to mourn them.

9. A monster located in the straits between Italy and Sicily, who snatched sailors off passing ships and devoured them.

MEDEA: No, that I will not. I will bury them myself,  
 Bearing them to Hera's temple on the promontory;  
 So that no enemy may evilly treat them  
 By tearing up their grave. In this land of Corinth  
 I shall establish a holy feast and sacrifice!  
 Each year for ever to atone for the blood guilt.  
 And I myself go to the land of Erechtheus  
 To dwell in Aigeus' house, the son of Pandion.  
 While you, as is right, will die without distinction,  
 Struck on the head by a piece of the Argo's timber,  
 And you will have seen the bitter end of my love.

JASON: May a Fury for the children's sake destroy you,  
 And justice, requitor of blood.

MEDEA: What heavenly power lends an ear  
 To a breaker of oaths, a deceiver?

JASON: O, I hate you, murderess of children.  
 MEDEA: Go to your palace. Bury your bride.  
 JASON: I go, with two children to mourn for.  
 MEDEA: Not yet do you feel it. Wait for the future.  
 JASON: Oh, children I loved!  
 MEDEA: I loved them, you did not.  
 JASON: You loved them, and killed them.  
 MEDEA: To make you feel pain  
 JASON: Oh, wretch that I am, how I long  
 To kiss the dear lips of my children!

MEDEA: Now you would speak to them, now you would kiss them.  
 Then you rejected them.

JASON: Let me, I beg you,  
 Touch my boys' delicate flesh.

MEDEA: I will not. Your words are all wasted.

JASON: O God, do you hear it, this persecution,  
 These my sufferings from this hateful  
 Woman, this monster, murderess of children?  
 Still what I can do that I will do:  
 I will lament and cry upon heaven,  
 Calling the gods to bear me witness  
 How you have killed my boys and prevent me from  
 Touching their bodies or giving them burial.  
 I wish I had never begot them to see them  
 Afterwards slaughtered by you.

CHORUS: Zeus in Olympus is the overseer  
 Of many doings. Many things the gods  
 Achieve beyond our judgment. What we thought  
 Is not confirmed and what we thought not god  
 Contrives. And so it happens in this story.

1. Some such ceremony was still performed at Corinth in Euripides' time.