

## Euripides: from *Medea*<sup>1</sup>

*Medea, daughter of King Aeëtes of Colchis, married the hero Jason and returned with him to Corinth to bear two children—only to have Jason leave Medea when Creon, king of Corinth, offers him his daughter, Glauce. Her allure and exotic origin caused her to be suspected of being a sorceress, representing the mysterious old ways of pre-Greek civilizations encountered by the newly arrived Greeks of the Bronze Age.*

### MEDEA

Women of Corinth, I have come out of the house [215] lest you find some fault with me. For I know that though many mortals are haughty both in private and in public, others get a reputation for indifference to their neighbors from their retiring manner of life. There is no justice in mortals' eyes [220] since before they get sure knowledge of a man's true character they hate him on sight, although he has done them no harm. Now a foreigner must be quite compliant with the city, nor do I have any words of praise for the citizen who is stubborn and causes his fellow-citizens pain by his lack of breeding. [225] In my case, however, this sudden blow that has struck me has destroyed my life. I am undone, I have resigned all joy in life, and I want to die. For the man in whom all I had was bound up, as I well know—my husband—has proved the basest of men.

[230] Of all creatures that have breath and sensation, we women are the most unfortunate. First at an exorbitant price we must buy a husband and master of our bodies.[235] And the outcome of our life's striving hangs on this, whether we take a bad or a good husband. For divorce is discreditable for women and it is not possible to refuse wedlock. And when a woman comes into the new customs and practices of her husband's house, she must somehow divine, since she has not learned it at home, [240] how she shall best deal with her husband. If after we have spent great efforts on these tasks our husbands live with us without resenting the marriage-yoke, our life is enviable. Otherwise, death is preferable. A man, whenever he is annoyed with the company of those in the house, [245] goes elsewhere and thus rids his soul of its boredom. But we must fix our gaze on one person only. Men say that we live a life free from danger at home while they fight with the spear. [250] How wrong they are! I would rather stand three times with a shield in battle than give birth once.

But your story and mine are not the same: you have a city and a father's house, the enjoyment of life and the company of friends, [255] while I, without relatives or city, am suffering outrage from my husband. I was carried off as booty from a foreign land and have no mother, no brother, no kinsman to shelter me from this calamity. And so I shall ask from you this much as a favor: [260] if I find any means or contrivance to punish my husband for these wrongs, keep my secret. In all other things a woman is full of fear, incapable of looking on battle or cold steel; [265] but when she is injured in love, no mind is more murderous than hers.

### CHORUS-LEADER

I will do so. For you will be right to punish your husband, Medea, and I am not surprised that you grieve at what has happened. [*Enter Creon.*] But I see Creon coming, ruler of this land. [270] He will have some new deliberation to report.

### CREON

You, Medea, scowling with rage against your husband, I order you to leave this land and go into exile, taking your two children with you, and instantly. I am the executor of this decree, [275] and I will not return home again until I expel you from this land.

### MEDEA

Oh, I am undone, wholly lost! My enemies are making full sail against me, and there is no haven from disaster that I can reach. [280] Still, though I am ill-treated, I will ask you: Why are you exiling me, Creon?

### CREON

I am afraid (no need to dissemble) that you will do some deadly harm to my daughter. Many indications of this combine: [285] you are a clever woman and skilled in many evil arts, and you are smarting with the loss of your husband's love. And I hear that you are threatening—such is the report people bring—to harm the bride, her father, and her husband. So I shall take precautions before the event. [290] It is better for me to incur your hatred now, woman, than to be soft now and regret it later.

### MEDEA

Ah me! This is not the first time, Creon, but often before now my reputation has done me great harm. No man who is sensible ought ever [295] to have his children educated beyond the common run. For apart from the charge of idleness they incur, they earn hostility and ill-will from their fellow-citizens. If you bring novel wisdom to fools, you will be regarded as useless, not wise; [300] and if the city regards you as greater than those with a reputation for cleverness, you will be thought vexatious. I myself am a sharer in this lot, for since I am clever, in the eyes of some I am an object of ill-will, while you on the other hand fear me.

<sup>1</sup>English translation by David Kovacs.

What harm are you afraid of? Have no fear, Creon, I am not the kind of person to commit crimes against my rulers. What injustice have you done me? You married your daughter [310] to the man your heart bade you to. It is my husband I hate, while you, I think, acted with perfect good sense in this. And now I do not begrudge you prosperity. Make your marriage, all of you, and may good fortune attend you. But let me stay in this land. For although I have been wronged, [315] I will hold my peace, yielding to my superiors.

CREON

Your words are soothing to listen to, but I am afraid that in your heart you are plotting some harm. I trust you that much the less than before. A hot-tempered woman—and a hot-tempered man likewise— [320] is easier to guard against than a clever woman who keeps her own counsel. No, go into exile at once—speak me no speeches—since my resolve is fixed and there is no way you can remain in our midst since you are hostile to me.

MEDEA

*[Medea kneels before him in the attitude of a suppliant, grasping his knees and hand.]* Do not, I beg you by your knees and by your newly-wedded daughter.

CREON

[325] You waste your words. You will never win me over.

MEDEA

But will you banish me without the regard due a suppliant?

CREON

Yes: I do not love you more than my own house.

MEDEA

O fatherland, how I think of you now!

CREON

Yes, after my children it is much the dearest thing to me.

MEDEA

[330] Oh, what a bane is love to mortals.

CREON

I fancy that depends on the circumstances.

MEDEA

Zeus, do not forget who has caused all this woe!

CREON

Go, foolish woman, and rid me of my trouble.

MEDEA

Trouble I have already. I have no need of more.

CREON

[335] In a moment you will be thrown out of the country by my servants.

MEDEA

No, no, not that, I entreat you, Creon!

CREON

Woman, it seems you are bent on causing me annoyance.

MEDEA

I accept my exile: it was not exile I sought reprieve of.

CREON

Why then are you still applying force and clinging to my hand?

MEDEA

[340] Allow me to remain this one day and to complete my plans for exile and to ensure some provision for my children, since their father does not care to do so. Have pity on them: you too are a parent, [345] and we might expect you to be well-disposed towards them. I do not care if I myself go into exile. It is their experience of misfortune I weep for.

CREON

My nature is not at all a tyrant's, and by showing consideration I have often suffered loss. [350] And now, though I see that I am making a serious mistake, nonetheless, woman, you shall have your request. But I warn you, if tomorrow's sun sees you and your children within the borders of this land, you will be put to death. I mean what I have said. [355] Now stay, if stay you must, for one more day. You will not do the mischief I fear by then. *[Exit Creon. Medea rises to her feet.]*

CHORUS-LEADER

O dear, crushed by your misfortunes, where will you turn? What protector of strangers will you find, [360] what house, what land, to save you from calamity? Medea, a god has cast you into a hopeless sea of troubles.

MEDEA

In every way the situation is bad: who will deny it? [365] But it is not thus—do not imagine it—that things <will turn out in the end if I have any power in my arts>. There are still struggles for the newly-wedded pair, and for the maker of the match difficulties that are not trifling. Do you think I would ever have fawned on this man unless I stood to gain, unless I were plotting? [370] I would not even have spoken to him or touched him with my hands. But he has reached such a pitch of folly that, while it lay in his power to check my plans by banishing me, he has permitted me to stay for this day, a day on which I shall make corpses of three of my enemies, [375] the father, his daughter, and my husband.

Now since I possess many ways of killing them, I do not know which I should try first, my friends: shall I set the bridal chamber on fire, [380] creeping into the house where the marriage-bed is spread? One thing, however, stands in my path: if I am caught entering the house and plotting its destruction, I will be killed and bring joy to my foes. Best to proceed by the direct route, in which I am [385] the most skilled, and kill them with poison.

So be it! Now let us suppose they have been killed. What city will receive me? What friend will give me a safe country and a secure house and rescue me? There is no one. And so I shall wait a short time yet, [390] and if some tower of safety appears, I shall go about this murder by stealth. But if hard circumstance forces me into the open, I shall take the sword and, even though I am sure to die for it, kill them with my own hand, going to the very utmost of daring. [395]

By the goddess I worship most of all, my chosen helper Hecate,<sup>2</sup> who dwells in the inner chamber of my house, none of them shall pain my heart and smile at it! Bitter will I make their marriage, [400] bitter Creon's marriage-alliance, and bitter my banishment from the land! Come, Medea, spare nothing of the arts you are mistress of as you plot and contrive! Into the fray! Now it is a contest of courage. Do you see what is being done to you? You must not suffer mockery [405] from this Sisyphean<sup>3</sup> marriage of Jason, you who are sprung from a noble father and have Helios for your grandsire. But you understand how to proceed. And furthermore we are women, unable to perform great deeds of valor, but most skilful architects of every evil.

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JASON

It appears, woman, that I must be no mean speaker but like the good helmsman of a ship reef my sail up to its hem and run before the storm [525] of your wearisome prattling. Since you so exaggerate your kindness to me, I for my part think that Aphrodite alone of gods and mortals was the savior of my expedition. As for you, I grant you have a clever mind—but to tell [530] how Eros forced you with his ineluctable arrows to save me would expose me to ill-will. No, I will not make too strict a reckoning on this point. So far as you did help me, you did well. But in return for saving me [535] you got more than you gave, as I shall make clear. First, you now live among Greeks and not barbarians, and you understand justice and the rule of law, with no concession to force. All the Greeks have learned that you are clever, [540] and you have won renown. But if you lived at the world's edge, there would be no talk of you. May I have neither gold in my house nor power to sing songs sweeter than Orpheus if it is not my lot to have high renown!

[545] Thus far I have spoken to you regarding my labors: for it

<sup>2</sup>Hecate, among her many functions, is connected with magic arts.

<sup>3</sup>The wily Sisyphus, famed for dishonest trickery, was a Corinthian.

was you who started this contest of words. As for your reproaches to me against my royal marriage, here I shall show, first, that I am wise, second, self-controlled, and third a great friend to you [550] and my children. [*Medea makes a gesture of impatience.*] No! Hold your peace! When I first moved here from the land of Iolcus, bringing with me many misfortunes hard to deal with, what luckier find than this could I have made, marriage with the daughter of the king, though I was an exile? [550] It was not—the point that seems to irk you—that I was weary of your bed and smitten with desire for a new bride, nor was I eager to rival others in the number of my children (we have enough already and I make no complaint) but my purpose was that we should live well—which is the main thing— [560] and not be in want, knowing that everyone goes out of his way to avoid a penniless friend. I wanted to raise the children in a manner befitting my house, to beget brothers to the children born from you, and put them on the same footing with them, so that by drawing the family into one [565] I might prosper. For your part, what need have you of any more children? For me, it is advantageous to use future children to benefit those already born. Was this a bad plan? Not even you would say so if you were not galled by the matter of sex. But you women are so far gone in folly that if all is well [570] in bed you think you have everything, while if some misfortune in that domain occurs, you regard as hateful your best and truest interests. Mortals ought, you know, to beget children from some other source, and there should be no female sex. [575] Then mankind would have no trouble.

CHORUS-LEADER

Jason, you have marshalled your arguments very skilfully, but I think, even though it may be imprudent to say so, that in abandoning your wife you are not doing right.

MEDEA

I realize I have far different views from the majority of mortals. [580] To my mind, the plausible speaker who is a scoundrel incurs the greatest punishment. For since he is confident that he can cleverly cloak injustice with his words, his boldness stops at no knavery. Yet he is not as wise as all that. So it is with you. Do not, therefore, give me your specious arguments [585] and oratory, for one word will lay you out: if you were not a knave, you ought to have gained my consent before making this marriage, not done it behind your family's back.

JASON

Fine support, I think, would you have given to my proposal if I had mentioned the marriage to you, seeing that even now [590] you cannot bring yourself to lay aside the towering rage in your heart.

MEDEA

It was not this. You thought that in later years a barbarian wife would discredit you.

JASON

You may be quite sure of this, that it was not for the sake of a woman that I married the royal bride I now have, [595] but as I have just said, because I wanted to save you and to beget princes as brothers to my children, to be a bulwark for the house.

MEDEA

A prosperous life that causes pain is no wish of mine, nor do I want any wealth that torments my heart.

JASON

[600] Do you know how to change your prayer and show yourself the wiser? Pray that you may never consider advantage as painful nor think yourself wretched when you are fortunate.

MEDEA

Go on, insult me! You have a refuge, but I go friendless into exile.

JASON

[605] You yourself chose that. You have no one else to blame.

MEDEA

How? By taking another wife and abandoning you?

JASON

By uttering unholy curses against the royal family.

MEDEA

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

JASON

I shall not argue any more of this case with you. [610] But if you wish to get some of my money to help the children and yourself in exile, say the word, for I am ready to give with unstinting hand, and also to send tokens<sup>4</sup> to my friends, who will treat you well. [615] You would be a fool not to accept this offer, woman. Forget your anger and it will be the better for you.

MEDEA

I will accept no help from your friends nor will I take anything from you, so do not offer it. The gifts of a base man bring no benefit.

JASON

At any rate I call the gods to witness [620] that I am willing to help you and the children all I can. But you refuse good treatment and obstinately rebuff your friends. This will only make your pain the greater. [*Exit Jason.*]

MEDEA

Go: it is clear that you are seized by longing for your new bride as

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<sup>4</sup>The sumbolon is a knuckle-bone sawed in half and used to serve as a letter of introduction. The host can recognize someone sent to enjoy his hospitality by fitting the half he has with the guest's half.

you linger so long out of the palace. [625] Go, play the bridegroom! For perhaps—and this will prove to be prophetic—you will make such a marriage as to cause you to weep.

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MEDEA

Now I shall tell you all of my designs. Hear, then, words that will give you no pleasure. I shall send one of my servants and ask [775] Jason to come to see me. When he arrives, I shall speak soothing words to him, saying that I hold the same opinion as he, that the royal marriage he has made by abandoning me is well made, that these are beneficial and good decisions. [780] I shall ask that the children be allowed to stay, not with the thought that I might leave my children behind on hostile soil for my enemies to insult, but so that I may kill the princess by guile. I shall send them bearing gifts, [785] [bearing them to the bride so as not to be exiled,] a finely-woven gown and a diadem of beaten gold. If she takes this finery and puts it on, she will die a painful death, and likewise anyone who touches her: with such poisons will I smear these gifts.

[790] This subject, however, I now leave behind. Ah me, I groan at what a deed I must do next. I shall kill my children: there is no one who can rescue them. [795] When I have utterly confounded the whole house of Jason, I shall leave the land, in flight from the murder of my own dear sons, having committed a most unholy deed. The laughter of one's enemies is unendurable, my friends. Let that be as it will. What do I gain by living? I have no fatherland, no house and no means to turn aside misfortune. [800] My mistake was when I left my father's house, persuaded by the words of a Greek. This man—a god being my helper—will pay the price of his deeds to me. He shall never from this day see his children by me alive, nor will he beget children [805] by his new bride since that wretch must die a wretched death by my poisons. Let no one think me weak, contemptible, untroublesome. No, quite the opposite, hurtful to foes, to friends kindly. [810] Such persons live a life of greatest glory.

CHORUS-LEADER

Since you have shared this plan with me, and since I wish to help you and uphold the laws of society, I urge you not to do this deed.

MEDEA

It cannot be otherwise. I excuse you for speaking [815] thus since you have not suffered as I have.

CHORUS-LEADER

Yet will you bring yourself to kill your own offspring, woman?

MEDEA

It is the way to hurt my husband most.

CHORUS-LEADER

And for yourself to become the most wretched of women.

MEDEA

Be that as it may. Till then all talk is superfluous. To the Nurse [820] But you, go and fetch Jason (for I use your service on all errands of trust). Tell him nothing of my intentions, if you are loyal to your mistress and a woman. [*Exit Nurse, Medea into the house.*]

. . .

JASON

I have come at your bidding. For though you hate me, you will not fail to obtain a hearing from me. What further do you wish from me, woman?

MEDEA

Jason, I beg you to forgive [870] what I said: it is reasonable for you to put up with my anger since many acts of love have passed between us in the past. I have talked with myself and reproached myself thus: 'Foolish creature, why am I raving and fighting those who plan things for the best?' [875] Why am I making myself an enemy to the rulers of this land and to my husband, who is acting in my interests by marrying a princess and begetting brothers for my children? Shall I not cease from my wrath (what has come over me?) when the gods are being so kind? [880] Do I not have the children? Is it not true that we are exiles and in need of friends?' These reflections have made me realize that I was being very foolish and was being angry for nothing. So now I approve and I agree that you are acting with sober sense [885] by contracting this marriage-alliance for us. It is I who am the fool, since I ought to be sharing in your plans, helping you carry them out, standing by the marriage-bed, and taking joy in the match I was making with your bride.

But we women are, I will not say bad creatures, [890] but we are what we are. So you ought not to imitate our nature or return our childishness with childishness. I give in: I admit that I was foolish then, but now I have taken a better view of the matter. Children, children, come here, leave the house, [895] come out, [*The children enter from the house with the Tutor.*] greet your father, speak to him with me, and join your mother in making an end to our former hostility against one dear to us. We have made a truce, and our wrath has vanished. Take his right hand. Ah, how I think [900] of something the future keeps hid! My children, will you continue all your lives long to stretch out your dear hands so? Unhappy me! How prone to tears I am, how full of foreboding. And as I now at long last make up the quarrel with your father, [905] my tender eyes are filled with tears.

CHORUS-LEADER

From my eyes too a pale tear starts. May misfortune go no further than it has!

JASON

I approve this, woman. Nor do I blame your earlier resentment. For it is natural for a woman to get angry [910] when a marriage of a different sort presents itself to the husband. But your thoughts have changed for the better, and though it took time, you have recognized the superior plan. These are the acts of a prudent woman. Children, your father has given anxious thought [915] and has secured for you—with the gods' help—abundant prosperity. I think that some day with your new brothers you will hold the very first place in the land of Corinth. But grow to manhood. The rest your father will see to, with the help of whatever god it is that smiles on him. [920] May I see you as fine strapping lads coming to young manhood, victorious over my enemies! [*Medea turns away weeping.*] You there, why do you dampen your eyes with pale tears and turn your white cheek away, and why are you not pleased to hear these words from me?

MEDEA

[925] It is nothing. I was thinking about the children.

JASON

But why, poor soul, do you lament over these children?

MEDEA

I gave them birth, and when you prayed that they might live, I felt pity for them wondering whether this would be.

JASON

Have no fear! I shall take good care of that.

MEDEA

[927] I shall do so. I will not distrust your words. But a woman is by nature female and prone to tears.

But of the reasons for our conversation, some have been spoken of, others I shall mention now. The rulers of this land have resolved to exile me— [935] and it is all for the best for me, I am well aware, that I not stay where I am in your way or that of the country's rulers, for I am thought to be an enemy to this house. Therefore I for my part shall leave this land in exile. But in order that the children may be raised by you, [940] beg Creon that they not be sent into exile.

JASON

I don't know whether I shall win him over, but I must try.

MEDEA

Well, then, tell your wife to ask her father that the children not be exiled.

JASON

Most certainly, and I think I shall persuade her.

MEDEA

[945] Yes, if she is a woman like the rest. But I too shall lend a hand in this. I shall send her gifts, gifts I know well are more beautiful by far than any now among mortals [950] by the hand of my children. [*To her servants*] One of you servants, quick, bring the raiment out to me. [*One of the servants goes into the house. To Jason*] She will have not one happiness but countless, getting in you an excellent husband to share her bed and possessing raiment which my grandfather [955] Helios gave to his descendants. [*The servant returns with the gifts.*] Take this bridal dowry, children, into your hands. Take and give it to the happy royal bride. It will be no contemptible gift she receives.

JASON

Silly woman, why do you deprive yourself of these things? [960] Do you think the royal house has need of gowns or gold? Keep them, don't give them away. For if my wife holds me in any regard, she will value my wishes more highly than wealth, I am quite sure.

MEDEA

Not a word! They say gifts win over even the gods, [965] and gold is more to mortals than ten thousand words. Her star is on the rise. And to free my children from exile I would give my life, not merely gold.

Now, children, when you have entered the rich palace, [970] entreat your father's new wife, my mistress, and beg her that you not be exiled. And give her the raiment: this is the most important thing, that she receive the gifts into her hands. Go with all speed. And may you have success [975] and bring back to your mother the good news she longs to hear. [*Exit Jason and children, accompanied by the Tutor and the Nurse.*]

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TUTOR

My lady, your sons here have been reprieved from exile, and the princess has been pleased to take the gifts into her hands. From that quarter the children have peace. [*Medea turns away and weeps.*] Ah! [1005] Why are you standing in distress when your fortune is good?

MEDEA

Alas!

TUTOR

This is not in tune with my tidings.

MEDEA

Alas once more!

TUTOR

Do I in ignorance report some mishap [1010] and wrongly think my news is good?

MEDEA

You have reported what you have reported. I find no fault with you.

TUTOR

Why then is your face downcast? Why do you weep?

MEDEA

I have every reason, old man. The gods, and I in my madness, have contrived it so.

TUTOR

[1015] Cheer up: one day your children will bring you home.

MEDEA

Before that there are others I shall bring home,<sup>5</sup> wretch that I am.

TUTOR

You are not the only woman to be separated from her children. We mortals must bear misfortune with resignation.

MEDEA

I will do so. But go into the house [1020] and provide the children with their daily needs. [*Exit Tutor into the house.*] My children, my children, you have a city and a home,<sup>6</sup> in which, leaving your poor mother behind, you will live henceforth, bereft of me. But I shall go to another land as an exile [1025] before I have the enjoyment of you and see you happy, before I have tended to your baths<sup>7</sup> and wives and marriage-beds and held the wedding-torches aloft. How wretched my self-will has made me! It was all in vain, I see, that I brought you up, [1030] all in vain that I labored and was wracked with toils, enduring harsh pains in childbirth. Truly, many were the hopes that I, poor fool, once had in you, that you would tend me in my old age and when I died dress me for burial with your own hands, [1035] an enviable fate for mortals. But now this sweet imagining has perished. For bereft of you I shall live out my life in pain and grief. And you will no longer see your mother with loving eyes but pass into another manner of life.

[1040] Oh! What is the meaning of your glance at me, children? Why do you smile at me this last smile of yours? Alas, what am I to do? My courage is gone, women, ever since I saw the bright faces of the children. I cannot do it. Farewell, my former [1045] designs! I shall take my children out of the land. Why should I wound their father with their pain and win for myself pain twice as great? I shall not: farewell, my designs!

<sup>5</sup>The grim word-play is untranslatable: κατὰ γῶ means both 'bring home (from exile)' and 'bring down.'

<sup>6</sup>To the children this means Corinth, to Medea it means the nether world. Such veiled discourse is characteristic of this speech, with the exception of the bracketed section below.

<sup>7</sup>A special bath for the bride and the groom preceded the wedding.

But what is coming over me? Do I wish to suffer mockery, [1050] letting my enemies go unpunished? Must I put up with that? No, it is mere weakness in me even to admit such tender words into my heart. Children, go into the house. Whoever is not permitted to attend my sacrifice [1055] shall feel concern for them: I shall not weaken my hand. ...

[*The children begin to move toward the house.*] [1065] Already the crown is on her head and the royal bride is perishing in the robe, I know it well. But—since I now go down the road of greatest misery and send these down one unhappier yet—I want to say farewell to the children. [*The children return to Medea.*] Give me [1070] your right hands to kiss, my children, give them to me. O hands and lips so dear to me, o noble face and bearing of my children, I wish you happiness—but in that other place. What is here your father has taken away. Oh, how sweet is the touch, [1075] how tender the skin, how fragrant the breath of these children! Go in, go in. I can no longer look at you but am overwhelmed with my pain. And I know well what pain I am about to undergo, but my wrath overbears my calculation, [1080] wrath that brings mortal men their gravest hurt. [*Exit the children into the house followed by Medea.*]

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MESSENGER

Medea, run for your life. Take ship, take chariot, and flee.

MEDEA

What event calls for my fleeing thus?

MESSENGER

[1125] The princess and her father Creon have just been killed by your poisons.

MEDEA

A splendid report you bring! Henceforth I shall regard you as one of my benefactors and friends.

MESSENGER

What? Can you be in your right mind and not mad, woman? [1130] Can you commit an outrage against the royal house, and then rejoice at the news and not be afraid?

MEDEA

I too have something that I could say in reply to your words. Do not be hot and hasty, friend, but tell me: how did they die? You will give me [1135] twice the pleasure if they died in agony.

MESSENGER

When your two children came with their father and entered the bride's house, all of us servants who were troubled by your misfortunes were cheered. For our ears buzzed with the loud report [1140] that you and your husband had brought your

former quarrel to an end. And someone kissed the hands and another the blond heads of the children. And I myself for very joy went along with the children into the women's quarters. Here the mistress we now honor instead of you, [1145] before she saw the two children, had eyes only for Jason. Then she veiled her eyes and turned her white cheek away, disgusted at seeing the children come in. But your husband [1150] tried to take away the girl's wrathful mood and said, 'You must not be unkind to your kin but must cease your anger and turn your face towards us again, regarding those as near and dear your husband so regards. Receive these gifts and ask your father [1155] to grant these children release from their exile for my sake.'

When she had seen the raiment, she could not wait but consented to all her husband asked, and before your children and their father had gone far from the house, she took the many-colored gown and put it on, [1160] and setting the gold crown about her locks, she arranged her hair in a bright mirror, smiling at the lifeless image of her body. And then getting up from her seat she paraded about the room, her white feet making dainty steps, [1165] entranced with the gifts, glancing back again and again at the straight tendon of her leg. But thereafter there was a terrible sight to behold. For her color changed, and with legs trembling she staggered back sidelong, and by falling on the chair [1170] barely escaped collapsing on the floor. And one old woman among the servants, thinking, I suppose, that a frenzy from Pan or one of the other gods had come upon her, raised a festal shout to the god, until she saw the white foam coming between her lips and her eyes [1175] starting out of their sockets and her skin all pale and bloodless. Then indeed she raised a wail in answer to her former shout. And at once one servant went to her father's house, another to her new husband to tell of the bride's misfortune: the whole [1180] house rang with the sound of drumming footsteps.

And by now a sprinter, putting his legs in swift motion, would be reaching the finish-line of the two-hundred-yard course,<sup>8</sup> when the poor woman wakened from her silence, opened her eyes, and gave forth a terrible groan. [1185] For she was being attacked with a double pain. The golden circlet about her head shot forth a terrible stream of consuming fire, and the fine-spun gown, gift of your sons, was eating into the wretched girl's white flesh. [1190] And all aflame she leapt from the chair and fled, tossing her hair this way and that, trying to shake off the diadem. But the gold crown held its fastenings firmly, and when she shook her hair, the fire only blazed up twice as high. [1195] She fell to the floor, overwhelmed by disaster, barely recognizable to any but her father. Her eyes no longer kept their wonted form nor did her shapely face, and from the top of her head blood dripped, mingled with fire, [1200] and her flesh dropped from her bones like resin from a pine-torch, torn by the unseen jaws of the poison, a dreadful sight to behold. And we were all afraid to touch the corpse, taught well by the event we had seen.

<sup>8</sup>I.e., about twenty seconds elapsed. The reference is to the Olympic stade-race, whose winner gave his name to the Olympiad.

But her poor father, ignorant of the calamity, [1205] stumbled upon her body unprepared as he entered the chamber. And at once he groaned aloud and throwing his arms about her kissed her and said, 'O unhappy child, which of the gods has destroyed you so shamefully and has bereft me of you, me, an old man [1210] at death's door? Oh, may I die with you, my child!' But when he had ceased from his wailing and lamenting and wished to raise up his aged body to his feet, he stuck fast to the fine-spun dress, as ivy clings to laurel-shoots, and a terrible wrestling ensued. [1215] For he wanted to rise to his knees, but she held him fast and prevented him. And if he used force, he would rip his aged flesh from his bones. Finally the poor man gave up and breathed his last, for he could not overcome the calamity. [1220] They lie dead, the daughter and her old father [nearby, a disaster that calls for tears]

As regards your fate, I will say nothing: you will know soon enough the punishment that will visit you. As for our mortal life, this is not the first time that I have thought it to be a shadow, [1225] and I would say without any fear that those mortals who seem to be clever and workers-up of polished speeches are guilty of the greatest folly. For no mortal ever attains to blessedness. One may be luckier than another [1230] when wealth flows his way, but blessed never. [*Exit Messenger.*]

#### CHORUS

It seems that fate is this day fastening calamity on Jason, and with justice. ...

#### MEDEA

My friends, my resolve is fixed on the deed, to kill my children with all speed and to flee from this land: I must not, by lingering, deliver my children for murder to a less kindly hand. [1240] They must die at all events, and since they must, I who gave them birth shall kill them. Come, put on your armor, my heart. Why do I put off doing the terrible deed that must be done? Come, wretched hand, take the sword, [1245] take it and go to your life's miserable goal. Do not weaken, do not remember that you love the children, that you gave them life. Instead, for this brief day forget them—and mourn hereafter: for even if you kill them, [1250] they were dear to you. Oh, what an unhappy woman I am! [*Exit Medea into the house.*]

. . .

#### JASON

O detestable creature, utterly hateful to the gods, to me, and to the whole human race, [1325] you brought yourself to take the sword to your own children and destroyed my life with childlessness! And having done this can you look on the sun and the earth, when you are guilty of a most abominable deed? Death and ruin seize you! Now I am in my right mind, though I was insane before [1330] when I brought you from your home among the barbarians to a Greek house. A great curse you were even

then, betrayer of father and of the land that nourished you. But the avenging spirit meant for you the gods have visited on me. For you killed your own brother at the hearth [1335] and then stepped aboard the fair-prowed Argo. It was with acts like these that you began. But now when you were married to me and had borne me children, you killed them because of sex and the marriage-bed. No Greek woman [1340] would have dared to do this, yet I married you in preference to them, and a hateful and destructive match it has proved. You are a she-lion, not a woman, with a nature more savage than Scylla the Tuscan monster. But since ten thousand insults of mine would fail [1345] to sting you—such is your native impudence—be gone, doer of disgraceful deeds and murderer of your children! Mine is a fate to bewail: I shall never have the benefit of my new bride, nor will I be able to speak to my children alive, [1350] the children I begot and raised, but have lost them.

#### MEDEA

Long would have been the speech I had made in reply to these words of yours if Father Zeus did not know clearly what kind of treatment you have had from me and how you have repaid it. You were not going to cast aside my bed [1355] and then spend a pleasant life laughing at me, no, nor the princess either, nor was Creon, who offered you his daughter, going to exile me with impunity. Call me a she-lion, then, if you like and Scylla, dweller on the Tuscan cliff. [1360] For I have touched your heart in the vital spot.

#### JASON

Yes, and you also have grief and are a sharer in my misfortune.

#### MEDEA

Of course, but the pain is worthwhile if you cannot mock me.

#### JASON

Children, what an evil mother you got.

#### MEDEA

Children, how you have perished by your father's fault.

#### JASON

[1365] It was not my hand, you know, that killed them.

#### MEDEA

No: it was the outrage of your new marriage.

#### JASON

Did you really think it right to kill them because of a marriage?

#### MEDEA

Do you imagine that loss of love is a trivial grief for a woman?

#### JASON

For a woman of sense, yes. But you find everything a disaster.



MEDEA

[1370] But the children are dead: this will wound you to the quick.

JASON

They live, alas, as spirits to take vengeance on your crimes.

MEDEA

The gods know who struck the first blow.

JASON

Yes, they know indeed your loathesome heart.

MEDEA

Hate on! I detest the hateful sound of your voice.

JASON

[1375] And I of yours. To part will be easy.

MEDEA

How? What shall I do? For that is very much my wish as well.

JASON

Allow me to bury these dead children and to mourn them.

MEDEA

Certainly not. I shall bury them with my own hand, taking them to the sanctuary of Hera Akraia,<sup>9</sup> [1380] so that none of my enemies may outrage them by tearing up their graves. And I shall enjoin on this land of Sisyphus a solemn festival and holy rites for all time to come in payment for this unholy murder.<sup>10</sup> As for myself, I shall go to the land of Erechtheus [1385] to live with Aegeus, son of Pandion. But you, as is fitting, shall die the miserable death of a coward, struck on the head by a piece of the Argo, having seen the bitter result of your marriage to me.

JASON

May the Fury that punishes your children's death, and [1390] Justice the murderous,<sup>11</sup> destroy you utterly!

MEDEA

What god or power above will listen to you, who broke your oath and deceived a stranger?

JASON

Pah! Unclean wretch! Child-murderer!

MEDEA

Go home! Bury your wife!

JASON

[1395] Yes—bereft of my two sons—I go.

MEDEA

Your mourning has yet to begin. Wait until old age.

JASON

O children most dear.

MEDEA

Yes, to their mother, not to you.

JASON

And so you killed them?

MEDEA

Yes, to cause you grief.

JASON

Alas, how I long for the dear faces of my children, [1400] to enfold them in my arms.

MEDEA

Now you speak to them, now you greet them, when before you thrust them from you.

JASON

By the gods, I beg you, let me touch the tender flesh of my children!

MEDEA

It cannot be. Your words are uttered in vain.

JASON

[1405] Zeus, do you hear this, how I am driven away and what treatment I endure from this unclean, child-murdering monster? But with all the strength I have, I make my lament and adjure the gods, [1410] calling the heavenly powers to witness that you killed my sons and now forbid me to touch them or to bury their bodies. Oh that I had never begotten them, never seen them dead at your hands! [*Medea with the corpses of her children is borne aloft away from Corinth. Exit Jason.*]

CHORUS-LEADER

[1415] Zeus on Olympus has many things in his treasure-house, and many are the things the gods accomplish against our expectation. What men expect is not brought to pass, but a god finds a way to achieve the unexpected. Such is the outcome of this story. [*Exit Chorus.*]

<sup>9</sup>Hera as worshiped on the Acrocorinth.

<sup>10</sup>In historical times, there appears to have been such a festival, in which young boys and girls of noble family spent a year in the temple precinct.

<sup>11</sup>Both the Erinys (Fury) and Diké (Justice) are agents of Zeus.