

I saved your life, and every Greek knows I saved it,
 Who was a shipmate of yours aboard the Argo,
 When you were sent to control the bulls that breathed fire
 And yoke them, and when you would sow that deadly field.
 Also that snake, who encircled with his many folds
 The Golden Fleece and guarded it and never slept,
 I killed, and so gave you the safety of the light.
 And I myself betrayed my father and my home,
 And came with you to Pelias' land of Iolcus.
 And then, showing more willingness to help than wisdom,
 I killed him, Pelias, with a most dreadful death
 At his own daughters' hands, and took away your fear.
 This is how I behaved to you, you wretched man,
 And you forsook me, took another bride to bed,
 Though you had children; for, if that had not been,
 You would have had an excuse for another wedding.
 Faith in your word has gone. Indeed, I cannot tell
 Whether you think the gods whose names you swore by
 then

Have ceased to rule and that new standards are set up,
 Since you must know you have broken your word to me.
 O my right hand, and the knees which you often clasped
 In supplication, how senselessly I am treated
 By this bad man, and how my hopes have missed their
 mark!

Come, I will share my thoughts as though you were a
 friend—

You! Can I think that you would ever treat me well?
 But I will do it, and these questions will make you
 Appear the baser. Where am I to go? To my father's?
 Him I betrayed and his land when I came with you.
 To Pelias' wretched daughters? What a fine welcome
 They would prepare for me who murdered their father!
 For this is my position—hated by my friends
 At home, I have, in kindness to you, made enemies
 Of others whom there was no need to have injured.

And how happy among Greek women you have made me
 On your side for all this! A distinguished husband
 I have—for breaking promises. When in misery
 I am cast out of the land and go into exile,
 Quite without friends and all alone with my children,
 That will be a fine shame for the new-wedded groom,
 For his children to wander as beggars and she who saved
 him.

O God, you have given to mortals a sure method
 Of telling the gold that is pure from the counterfeit;
 Why is there no mark engraved upon men's bodies,
 By which we could know the true ones from the false ones?

CHORUS It is a strange form of anger, difficult to cure,
 When two friends turn upon each other in hatred.

JASON As for me, it seems I must be no bad speaker.
 But, like a man who has a good grip of the tiller,
 Reef up his sail, and so run away from under
 This mouthing tempest, woman, of your bitter tongue.
 Since you insist on building up your kindness to me,
 My view is that Cypris* was alone responsible
 Of men and gods for the preserving of my life.
 You are clever enough—but really I need not enter
 Into the story of how it was love's inescapable
 Power that compelled you to keep my person safe.
 On this I will not go into too much detail.
 In so far as you helped me, you did well enough.
 But on this question of saving me, I can prove
 You have certainly got from me more than you gave.
 Firstly, instead of living among barbarians,
 You inhabit a Greek land and understand our ways,
 How to live by law instead of the sweet will of force.
 And all the Greeks considered you a clever woman.
 You were honored for it; while, if you were living at

* Aphrodite, goddess of love.

The ends of the earth, nobody would have heard of you.
 For my part, rather than stores of gold in my house
 Or power to sing even sweeter songs than Orpheus,
 I'd choose the fate that made me a distinguished man.
 There is my reply to your story of my labors.
 Remember it was you who started the argument.
 Next for your attack on my wedding with the princess:
 Here I will prove that, first, it was a clever move,
 Secondly, a wise one, and, finally, that I made it
 In your best interests and the children's. Please keep
 calm.

When I arrived here from the land of Iolcus,
 Involved, as I was, in every kind of difficulty,
 What luckier chance could I have come across than this,
 An exile to marry the daughter of the king?
 It was not—the point that seems to upset you—that I
 Grew tired of your bed and felt the need of a new bride;
 Nor with any wish to outdo your number of children.
 We have enough already. I am quite content.
 But—this was the main reason—that we might live well,
 And not be short of anything. I know that all
 A man's friends leave him stone-cold if he becomes poor.
 Also that I might bring my children up worthily
 Of my position, and, by producing more of them
 To be brothers of yours, we would draw the families
 Together and all be happy. You need no children.
 And it pays me to do good to those I have now
 By having others. Do you think this a bad plan?
 You wouldn't if the love question hadn't upset you.
 But you women have got into such a state of mind
 That, if your life at night is good, you think you have
 Everything; but, if in that quarter things go wrong,
 You will consider your best and truest interests
 Most hateful. It would have been better far for men
 To have got their children in some other way, and women
 Not to have existed. Then life would have been good.

CHORUS Jason, though you have made this speech of yours look
 well,
 Still I think, even though others do not agree,
 You have betrayed your wife and are acting badly.

MEDEA Surely in many ways I hold different views
 From others, for I think that the plausible speaker
 Who is a villain deserves the greatest punishment.
 Confident in his tongue's power to adorn evil,
 He stops at nothing. Yet he is not really wise.
 As in your case. There is no need to put on the airs
 Of a clever speaker, for one word will lay you flat.
 If you were not a coward, you would not have married
 Behind my back, but discussed it with me first.

JASON And you, no doubt, would have furthered the proposal,
 If I had told you of it, you who even now
 Are incapable of controlling your bitter temper.

MEDEA It was not that. No, you thought it was not respectable
 As you got on in years to have a foreign wife.

JASON Make sure of this: it was not because of a woman
 I made the royal alliance in which I now live,
 But, as I said before, I wished to preserve you
 And breed a royal progeny to be brothers
 To the children I have now, a sure defense to us.

MEDEA Let me have no happy fortune that brings pain with it,
 Or prosperity which is upsetting to the mind!

JASON Change your ideas of what you want, and show more sense.
 Do not consider painful what is good for you,
 Nor, when you are lucky, think yourself unfortunate.

MEDEA You can insult me. You have somewhere to turn to.
 But I shall go from this land into exile, friendless.

JASON It was what you chose yourself. Don't blame others for it.

MEDEA And how did I choose it? Did I betray my husband?

JASON You called down wicked curses on the king's family.

MEDEA A curse, that is what I am become to your house too.

JASON I do not propose to go into all the rest of it;
But, if you wish for the children or for yourself
In exile to have some of my money to help you,
Say so, for I am prepared to give with open hand,
Or to provide you with introductions to my friends
Who will treat you well. You are a fool if you do not
Accept this. Cease your anger and you will profit.

MEDEA I shall never accept the favors of friends of yours,
Nor take a thing from you, so you need not offer it.
There is no benefit in the gifts of a bad man.

JASON Then, in any case, I call the gods to witness that
I wish to help you and the children in every way,
But you refuse what is good for you. Obstinate
You push away your friends. You are sure to suffer for it.

MEDEA Go! No doubt you hanker for your virginal bride,
And are guilty of lingering too long out of her house.
Enjoy your wedding. But perhaps—with the help of
God—
You will make the kind of marriage that you will regret.

(Jason goes out with his attendants.)

CHORUS When love is in excess
It brings a man no honor
Nor any worthiness.
But if in moderation Cypris comes,
There is no other power at all so gracious.
O goddess, never on me let loose the unerring
Shaft of your bow in the poison of desire.

Let my heart be wise.
It is the gods' best gift.

On me let mighty Cypris
Inflict no wordy wars or restless anger
To urge my passion to a different love.
But with discernment may she guide women's weddings,
Honoring most what is peaceful in the bed.

O country and home,
Never, never may I be without you,
Living the hopeless life,
Hard to pass through and painful,
Most pitiable of all.
Let death first lay me low and death
Free me from this daylight.
There is no sorrow above
The loss of a native land.

I have seen it myself,
Do not tell of a secondhand story.
Neither city nor friend
Pitied you when you suffered
The worst of sufferings.
O let him die ungraced whose heart
Will not reward his friends,
Who cannot open an honest mind
No friend will be of mine.

(Enter Aegeus, king of Athens, an old friend of Medea.)

AEGEUS Medea, greeting! This is the best introduction
Of which men know for conversation between friends.

MEDEA Greeting to you too, Aegeus, son of King Pandion.
Where have you come from to visit this country's soil?

AEGEUS I have just left the ancient oracle of Phoebus.

MEDEA And why did you go to earth's prophetic center?

AEGEUS I went to inquire how children might be born to me.

- MEDEA Is it so? Your life still up to this point is childless?
- AEGEUS Yes. By the fate of some power we have no children.
- MEDEA Have you a wife, or is there none to share your bed?
- AEGEUS There is. Yes, I am joined to my wife in marriage.
- MEDEA And what did Phoebus say to you about children?
- AEGEUS Words too wise for a mere man to guess their meaning.
- MEDEA Is it proper for me to be told the god's reply?
- AEGEUS It is. For sure what is needed is cleverness.
- MEDEA Then what was his message? Tell me, if I may hear.
- AEGEUS I am not to loosen the hanging foot of the wine-skin . . .
- MEDEA Until you have done something, or reached some country?
- AEGEUS Until I return again to my hearth and house.
- MEDEA And for what purpose have you journeyed to this land?
- AEGEUS There is a man called Pittheus, king of Troezen.
- MEDEA A son of Pelops, they say, a most righteous man.
- AEGEUS With him I wish to discuss the reply of the god.
- MEDEA Yes. He is wise and experienced in such matters.
- AEGEUS And to me also the dearest of all my spear-friends.
- MEDEA Well, I hope you have good luck, and achieve your will.
- AEGEUS But why this downcast eye of yours, and this pale cheek?
- MEDEA O Aegeus, my husband has been the worst of all to me.
- AEGEUS What do you mean? Say clearly what has caused this grief.
- MEDEA Jason wrongs me, though I have never injured him.
- AEGEUS What has he done? Tell me about it in clearer words.

- MEDEA He has taken a wife to his house, supplanting me.
- AEGEUS Surely he would not dare to do a thing like that.
- MEDEA Be sure he has. Once dear, I now am slighted by him.
- AEGEUS Did he fall in love? Or is he tired of your love?
- MEDEA He was greatly in love, this traitor to his friends.
- AEGEUS Then let him go, if, as you say, he is so bad.
- MEDEA A passionate love—for an alliance with the king.
- AEGEUS And who gave him his wife? Tell me the rest of it.
- MEDEA It was Creon, he who rules this land of Corinth.
- AEGEUS Indeed, Medea, your grief was understandable.
- MEDEA I am ruined. And there is more to come: I am banished.
- AEGEUS Banished? By whom? Here you tell me of a new wrong.
- MEDEA Creon drives me an exile from the land of Corinth.
- AEGEUS Does Jason consent? I cannot approve of this.
- MEDEA He pretends not to, but he will put up with it.
Ah, Aegeus, 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.
- AEGEUS 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;
 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.

AEGEUS 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 Creon. 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,
 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.

AEGEUS You show much foresight for such negotiations.
 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
 Of my father, and name together all the gods . . .

AEGEUS 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.

AEGEUS 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?

AEGEUS What comes to those who have no regard for heaven.

MEDEA Go on your way. Farewell. For I am satisfied.
 And I will reach your city as soon as I can,
 Having done the deed I have to do and gained my end.

(Aegeus goes out.)

CHORUS May Hermes, god of travelers,
 Escort you, Aegeus, to your home!
 And may you have the things you wish
 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.
 Now I am confident they will pay the penalty.
 For this man, Aegeus, 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.*
 And now I shall tell to you the whole of my plan.
 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.

* Athens, the town of Athena.

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* are
 Splendid, the sons of blessed gods. They dwell
 In Athens' holy and unconquered land,
 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.

And beside the sweet flow of Cephisus' stream,**
 Where Cypris 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!

* The Athenians.

** At Athens.

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 toward me
 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 toward 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 Creon 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.