

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 forever.
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.
Oh 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. Oh 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.
 No! 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.
 Oh the dear hands, and oh 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. Oh 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, toward 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 toward 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 Creon 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 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 twofold 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,

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 sepulcher,
 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 among 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 Creon, 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, Oh, arm yourself in steel, my heart! Do not hang back From doing this fearful and necessary wrong. Oh, 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, Afterward weep; for even though you will kill them, They were very dear—Oh, 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?

ANOTHER CHILD (*from within*) O my dear brother, I cannot tell. We
are lost.

CHORUS Shall I enter the house? Oh, 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,
 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?
 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?
 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.

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! That is it? O woman, you have destroyed me!

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,
 My children dead and her—Oh 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,
 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
 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
 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 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,
 Creon, drive me away without paying for it.
 So now you may call me a monster, if you wish,
 A 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.

* A monster in the *Odyssey*.

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.

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 Aegeus' 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, Requirer of blood.

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

JASON Oh, 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
Afterward 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.

(Curtain.)