

MEDEA

EURIPIDES

TRANSLATED BY DAVID KOVACS

Nurse

Tutor

Medea

Chorus of Women

Creon

Jason

Aegeus

Messenger

Medea's Children

Enter the Nurse from the central door of the skene.

NURSE

[1] Would that the Argo had never winged its way to the land of Colchis through the dark-blue Symplegades! Would that the pine trees had never been felled in the glens of Mount Pelion and furnished oars for the hands of the heroes who at Pelias' command set forth in quest of the Golden Fleece! For then my lady Medea would not have sailed to the towers of Iolcus, her heart smitten with love for Jason, or persuaded the daughters of Pelias to kill their father and hence now be

inhabiting this land of Corinth,² with her husband and children, an exile loved by the citizens to whose land she had come, and lending to Jason himself all her support. This it is that most rescues life from trouble, when a woman is not at variance with her husband.

[16] But now all is enmity, and love's bonds are diseased. For Jason, abandoning his own children and my mistress, is bedding down in a royal match, having married the daughter of Creon, ruler of this land. Poor Medea, finding herself thus cast aside, calls loudly on his oaths, invokes the mighty assurance of his sworn right hand, and calls the gods to witness the unjust return she is getting from Jason. She lies fasting, giving her body up to pain, wasting away in tears all the time ever since she learned that she was wronged by her husband, neither lifting her face nor taking her eyes from the ground. She is as deaf to the advice of her friends as a stone or a wave of the sea: she is silent unless perchance to turn her snow-white neck and weep to herself for her dear father and her country and her ancestral house. All these she abandoned when she came here with a man who has now cast her aside. The poor woman has learned at misfortune's hand what a good thing it is not to be cut off from one's native land.

[36] She loathes the children and takes no joy in looking at them. And I am afraid that she will hatch some sinister plan.

For she has a terrible temper and will not put up with bad treatment (I know her), and I fear she may thrust a whetted sword through her vitals, [slipping quietly into the house where the bed is spread,] or kill the royal family and the bride-groom and then win some greater calamity. For she is dangerous. I tell you, no man who clashes with her will find it easy to crow in victory.

[Enter Tutor by Eisdos A, escorting the two sons of Jason and Medea]

[46] But see, her boys are coming home after their games. They have no thought of their mother's troubles: it is not usual for young minds to dwell on grief.

TUTOR

[49] Aged slave of my mistress' household, why do you stand alone like this at the palace-gate, complaining of your troubles to your own ears? How can Medea spare your service?

NURSE

[52] Old attendant to the children of Jason, to trusty servants it is a disaster when the dice of their masters' fortunes fall badly: it touches their hearts. So great is the grief I feel that

the desire stole over me to come out here and speak my mistress' troubles to the earth and the sky.

TUTOR

[59] What? Does the poor woman not yet cease from moaning?

NURSE

[60] Your ignorance is enviable. Her misfortune is still beginning and has not yet reached its peak.

TUTOR

[62] Poor fool (if I may speak thus of my masters), how little she knows of her latest trouble!

NURSE

[63] What is it, old man? Do not begrudge me the news.

TUTOR

[64] Nothing. I am sorry I said as much as I have.

NURSE

[65] I beg you by your beard, do not conceal this from your fellow-slave! I will keep it a secret if I must.

TUTOR

[67] As I approached the gaming-tables where the old men sit, near the holy spring of Peirene, I heard someone say (I was pretending not to listen) that Creon, this country's king, was going to exile these children and their mother from the land of Corinth. Whether the story is true I do not know. I could wish it were not so.

NURSE

[74] But will Jason allow this to happen to his sons even if he is at odds with their mother?

TUTOR

[76] Old marriage-ties give way to new: he is no friend to this house.

NURSE

[78] We are done for, it seems, if we add this new trouble to our old ones before we've weathered those

TUTOR

[80] But you, hold your peace, since it is not the right time for your mistress to know this, and say nothing of this tale.

NURSE

[82] O children, do you hear what kind of man your father is towards you? A curse on him! -- but no, he is my master. Yet he is certainly guilty of disloyalty towards his loved ones.

TUTOR

[85] As what mortal is not? Are you just now learning this, that each man loves himself more than his neighbor, [some justly, others for the sake of gain,] seeing that their father does not love these boys because of his bride?

NURSE

[89] Go into the house, children, all will be well. And you, keep them as far off as you can and do not bring them near their mother in her distress. For I have seen her turn a savage glance at them, as if she meant to do something to them. And she will not let go of her wrath, I am sure, before she brings it down on someone's head. But may it be enemies, not loved ones, that feel her wrath!

MEDEA

[96] within Oh, what a wretch am I, how miserable in my sorrows! Ah ah, how I wish I could die!

NURSE

[98] Just as I said, dear children. Your mother is stirring up her feelings, stirring up her anger. Go quickly into the house, and do not come into her sight or approach her, but beware of her fierce nature and the hatefulness of her wilful temper. Go inside as quickly as you can.

[Exit Tutor and children into the house]

[106] It is plain that she will soon kindle with even greater passion the cloud of lament now rising from its source: what will her proud soul, so hard to check, do when stung by this injury?

MEDEA

[111] Oh, what sufferings are mine, sufferings that call for loud lamentation! O accursed children of a hateful mother, may you perish with your father and the whole house collapse in ruin!

NURSE

[115] Oh, woe is me! Why do you make the children sharers in their father's sin? Why do you hate them? O children, how terrified I am that you may come to harm. The minds of royalty are dangerous: since they often command and seldom obey, they are subject to violent changes of mood. For it is

better to be accustomed to live on terms of equality. At any rate, may I be able to grow old in modest state and with security. For moderate fortune has a name that is fairest on the tongue, and in practice it is by far the most beneficial thing for mortals. But excessive riches mean no advantage for mortals, and when a god is angry at a house, they make the ruin greater.

[Enter by Eisodos B a group of Corinthian women as Chorus]

CHORUS

[131] I have heard the voice, I have heard the cry, of the unhappy woman of Colchis: is she not yet soothed? Tell me, old woman, for I heard from a servant of her shouting within the house, and it is no joy I feel at this house's misfortunes since I have shared the cup of friendship with it.

NURSE

[139] The house is no more: it has perished. For the husband is held fast in a royal marriage, while the wife, my mistress, wastes away her life in her chamber, her heart in no way soothed by the words of any of her friends.

MEDEA

[144] Oh! May a flash of lightning pierce my head! What profit any longer for me in life? Ah, ah! may I find my rest in death and leave behind my hateful life!

CHORUS

[148] Did you hear, O Zeus and earth and light of the sun, what a wail the miserable woman utters? What is this desire you feel for the bed of death, the bed we should not approach, foolish woman? Death will come all too quickly: do not pray for it. But if your husband holds another marriage-bed in honor, do not vex yourself on his account: Zeus will be your advocate in this. Do not grieve excessively or weep over your husband.

MEDEA

[160] O mighty Themis and my lady Artemis, do you see what I suffer, I who have bound my accursed husband with mighty oaths? May I one day see him and his new bride ground to destruction, and their whole house with them, so terrible are the wrongs they are bold to do me unprovoked! O father, O my native city, from you I departed in shame, having killed my brother.

NURSE

[168] Do you hear what she says, how she calls on Themis invoked in prayer, daughter of Zeus, who is deemed guardian of men's oaths? It is not possible that my mistress will bring her wrath to an end in some trifling deed.

CHORUS

[174] Oh, how I wish she could come face to face with us and receive the sound of our words to her, on the chance that somehow she might give up her angry temper! May my good will never desert my friends! But go now and bring her out of the house. Tell her that here are friends, and hurry before she harms those inside. For this grief of hers is charging powerfully forward.

NURSE

[184] I will do so. But there is doubt whether I shall persuade my mistress. Still, I will make you a further present of my labor, though she glowers at the servants with the look of a lioness with cubs when any of them approaches her with something to say. You would be right to call men of old foolish, not at all wise: for while they invented songs for festivities, banquets, and dinners and added pleasant sounds to human life, no one discovered how to put an end to mortals' bitter griefs with music and song sung to the lyre. It is because of these griefs that deaths and terrible disasters

overthrow houses. It would have been a gain for mortals to cure these ills by song. Where there are feasts of plenty, why do they raise the loud song to no purpose? The abundance of the feast at hand provides mortals with its own pleasure.

[Exit Nurse into the house]

CHORUS

[205] I have heard her cry full of groans, how she utters shrill charges against the husband who betrayed her bed. Having suffered wrong she raises her cry to Zeus's daughter, Themis, goddess of oaths, the goddess who brought her³ to Hellas across the sea through the dark salt-water over the briny gateway of the Black Sea, a gateway few traverse.⁴

[Enter Medea with the Nurse from the house]

MEDEA

[214] Women of Corinth, I have come out of the house [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 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. 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. [This misfortune is more painful than misfortune.] 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, 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, goes elsewhere and thus rids his soul of its boredom [turning to some male friend or age-mate]. 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. How wrong they are! I would rather stand three times with a shield in battle than give birth once.

[252] 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, 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: if I find any means or contrivance to punish my husband for these wrongs [and the bride's father and the bride], keep my secret. In all other things a woman is full of fear, incapable of looking on battle or cold steel; but when she is injured in love, no mind is more murderous than hers.

CHORUS-LEADER

[266] 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 by Eisodos B]

[269] But I see Creon coming, ruler of this land. He will have some new deliberation to report.

CREON

[271] 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, and I will not return home again until I expel you from this land.

MEDEA

[276] 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. Still, though I am ill-treated, I will ask you: Why are you exiling me, Creon?

CREON

[262] I am afraid (no need to dissemble) that you will do some deadly harm to my daughter. Many indications of this combine: 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. It is better for me to incur your hatred now, woman, than to be soft now and regret it later.

MEDEA

[292] 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 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; 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, [others find me retiring, others the opposite, others an obstacle, yet I am not so very wise,] while you on the other hand fear me. 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 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, I will hold my peace, yielding to my superiors.

CREON

[316] 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 -- 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 kneels before him in the attitude of a suppliant, grasping his knees and hand]

MEDEA

[324] 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

[326] But will you banish me without the regard due a suppliant?5

CREON

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

MEDEA

[328] O fatherland, how I think of you now!

CREON

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

MEDEA

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

CREON

[331] I fancy that depends on the circumstances.

MEDEA

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

CREON

[333] Go, foolish woman, and rid me of my trouble.

MEDEA

[334] 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

[336] No, no, not that, I entreat you, Creon!

CREON

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

MEDEA

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

CREON

[339] 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, 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

[348] My nature is not at all a tyrant's, and by showing consideration I have often suffered loss. 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. Now stay, if stay you must, for one more day. You will not do the mischief I fear by then.

[Exit Creon by Eisdos B. Medea rises to her feet]

CHORUS-LEADER

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

MEDEA

[362] In every way the situation is bad: who will deny it? But it is not thus -- do not imagine it -- that things.⁷ 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? 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, the father, his daughter, and my husband.

[376] 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 [or thrust a sharp sword through their vitals], 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 the most skilled, and kill them with poison.

[386] 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, 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,⁸ 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, 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 from this Sisyphean⁹ 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.

CHORUS

[410] Backward to their sources flow the streams of holy rivers, and the order of all things is reversed: men's thoughts have become deceitful and their oaths by the gods do not hold fast. The common talk will so alter that women's ways will enjoy good repute. Honor is coming to the female sex: no more will women be maligned by slanderous rumor.

[421] The poetry of ancient bards will cease to hymn our faithlessness. Phoebus lord of song never endowed our minds with the glorious strains of the lyre. Else I could have sounded a hymn in reply to the male sex. The long expanse of time can say many things of men's lot as well as of women's.

[431] But you sailed from your father's halls, passing with love-maddened heart between the twin rocks of the Euxine.¹⁰

On strange soil you now dwell, you have lost your marriage-bed, your husband's love, poor wretch, and you are being driven from this land an exile without rights.

[438] The magical power of an oath has gone, and Shame is no more to be found in wide Hellas: she has taken wing to heaven. You have no father's home in which to find anchorage, unhappy woman, and another, a princess, greater match than yourself, holds sway in the house.

[Enter Jason by Eisodos B]

JASON

[446] Not now for the first time but often before I have seen what an impossible evil to deal with is a fierce temper.

Although you could have kept this land and this house by patiently bearing with your superiors' arrangements, you will be exiled because of your foolish talk. Not that it bothers me: go on, if you like, calling Jason the basest man alive. But as for your words against the ruling family, count yourself lucky that your punishment is exile. For my part I have always tried to soothe the king's angry temper, and I wanted you to stay. But you would not cease from your folly and always kept reviling the ruling house. For that you will be exiled.

[459] Still, even after this I have not failed my loved ones but have come here in your interests, woman, so that you might

not go into exile with your children penniless or in need of anything: exile brings many hardships with it. Even if you hate me, I could never bear you ill-will.

MEDEA

[465] Vilest of knaves -- for that is the worst insult my tongue can speak against your lack of manly worth -- have you really come to see me when you have made yourself my worst enemy [to the gods, to me, and to the whole human race]? This is not boldness or courage -- to wrong your loved ones and then look them in the face -- but the worst of all mortal vices, shamelessness. But you did well to come, for it will relieve my feelings to tell you how wicked you are, and you will be stung by what I have to say.

[475] I shall begin my speech from the beginning. I saved your life -- as witness all the Greeks who went on board the Argo with you -- when you were sent to master the fire-breathing bulls with a yoke and to sow the field of death. The dragon who kept watch over the Golden Fleece, sleeplessly guarding it with his sinuous coils, I killed, and I raised aloft for you the fair light of escape from death. Of my own accord I abandoned my father and my home and came with you to Iolcus under Pelion, showing more love than sense. I murdered Pelias by the most horrible of deaths -- at the hand of his own daughters -- and I destroyed his whole house. And

after such benefits from me, o basest of men, you have betrayed me and have taken a new marriage, though we had children. For if you were still childless, your desire for this marriage would be understandable.

[492] Respect for your oaths is gone, and I cannot tell whether you think that the gods of old no longer rule or that new ordinances have now been set up for mortals, since you are surely aware that you have not kept your oath to me. O right hand of mine, which you often grasped together with my knees, how profitless was the suppliant grasp upon us of a knave, and how we have been cheated of our hopes!

[499] But come now -- for I will share my thoughts with you as a friend (yet what benefit can I expect to get from you? Still I will do it, for you will be shown up in an uglier light by my questions)--where am I now to turn? To my father's house, which like my country I betrayed for your sake when I came here? Or to the wretched daughters of Pelias? A fine reception they would give me in their house since I killed their father. This is how things stand: to my own kin I have become an enemy, and by my services to you I have made foes of those I need not have harmed. That, doubtless, is why you have made me so happy in the eyes of many Greek women, in return for these favors. I, poor wretch, have in you a wonderful and faithful husband if I am to flee the country, sent into exile, deprived of friends, abandoned with my

abandoned children. This is splendid praise for a new bridegroom, that his children are wandering as beggars, and she who saved him likewise.

[517] O Zeus, why, when you gave to men sure signs of gold that is counterfeit, is there no mark on the human body by which one could identify base men?

CHORUS-LEADER

[520] Terrible and hard to heal is the wrath that comes when kin join in conflict with kin.

JASON

[521] 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 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 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 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, 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 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 and my children.

[Medea makes a gesture of impatience]

[551] 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? 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 -- 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 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 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. Then mankind would have no trouble.

CHORUS-LEADER

[576] 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

[578] I realize I have far different views from the majority of mortals. 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 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

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

MEDEA

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

JASON

[593] 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, 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

[598] 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

[604] 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

[606] How? By taking another wife and abandoning you?

JASON

[607] By uttering unholy curses against the royal family.

MEDEA

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

JASON

[609] I shall not argue any more of this case with you. 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 tokens¹¹ to my friends, who will treat you well. You would be a fool not to accept this offer, woman. Forget your anger and it will be the better for you.

MEDEA

[617] 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

[619] At any rate I call the gods to witness 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 by Eisodos B]

MEDEA

[623] Go: it is clear that you are seized by longing for your new bride as you linger so long out of the palace. 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.

CHORUS

[629] Loves that come to us in excess bring no good name or goodness to men. If Aphrodite comes in moderation, no other goddess brings such happiness. Never, o goddess, may you smear with desire one of your ineluctable arrows and let it fly against my heart from your golden bow!

[636] May moderation attend me, fairest gift of the gods. May Aphrodite never cast contentious wrath and insatiate quarreling upon me and madden my heart with love for a stranger's bed. But may she honor marriages that are peaceful and wisely determine whom we are to wed.

[645] O fatherland, o house, may I never be bereft of my city, never have a life of helplessness, a cruel life, most pitiable of woes. In death, O in death may I be brought low ere that, ending the light of my life. Of troubles none is greater than to be robbed of one's native land.

[654] We ourselves have seen it, and it is not from others' report that I can tell this tale. For no city, no friend has taken pity on you who have suffered the most grievous of sufferings. May that man die unloved who cannot honor his friends, unlocking to them his honest mind. To me at any rate he shall never be friend.

[Enter by Eisodos A Aegeus, the aged king of Athens, in travelling costume]

AEGEUS

[662] Medea, I wish you joy: no one knows a better way than this to address a friend.

MEDEA

[665] Joy to you as well, Aegeus, son of wise Pandion! Where have you come from to be visiting the soil of this land?

AEGEUS

[667] I have come from the ancient oracle of Phoebus.

MEDEA

[668] Why did you go to earth's prophetic center?

AEGEUS

[669] To inquire how I might get offspring.

MEDEA

[670] Have you really lived so long a life without children?

AEGEUS

[671] I am childless: it is the act of some god.

MEDEA

[672] Have you a wife, or have you no experience of marriage?

AEGEUS

[673] I am not without a wife to share my bed.

MEDEA

[674] What then did Phoebus tell you about children?

AEGEUS

[675] Words too wise for mortal to interpret.

MEDEA

[676] Is it lawful for me to hear the response?

AEGEUS

[677] Most certainly: it calls for a wise mind.

MEDEA

[678] What then did the god say? Tell me, if it is lawful to hear.

AEGEUS

[679] 'Do not the wineskin's salient foot untie . . .'

MEDEA

[680] Until you do what or come to what country?

AEGEUS

[681] '. . .until you come to hearth and home again.'12

MEDEA

[682] And what were you in need of that you sailed to this land?

AEGEUS

[683] There is a man named Pittheus, king of Trozen.

MEDEA

[684] The son of Pelops and a man most pious, they say.

AEGEUS

[685] It is with him that I wish to share the god's response.

MEDEA

[686] The man is wise and experienced in such matters.

AEGEUS

[687] What is more, he is closest of all my allies.

MEDEA

[688] Well good luck attend you, and may you obtain what you desire.

AEGEUS

[689] noticing Medea's distraught demeanor But why is your face dissolved in tears?

MEDEA

[690] Aegeus, my husband is the basest of men.

AEGEUS

[691] What is this you say? Tell me particulars of your unhappiness.

MEDEA

[692] Jason wrongs me, though he has suffered no wrong from me.

AEGEUS

[693] What has he done? Tell me in detail.

MEDEA

[694] He has put another woman over me as mistress of the house.

AEGEUS

[695] Surely he has not dared such a shameful act?

MEDEA

[696] He has indeed. Once he loved me, but now I am cast off.

AEGEUS

[697] Was it some passion, or did he grow tired of your bed?

MEDEA

[698] A great passion. He has been unfaithful to his family.

AEGEUS

[699] Pay him no mind then since, as you say, he is base.

MEDEA

[700] His passion was to marry a king's daughter.

AEGEUS

[701] Who has given his daughter to him? Tell me the rest.

MEDEA

[702] Creon, who rules this land of Corinth.

AEGEUS

[703] But it is quite understandable, then, that you are distressed.

MEDEA

[704] I am finished. Furthermore, I am being exiled from the country.

AEGEUS

[705] By whom? This is yet another misfortune you speak of.

MEDEA

[706] It is Creon who exiles me from Corinth.

AEGEUS

[707] Does Jason accede to this? I do not approve of that either.

MEDEA

[708] He pretends not to, but he is ready to put up with it.

[Medea kneels before Aegeus in the posture of a suppliant]

[709] But I beg you by your beard and by your knees and I make myself your suppliant: have pity, have pity on an unfortunate woman, and do not allow me to be cast into exile without a friend, but receive me into your land and your house as a suppliant. If you do so, may your longing for children be brought to fulfillment by the gods, and may you yourself die happy! You do not know what a lucky find you have made in me. I will put an end to your childlessness and cause you to beget children, for I know the medicines to do it.

AEGEUS

[719] Dear woman, for many reasons [I am eager to grant you this favor, first, for the sake of the gods, then for the children you promise I will beget. For on that score I am utterly undone. But here is how matters stand with me. If you come to my country, I shall in justice try to act as your protector. This much, however, I tell you in advance: I will not consent to take you from this land. But if you manage by yourself to come to my house, you may stay there in safety, and I will never give you up to anyone. You must go on your own, then, from this land. I wish to be blameless in the eyes of my hosts as well.

MEDEA

[731] It shall be so. But if you were to give me a promise of this, I would have all I could wish from you.

AEGEUS

[733] Do you not trust me? What is your difficulty?

MEDEA

[734] I trust you. But Pelias' house is hostile to me, and Creon as well. If you are bound by an oath, you will not give me up to them when they come to take me out of the country. But if you have made an agreement in mere words and have not sworn by the gods, you might become their friend and comply with diplomatic requests. For I am weak, while they have wealth and royal power.

AEGEUS

[741] You have shown much prudence in your speech. Well, if you like, I do not object to doing this. Not only is this plan safer for me, since I can show your enemies some pretext, but your own case is more secure. Name the gods I must swear by.

MEDEA

[746] Swear by the plain of Earth, by Helios, my grandfather, and by the whole race of gods all together.

AEGEUS

[748] To do what or to refrain from what? You must say.

MEDEA

[749] That you yourself will never banish me from your land and that, if any of my enemies ask to take me, you will not willingly give me up as long as you live.

AEGEUS

[752] I swear by Earth, by the holy light of Helios, and by all the gods that I will do as I have heard from your lips.

MEDEA

[754] That is good. But what punishment do you call down on yourself if you do not abide by your oath?

AEGEUS

[755] The punishment that befalls the impious among mortals.

MEDEA

[756] Go your way with joy. For all is well, and I shall come to your city as soon as I can, when I have accomplished what I intend and gained what I wish.

[Exit Aegeus by Eisodos A]

CHORUS-LEADER

[759] May Hermes, Maia's son, patron of travellers, bring you safely to your house, and may you accomplish what you have set your heart on, Aegeus, since in my eyes you are a generous man.

MEDEA

[764] O Zeus and Zeus's justice, o light of the sun, now, my friends, I shall be victorious over my enemies: I have set my foot on the path. Now I may confidently expect that my enemies will pay the penalty. For this man, at the very point where I was most in trouble, has appeared as a harbor for my plans: to him will I tie my cable when I go to the city of Pallas Athena.

[771] 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 ason 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. 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, [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. 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. 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 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. Such persons live a life of greatest glory.

CHORUS-LEADER

[811] 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

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

CHORUS-LEADER

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

MEDEA

[817] It is the way to hurt my husband most.

CHORUS-LEADER

[818] And for yourself to become the most wretched of women.

MEDEA

[819] Be that as it may. Till then all talk is superfluous.

[820] To the Nurse 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 by Eisodos B, Medea into the house]

CHORUS

[824] From ancient times the sons of Erechtheus have been favored; they are children of the blessed gods sprung from a holy land never pillaged by the enemy. They feed on wisdom most glorious, always stepping gracefully through the bright air, where once, they say, the nine Pierian Muses gave birth to fair-haired Harmonia.

[835] Legend tells that Aphrodite, filling her pail at the streams of the Cephisus, blew down upon the land temperate and sweetly blowing breezes. And ever dressing her hair with a fragrant chaplet of roses she sends the Loves to sit at Wisdom's side, joint workers in every kind of excellence.

[846] How then shall this city of holy rivers or this land that walks at the side of gods lodge you, the killer of your children, stained with their blood, in the company of her citizens? Think on the slaying of your children, think what slaughter you are committing! Do not, we beseech you by your knees and in every way we can, do not kill your children!

[856] How will you summon up the strength of purpose or the courage of hand and heart to dare this dreadful deed? When you have turned your eyes upon your children, how will you behold their fate with tearless eye? When your children fall as suppliants at your feet, you will not be able to drench your hand in their blood with hardened heart.

[Enter Medea from the house, then Jason by Eisodes B accompanied by the Nurse]

JASON

[866] 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

[869] Jason, I beg you to forgive 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? 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? 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.

[884] So now I approve and I agree that you are acting with sober sense 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, 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, come out,

[The children enter from the house with the Tutor]

[896] 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 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, my tender eyes are filled with tears.

CHORUS-LEADER

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

JASON

[908] I approve this, woman. Nor do I blame your earlier resentment. For it is natural for a woman to get angry 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 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. May I see you as fine strapping lads coming to young manhood, victorious over my enemies!

[Medea turns away weeping]

[922] 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

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

MEDEA

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

JASON

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

MEDEA

[930] 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 -- 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, beg Creon that they not be sent into exile.

JASON

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

MEDEA

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

JASON

[944] 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 [a finely-woven gown and a diadem of beaten gold] by the hand of my children.

[951] To her servants One of you servants, quick, bring the raiment out to me.

[One of the servants goes into the house]

[952] 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 Helios gave to his descendants.

[956] 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

[959] Silly woman, why do you deprive yourself of these things? 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

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

[969] Now, children, when you have entered the rich palace, 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 and bring back to your mother the good news she longs to hear.

[Exit Jason and children, accompanied by the Tutor and the Nurse, by Eisodos B]

CHORUS

[976] Now no more can I hope that the children shall live, no more. For already they are walking the road to murder. The bride will accept, will accept, unhappy woman, ruin in the form of a golden diadem; about her fair hair with her own hand she will place the finery of Death. Their charm and heavenly gleam will entice her to put on the gown and the circlet of fashioned gold. But the bridal bed she lies in will be among the dead. Such is the snare, such the death, she will fall into. She will not escape destruction.

[990] And you, unlucky bridegroom, married into the house of kings, all unwitting you bring destruction upon your children's life and upon your wife a dreadful death. Unhappy man, how wrong you were about your destiny.

[997] Your sorrows next I mourn, unhappy mother of the children, who mean to kill your sons because of your

marriage-bed. Your husband wickedly abandoned it and now lives with another as his wife.

[Enter the Tutor with the children by Eisosdos B]

TUTOR

[1001] 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]

[1004] Ah! Why are you standing in distress when your fortune is good? [Why have you turned your face away and why do you show no pleasure at this news?]

MEDEA

[1007] Alas!

TUTOR

[1008] This is not in tune with my tidings.

MEDEA

[1008] Alas once more!

TUTOR

[1009] Do I in ignorance report some mishap and wrongly think my news is good?

MEDEA

[1011] You have reported what you have reported. I find no fault with you.

TUTOR

[1012] Why then is your face downcast? Why do you weep?

MEDEA

[1013] 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

[1016] Before that there are others I shall bring home, ¹³wretch that I am.

TUTOR

[1017] You are not the only woman to be separated from her children. We mortals must bear misfortune with resignation.

MEDEA

[1019] I will do so. But go into the house and provide the children with their daily needs.

[Exit Tutor into the house]

[1021] My children, my children, you have a city and a home,¹⁴ in which, leaving your poor mother behind, you will live henceforth, bereft of me. But I shall go to another land as an exile before I have the enjoyment of you and see you happy, before I have tended to your baths¹⁵ 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, 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, 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 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!

[1049] But what is coming over me? Do I wish to suffer mockery, 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 shall feel concern for them: I shall not weaken my hand. [Oh! Do not, my angry heart, do not do these things. Let them go, hard-hearted wretch, spare the children. If they live with me in that other place,¹⁶ they will gladden you. By Hell's avenging furies, I shall never leave my children for my enemies to outrage.¹⁷ They must die in any case. And since they must, the one who gave them birth shall kill them. These things are settled in any case and cannot be undone.]

[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]

[1070] Give me 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, 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, wrath that brings mortal men their gravest hurt.

[Exit the children into the house followed by Medea]

CHORUS-LEADER

[1081] Often ere now I have engaged in discourses subtler, and entered upon contests greater, than is right for woman to peer into. No, we too possess a muse, who consorts with us to bring us wisdom: not with all of us, for it is some small clan, one woman among many, that you will find with a share in the Muse. I say that those mortals who are utterly without experience of children and have never borne them have the

advantage in good fortune over those who have. For the childless, because they do not possess children and do not know whether they are a pleasure or a vexation to mortals, hold themselves aloof from many griefs. But those who have in their house the sweet gift of children, them I see worn down their whole life with care: first, how they shall raise their children well and how they may leave them some livelihood. And after that it is unclear whether all their toil is expended on worthless or worthy objects.

[1105] But the last of all misfortunes for all mortals I shall now mention. Suppose they have found a sufficient livelihood, suppose the children's bodies have arrived at young manhood and their character is good: yet if their destiny so chances, off goes death carrying the children's bodies to Hades. How then does it profit us that for the sake of heirs the gods cast upon mortals, in addition to their other troubles, this further grief most painful?

[Enter Medea from the house]

MEDEA

[1116] My friends, for a long time now I have been expecting the event, waiting to see how matters in that quarter will turn out. And look, here I see one of Jason's servants coming. His

agitated breathing shows that he is about to announce some fresh disaster.

[Enter Messenger by Eisodos B]

MESSENGER

[1121] [You that have done a terrible deed unlawfully,]
Medea, run for your life. Take ship, take chariot, and flee.

MEDEA

[1124] What event calls for my fleeing thus?

MESSENGER

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

MEDEA

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

MESSENGER

[1129] What? Can you be in your right mind and not mad, woman? Can you commit an outrage against the royal house, and then rejoice at the news and not be afraid?

MEDEA

[1132] 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 twice the pleasure if they died in agony.

MESSENGER

[1136] 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 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, 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 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 to grant these children release from their exile for my sake.'

[1156] 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, 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, 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 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 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 house rang with the sound of drumming footsteps.

[1181] And by now a sprinter, putting his legs in swift motion, would be reaching the finish-line of the two-hundred-yard course,¹⁸ when the poor woman wakened from her silence,

opened her eyes, and gave forth a terrible groan. 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. 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. 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, 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.

[1204] But her poor father, ignorant of the calamity, 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 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. 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. They lie dead, the daughter and her old father [nearby, a disaster that calls for tears]

[1222] 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, [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 may be luckier than another when wealth flows his way, but blessed never.

[Exit Messenger by Eisodos B]

CHORUS

[1233] It seems that fate is this day fastening calamity on Jason, and with justice. [O poor woman, daughter of Creon, how we pity your misfortune: because of your marriage to Jason you have departed to the halls of Hades.]

MEDEA

[1236] 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. 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, 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, they were dear to you. Oh, what an unhappy woman I am!

[Exit Medea into the house]

CHORUS

[1252] O earth, o ray of the Sun that lightens all, turn your gaze, o turn it to this ruinous woman before she lays her bloody murderous hands upon her children! They are sprung from your race of gold, and it is a fearful thing for the blood of a god to be spilt upon the ground by the hands of mortal men. O light begotten of Zeus, check the cruel and murderous Fury, take her from this house plagued by spirits of vengeance.19

[1261] The toil of bearing your children has come to naught, it was to no purpose that you bore your dear offspring, you who left behind the inhospitable strait where the dark-blue Symplegades clash. O unhappy woman, why does wrath fall so heavy upon your mind and one rash murder succeed another? Grievous for mortals is the stain of kindred blood. For the murderers are dogged by woes harmonious with their deeds, sent by the gods upon their houses.

FIRST CHILD

[1271] within Help!

CHORUS

[1272] Do you hear the cry, the children's cry? O wretched and accursed woman!

FIRST CHILD

[1273] Oh, what shall I do? How can I escape my mother's hands?

SECOND CHILD

[1274] I know not, dear brother. We are done for.

CHORUS

[1275] Shall I enter the house? I am determined to stop the death of the children.

FIRST CHILD

[1277] Yes, in heaven's name, stop it! Now is the time.

SECOND CHILD

[1279] We are now close to the snare of the sword.

CHORUS

[1280] Hard-hearted wretch, you are, it seems, a stone or a piece of iron. You mean to kill the children you gave birth to with a fate your own hand deals out.

[1282] One woman, only one, of all that have been, have I heard of who put her hand to her own children: Ino driven mad by the gods when Hera sent her forth to wander in madness from the house. The unhappy woman fell into the sea, impiously murdering her children. Stepping over the sea's edge, she perished with her two children. What possible further horror now remains? O womankind and marriage fraught with pain, how many are the troubles you have already wrought for mortal men!

[Enter Jason by Eisodos B]

JASON

[1293] You women who stand near the house, is Medea inside, she who has done these dreadful deeds, or has she fled? She will have to hide herself beneath the earth or soar aloft to heaven if she is not going to give satisfaction to the royal house. Does she think that having killed this land's ruling family she will escape from this house unscathed?

[1301] But it is not so much about her that I am concerned as about the children. She will be punished by those she has wronged, but I have come to save my children's life, that no harm may come to them from the next of kin, avenging on them their mother's impious crime.

CHORUS-LEADER

[1306] Poor Jason, you have no idea how far gone you are in misfortune. Else you would not have spoken these words.

JASON

[1308] What is it? Surely she does not mean to kill me as well?

CHORUS-LEADER

[1309] Your children are dead, killed by their mother's hand.

JASON

[1310] What can you mean? You have destroyed me, woman.

CHORUS-LEADER

[1311] You must realize that your children are no more.

JASON

[1312] Where did she kill them? In the house or outside?

CHORUS-LEADER

[1313] Open the gates and you will see your slaughtered sons.

JASON

[1314] Servants, remove the bar at once so that I may see a double disaster, these children's corpses²⁰ I may exact punishment.

Jason tries to open the doors of the house. Medea appears aloft in a winged chariot upon the mechane, which rises from behind the skene.

MEDEA

[1317] Why do you rattle these gates and try to unbar them, in search of the corpses and me who did the deed? Cease your toil. If you need anything from me, speak if you like. But

your hand can never touch me: such is the chariot Helios my grandfather has given me to ward off a hostile hand.

JASON

[1323] O detestable creature, utterly hateful to the gods, to me, and to the whole human race, 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 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 and then stepped aboard the fair-prowed Argo. It was with acts like these that you began.

[1338] 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 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 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, the children I begot and raised, but have lost them.

MEDEA

[1351] 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 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. For I have touched your heart in the vital spot.

JASON

[1361] Yes, and you also have grief and are a sharer in my misfortune.

MEDEA

[1362] Of course, but the pain is worthwhile if you cannot mock me.

JASON

[1363] Children, what an evil mother you got.

MEDEA

[1364] Children, how you have perished by your father's fault.

JASON

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

MEDEA

[1366] No: it was the outrage of your new marriage.

JASON

[1367] Did you really think it right to kill them because of a marriage?

MEDEA

[1368] Do you imagine that loss of love is a trivial grief for a woman?

JASON

[1369] 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

[1371] They live, alas, as spirits to take vengeance on your crimes.

MEDEA

[1372] The gods know who struck the first blow.

JASON

[1373] Yes, they know indeed your loathesome heart.

MEDEA

[1374] Hate on! I detest the hateful sound of your voice.

JASON

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

MEDEA

[1376] How? What shall I do? For that is very much my wish as well.

JASON

[1377] Allow me to bury these dead children and to mourn them.

MEDEA

[1378] Certainly not. I shall bury them with my own hand, taking them to the sanctuary of Hera Akraia,²¹ 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.²² As for myself, I shall go to the land of Erechtheus 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

[1389] May the Fury that punishes your children's death, and Justice the murderous,²³ destroy you utterly!

MEDEA

[1391] What god or power above will listen to you, who broke your oath and deceived a stranger?

JASON

[1393] Pah! Unclean wretch! Child-murderer!

MEDEA

[1394] Go home! Bury your wife!

JASON

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

MEDEA

[1396] Your mourning has yet to begin. Wait until old age.

JASON

[1397] O children most dear.

MEDEA

[1397] Yes, to their mother, not to you.

JASON

[1398] And so you killed them?

MEDEA

[1398] Yes, to cause you grief.

JASON

[1399] Alas, how I long for the dear faces of my children, to enfold them in my arms.

MEDEA

[1401] Now you speak to them, now you greet them, when before you thrust them from you.

JASON

[1403] By the gods, I beg you, let me touch the tender flesh of my children!

MEDEA

[1404] 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, 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 by Eisodos B]

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 by Eisodos B]

THE END

1. The Symplegades, mobile rocks that clashed together to crush any ships running between them, guarded the entrance to the Hellespont and prevented passage between East and West until the Argo managed by a clever ruse to get through.
2. This gives the probable sense of the lacuna.
3. Themis "brought her to Hellas" in that she came to Greece relying on Jason's oath.
4. "The briny gateway [lit. "key"] of the Euxine" is probably the Bosphorus, beyond which, on the Propontis and Hellespont, lay numerous Greek settlements in historical times.
5. The verb aideomai and the corresponding noun aidôs designate the response that suppliance requires, respect for

the sanctity of the suppliant and acquiescence in what he asks.

6. The religious obligation to respect the suppliant is so great that those supplicated feel supplication as violence and constraint: cf. Eur. Hipp. 325.

7. I give the probable sense of the lacuna.

8. Hecate, among her many functions, is connected with magic arts.

9. The wily Sisyphus, famed for dishonest trickery, was a Corinthian.

10. See note above to line 2.

11. 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.

12. Aegeus is bidden in the oracle's riddling terms not to have sexual intercourse before he reaches home. In the usual version of the legend, Aegeus does have intercourse with Aethra, daughter of Pittheus, in Trozen and thus begets Theseus. But the oracle, which may be Euripides' own invention, clearly does not belong with this story, for how could Aegeus beget a son if he violated the oracle's instructions? When Aegeus departs at the end of this scene, he seems bound for Athens, not Trozen.

13. The grim word-play is untranslatable: katagô means both "bring home (from exile)" and "bring down."

14. 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.

15. A special bath for the bride and the groom preceded the wedding.

16. The author of these lines apparently means "Athens." Contrast the expressively ambiguous use of ekeito mean Hades in 1073 below.

17. Among the reasons for deleting these lines is that they make no intelligible sense. Medea cannot resolve on murdering her children as the only alternative to leaving them to be outraged by the Corinthians when less than twenty lines earlier she discussed taking them with her. Also they refer explicitly in the children's hearing to their murder, unlike the ambiguous language elsewhere in the speech.

18. i.e., about twenty seconds elapsed. The reference is to the Olympic stade-race, whose winner gave his name to the Olympiad.

19. The Chorus see in the murder the work of an Erinys (Fury), one of the punishing divinities usually thought of as under the control of Zeus. That human agents may be sometimes regarded as embodying this spirit or serving as its

unconscious agent is clear from Aesch. Ag. 749 and Eur. Tro. 457.

20. I give the probable sense of the lacuna.

21. Hera as worshiped on the Acrocorinth.

22. 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.

23. Both the Erinys (Fury) and Diké (Justice) are agents of Zeus.