

*Medea*

SENECA

*Translated by Moses Hadas*



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# MEDEA

SENECA

Translated, with an Introduction, by  
MOSES HADAS

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**Lucius Annaeus Seneca: c. 3 B.C. - A.D. 65**

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## INTRODUCTION

Jason was the son of Aeson, king of Iolcus in Thessaly. When his uncle Pelias seized the throne, Jason, then an infant, was spirited away and brought up by the centaur Chiron. Upon reaching manhood he returned to demand the kingdom, and Pelias agreed to surrender it if Jason would fetch the Golden Fleece, which was in the possession of King Aetes of Colchis and guarded by an ever-watchful dragon. For this enterprise Argus, with Athena's help, built the world's first ship, the Argo, which was manned by fifty heroes, including such personages as Hercules, Orpheus, Castor and Pollux, Theseus, and their like. The most famous of the many perils of the voyage was the passage through the Symplegades, mountains which guarded the entrance to the Black Sea by clashing together; after the Argo eluded them these mountains were fixed apart. At Colchis King Aetes agreed to surrender the Fleece if Jason would plough a field with a team of fire-breathing bulls and sow it with dragon's teeth which would spring into armed soldiers. Aphrodite caused Aetes' daughter Medea to fall in love with Jason, and she provided magic means by which he mastered the bulls and the earth-born soldiery; then she lulled the watchful dragon to sleep and sailed off with Jason and the Golden Fleece. To retard pursuit she killed her brother Absyrtus and strewed his dismembered limbs over the sea. At Iolcus, Medea deceived Pelias' daughters into attempting to rejuvenate their father by cutting him in pieces and boiling him; the consequent hostility of Pelias' son Acastus forced Jason and Medea to flee to Corinth. Here they lived for some years and had two sons; but to secure his position Jason resolved to dismiss Medea and marry King Creon's daughter, Creusa. In her resentment at this betrayal Medea murdered their two sons, and herself escaped in a chariot drawn by two flying dragons.

The story of the Argo and the Golden Fleece is one of

Europe's oldest. Homer (*Odyssey* 12.70) speaks of it as a familiar thing, Pindar deals with it in one of his longest and finest odes (the *Fourth Pythian*), and it is the subject of the best epic in Greek next to Homer's, the *Argonautica* of Apollonius of Rhodes. The central interest of the *Argonautica*, and the first full treatment of romantic love in European literature, is the episode of Jason and Medea, which served Vergil as a model for the Dido episode in the *Aeneid*. But far the most familiar ancient treatment of the love and hate of Jason and Medea is the *Medea* of Euripides, which is the model for Seneca's play.

Euripides' theme, like Seneca's, is the reaction of a passionate woman when her husband deserts her for a younger bride. Euripides no more approves of Medea's vengeance than does Seneca or any sane man, but Euripides is also concerned to criticize social conventions which were ultimately responsible for the tragedy—masculine smugness toward women and Greek smugness toward foreigners. When Medea reproaches Jason with ingratitude he replies that his gratitude, if any is due, must go to Aphrodite: Medea could do no other than fall in love with him and serve him. On the contrary, she should be grateful to him for taking her from a barbarian land and bringing her to civilized and law-abiding Greece.

To these or other social implications of the story Seneca is indifferent. Even on the matter of kingship, where as a Stoic and tutor to a tyrant Seneca is regularly concerned to emphasize the role of the king as servant rather than master, the implications of this play are equivocal. Medea scores tyranny and advocates moderation, but she does so not out of conviction but only to temporize, and it is Creon's very yielding that makes the horrible outcome possible. If the play has an ethical content it is that strong passions (the Stoics called them perturbations) are harmful and make life unlivable. Each of Seneca's plays, indeed, shows the awful consequences of some passion, and in the *Medea* the passion is love. But even without Stoic moralizing the display of colossal passion can be edifying. The spectacle of emotional intensity, as

of extraordinary prowess in other departments, enlarges the spectator's perception of human potentialities and vicariously enhances his own stature.

In the *Medea*, as in his other tragedies, Seneca's prime object seems to be to create huge figures capable of transcendent intensity; and to communicate their extraordinary quality he endows them with power over nature itself and lavishes upon them all the distinction his splendid rhetoric is capable of. To a literal-minded age superhuman language, like superhuman personages and emotions, may be suspect; nevertheless, *Medea* provides as effective illumination of a theme central to half of literature as do any of its thousand adaptations. These bear witness to the perennial relevance of the theme; that it suited Roman taste is indicated by the fact that in Seneca's own century Ovid wrote a highly praised (but unfortunately lost) *Medea* and Valerius Flaccus expanded Apollonius' epic in a Latin version.

Because our generation favors the commonplace in vocabulary and syntax, a satisfactory translation of Seneca is harder to achieve today than ever before. When factual content is of the essence, the translator may legitimately reduce rhetoric to a more familiar level, but such a procedure would strip Seneca of all that makes him moving and meaningful and leave only a bare framework of frightfulness. His rhetoric was undoubtedly as striking to Seneca's contemporaries as it is to us, with the difference that to them it enriched and gave meaning to the plot in the way that music enriches the meaning of an otherwise indifferent opera libretto for us. Indeed it is very doubtful that Seneca's plays were ever intended for full performance; it is more likely that they were presented by a cast of reciters, like an oratorio.

Seneca's dates are 4 B.C.—A.D. 65. Besides nine tragedies (*Octavia*, the tenth in the collection, is probably by another hand) he wrote a number of ethical essays and numerous philosophical "letters," a treatise on natural history, and a satire on the deification of the emperor Claudius.





**M E D E A**

## CHARACTERS

MEDEA, daughter of King Aectes of Colchis, wife of JASON

JASON, prince of Iolcus, sometime commander of the Argonauts

CREON, king of Corinth, father of JASON's bride Creusa

NURSE, confidante of MEDEA

MESSENGER

Two sons of MEDEA and JASON (mutes)

CHORUS OF CORINTHIANS

Guards, servants, Corinthian crowd

SCENE: *the front of JASON's house in Corinth*

# MEDEA

## I

*(Enter MEDEA.)*

MEDEA: Ye Jupiter and Juno, patrons of wedlock; thou Lucina, keeper of the conjugal couch; thou Minerva, who didst teach Tiphys to bridle a novel craft that would master the seas; thou Neptune, savage lord of Ocean's depths; thou Sun, who dost apportion bright light to the globe; thou triform Hecate, whose radiance serves as accomplice to silent sacraments—ye deities by whom Jason swore to me, yea, and ye deities whom Medea hath better right to invoke: thou Chaos of endless night; ye realms opposed to the upper world's; ye impious ghosts; thou Pluto, lord of the gloomy demesne; thou Proserpina, ravished with more honorable intentions than was I—all you I invoke, but not for blessing. Attend, ye goddesses who avenge crime, attend, your unkempt hair foul serpents, your bloody hands grasping the ominous torch; attend now in such dread presence as once ye showed when ye stood posted at my bridals. Make your gifts death for the new bride, death for the father-in-law and the royal stock.

But for the husband I have a worse gift to beg: let him live. Let him wander through cities he knows not, a needy vagabond, a trembling alien, hated and homeless. Let him beg at a stranger's threshold, now a recognized cadger. May he wish I were his wife. May his children—I can think of no worse imprecation—be like their father, yes, and like their mother. Born is my vengeance, already born; I have given birth.

But idle are the plaints I broadcast, mere words. Shall I not march against the enemy? I shall wrest the wedding torches from their hands, the very light from heaven. Can

Sun, founder of my race, look on? Can he let himself be looked at as he sits upon his chariot and drives his customary course in untainted air? Will he not return to his rising and retrace the day's course? Grant me to ride through the air in my father's chariot, do grant it; hand me the reins, sire, assign me to steer that fire-bearing car with blazing traces. Corinth with the obstruction of its twin shores shall be burned down and its two seas joined.

Only this remains, that I myself serve as matron of honor and carry the flambeau into the bridal chamber!—and after sacrificial prayers slaughter the victims on the appointed altars. Through the vitals find a path for punishment, my soul, if you still have feeling; if a spark of your old energy is left, banish womanish timidity and put on the temper of stranger-hating Caucasus. Whatever crime Phasis and Pontus have seen, Corinth's Isthmus shall see. Savage and unexampled enormities, horrifying to heaven and earth alike, my mind within me is churning up, wounds and murder and death that slithers along the limbs. Too trivial are the deeds I recall—those things I did as a girl. 'Tis time for deeper passion; now I am a mother, more impressive crimes are expected. Gird yourself in fury, with all your frenzy ready yourself for destruction! Let the tale of your divorce be as memorable as that of your marriage: how did you leave your husband?—by the methods by which you won him. Away with laggard lethargy; the bond concluded by crime must by crime be severed.

(MEDEA withdraws to one side as the Chorus enters in procession, chanting the epithalamium for the marriage of JASON and CREUSA.)

CHORUS: With divine benison attend ye the marriage of princes, ye heavenly gods and ye that govern the sea; and in manner ordained show your good will, ye people.

First, to the scepter-bearing Thunderers a bull of gleaming white shall raise his lofty neck. To Lucina a heifer of snowy body, untried by the yoke, shall be offered. Venus, who re-

strains rough Mars' bloody hands, who offers terms to warring peoples and holds plenty in her rich horn, will be presented, for her gentleness, with a tenderer victim. And thou, Hymen, patron of legitimate marriage, who dost disperse night's darkness with the torch in thine auspicious right hand, come thou forward with languorous step wine-drenched, thy brows bound with a chain of roses. And thou, star of the evening, twilight's herald, whose slow coming makes lovers impatient, whom eager matrons and brides long for, quickly as may be spread thy clear rays.

Our maiden's comeliness surpasses far the beauty of Athenian brides, and those of unwalled Sparta who exercise like boys on the ridges of Taygetus, and those on the banks of Theban Aonia or Elis' sacred Alpheus.

If our Jason, Aeson's scion, would display his beauty, then would the wicked lightning's offspring yield to him, even Bacchus, who harnesses tigers to his chariot. Yield, too, would Apollo, who shakes the tripod, severe Diana's brother; Pollux, adept in boxing, would yield, along with his brother Castor. So, I pray you heaven-dwellers, so may our lady transcend all wives, the husband far surpass all husbands.

When our lady takes her stand in the maidens' choir, her sole beauty outshines them all, as when comeliness fades from the stars when the sun rises, or the dense crowds of Pleiades hide when Phoebe completes her wonted orb with her circling horns of borrowed light. As snowy whiteness blushes when tinged with scarlet, so the dewy shepherd beholds the shining beam of fresh dawn.

Delivered from the wedlock of uncouth Phasis, schooled fearfully and with unwilling hand to fondle the bosom of an incontinent mate, now, happy groom, take unto yourself an Aeolian maid, only now can you marry with the blessings of the bride's kin.

Come, lads, banter is seasonable: take your fun. From this side and then from that discharge your barbed verses; license to chaff nobles comes rarely.

Flawless Hymen, noble offspring of thyrsus-bearing Bacchus,

now is your time to kindle the torch of splintered pine: wave the ritual blaze with drunken fingers. Let the fescennine pater pour out its festive banter, let the crowd chaff and jest. In silence and darkness depart the woman who surreptitiously marries a foreign husband.

## II

*(As the CHORUS retires backstage MEDEA steps forward.)*

MEDEA: Lost! The wedding chant has beaten on my ears. Even I can hardly believe, even now, so total a calamity. Could Jason do this? He robbed me of father, country, kingdom: can he cruelly desert me, all alone and in a foreign place? Is he scornful of my services when he has seen fire and ocean vanquished by my crime? Or does he believe that all my uncanniness is used up? Without resolution or decision or rational wit, I am tossed about in all directions. In what quarter can I take vengeance? I wish *he* had a brother! But he has a wife: against her shall my sword be driven. But is this satisfaction for my abuses? If cities Pelasgian or cities barbarian have learned any enormity of which your hands are ignorant, now is the time to study them. Your own crimes should urge you on; recall them all: the glorious symbol of royalty stolen away; the impious girl's little brother dismembered with a sword, his death thrust upon his father, and his body scattered over the sea; the limbs of aged Pelias boiled in a brass cauldron. How often have I perpetrated bloody murder! Yet no crime have I committed in anger; it was ill-starred love that impelled me.

But what could Jason do, subject as he was to another's decision and authority? He should have bared his breast to the sword—more kindly, mad grief, speak more kindly! Let Jason live, if possible, my own as in the past, but if not, let him live nevertheless, and remember me, and cherish the life I gave him. The whole fault is Creon's; with capricious lordliness he dissolves marriages, tears mothers from children, and

severs loyalties cemented by the most intimate of pledges. It is he that must be attacked; he alone shall pay the score he owes. His house I shall heap high with ashes. As his roofs are blackened with flame they shall be conspicuous at Malea, which enforces long delay on shipping.

(*As MEDEA's tirade reaches a crescendo, enter the NURSE, hurriedly.*)

NURSE: Silence, please! Muffle your complaints, confide them to secret sorrow. One who is mute under hard blows, and keeps patient and collected, can requite them: wrath concealed can inflict injury, but hatred professed forfeits opportunity for vengeance.

MEDEA: Light is the grief which can take counsel and dissemble; great ills cannot take cover. I choose open hostility.

NURSE: Halt this passionate offensive, my darling; passive defense will scarcely save you.

MEDEA: Fortune fears the brave, the cowardly crushes.

NURSE: Valor is admirable when it has a place.

MEDEA: It is impossible valor should ever have no place.

NURSE: No hope points a path in your prostrate position.

MEDEA: Who has nothing to hope should despair of nothing.

NURSE: The Colchians have deserted you, your husband is gone, of all your resources nothing is left.

MEDEA: Medea is left. Here you see sea and land, steel and fire and gods and thunderbolts.

NURSE: A king is to fear.

MEDEA: My father was a king.

NURSE: Are you not afraid of soldiery?

MEDEA: No! though they sprouted from earth.

NURSE: You will die!

MEDEA: So I desire.

NURSE: Flee!

MEDEA: I have regretted flight.



NURSE: Medea—

MEDEA: —will I prove myself.

NURSE: You are a mother.

MEDEA: You see by whom.

NURSE: Then do you hesitate to fly?

MEDEA: I shall fly, but first take my vengeance.

NURSE: The avenger will track you.

MEDEA: Perhaps I shall contrive to delay him.

NURSE: Restrain your words, have done with threats, mad woman, bate your temper. One must adjust oneself to the situation.

MEDEA: Fortune can cancel my resources, not my spirit.— But who is that knocking at my palace door? It is Creon himself, swollen with Pelasgian lordship.

*(As CREON enters MEDEA moves to the rear. Exit NURSE.)*

CREON: Has Medea, Colchian Aetes' cankerous growth, not yet carried herself off from my kingdom? She is working some mischief: I know her guile, I know her power. Whom will that woman spare, whom will she leave in peace? For my part, I was ready to eradicate that dangerous plague with the sword, but my son-in-law begged her off. I have granted her life, but she must free my realm from fear and go elsewhere for her safety.

Beetling she strides toward me, her expression is menacing as she approaches nearer to address me. Keep her off, slaves!— far off from touch or access; bid her be silent. It is time she learned to accept a king's edict. *(To MEDEA)* Go, fly headlong! Take your monstrous, savage, repulsive self away at once!

MEDEA: What is the charge? What offense brings sentence of exile?

CREON: An innocent woman asks why she is expelled!

MEDEA: If you are judge, examine the case; if king, issue your orders.

CREON: Just or unjust, a king's orders you must accept.

MEDEA: Unjust rule is never lasting.

CREON: Go, complain to the Colchians.

MEDEA: I go, but he who carried me from Colchis should take me back.

CREON: Speech comes late when the decree is fixed.

MEDEA: Whoso passes sentence with one party unheard—even though the sentence be just, not just was the judge.

CREON: Did you hear Pelias before he received his doom? But speak on; for your excellent case a place shall be made.

MEDEA: How difficult it is to sway an excited temper from anger, how royal the man whose proud hands have touched the scepter regards it to persist in a course he has begun, I have learned in my own experience of royalty. Yes, though I am overwhelmed with wretched ruin, expelled, a beggar, forlorn, forsaken, afflicted on every side, once I shone brilliant in my father's high birth and traced glorious lineage from my grandfather, the Sun. Whatever lands the Phasis waters with its placid bends, whatever Scythian Pontus sees at its back, where the seas grow sweet with the waters of the marshes, whatever lands live in fear of the manless troop armed with shields bounded by Thermodon's banks—all this broad domain my father holds under his sway. Nobly born, blessed, royalty and power made my life a shining splendor. Then did nobles sue for my hand—now I must be the suitor. Rapid is fortune and fickle. Headlong it has swept me from royalty and delivered me to exile.

Trust kingship when the slightest accident plays havoc with its mighty state! But there is a glorious and incalculable possession in the power of kings which time can never snatch away: to protect the downtrodden, to shelter suppliants with a hearth they can trust. This alone have I brought with me from my Colchian realm, that myself I saved that magnificent and illustrious flower of Greece, bulwark of the Achaean race, progeny of gods. Orpheus is my gift, who enchants stones by his song and draws the forests to hear; my gift, too, are Castor and Pollux, and Boreas' scions, and Lynceus, whose sharp

sight perceives things beyond Pontus, and all the Minyans. Of the leader of leaders I say nothing; for him there is no debt, him I charge to no one's account. The others I brought back for you, Jason for myself.

Proceed now and pile your indictments high; I shall confess all. The sole charge to which I am liable is the return of the Argo. Suppose my choice had been maidenly modesty and my own father: then all the Pelasgian land would have collapsed along with its leaders, and first of all would this son-in-law of yours have succumbed to the fiery breath of that fierce bull. Fortune may overwhelm my case as it will: I am not sorry I saved that numerous band of glorious princes. It is in your power to fix the reward I receive for all my transgressions. Condemn the defendant, if you like, but give me back the source of my sin. I am guilty, Creon, I confess it; but so you knew me to be when I touched your knees as a suppliant and begged the solemn protection of your hand. Again I beg for some little corner, some repose, for my miseries, some humble hovel to hide in. If the decision is to drive me from this city, let me have some faraway cranny in your kingdom.

CREON: I think I gave sufficient evidence that I am not a man who is overbearing in wielding the scepter or who tramples upon misery with proud foot when I chose for my son-in-law an exile helpless and haunted by pressing fear, inasmuch as Acastus, who holds the Thessalian realm, is demanding his person for capital punishment. Acastus' complaint is that his aged father, palsied and heavy with years, was murdered and that the limbs of the aged victim were dismembered when his dutiful sisters, deceived by your cheat, ventured on an undutiful enormity. Jason can defend his case if you separate yours from it. No blood has tainted his innocence. his hand plied no sword, he has detached himself from complicity and kept himself undefiled. It is you, you, who are the architect of odious crime. You have a woman's irresponsibility for reckless daring and the strength of a man, with no thought of reputation: begone, purge my realm, take

your lethal herbs with you, free my citizens from terror, settle in some other land and there trouble the gods!

MEDEA: Is it flight you enforce? Then for flight give me back my ship, give me back my shipmate. Why do you order me to flee alone? I was not alone when I came. If it is fear of war that impels you, eject us both from your realm; why do you differentiate between a pair equally guilty? It is for him Pelias fell, not for me. Add to your indictment elopement and theft, a deserted father and a butchered brother—all the crimes that bridegroom teaches his new wives: the sin is not mine. Many times have I been made guilty, but never for myself.

CREON: You should have been far away by now. Why do you purposely delay matters with speechmaking?

MEDEA: I am going; this is my last humble petition: let the mother's guilt not drag her innocent children down.

CREON: Go, I will take them into my fatherly embrace as if they were mine.

MEDEA: By the blessed bed of this royal marriage, by your hopes for the future, by the continuance of kingdoms, which is subject to the vicissitudes of variable fortune, I pray you: bestow the largesse of a brief stay upon the refugee mother, until I imprint what may be my dying kiss upon my sons.

CREON: It is for a trick you want time.

MEDEA: What trick is there to fear when the time is so slight?

CREON: For the wicked no time is too scant to work harm.

MEDEA: Will you deny a poor creature a tiny respite for her tears?

CREON: Though inveterate fear opposes your plea, one day shall be given you to prepare for exile.

MEDEA: Generous, even if you curtail it a bit; I, too, am impatient.

CREON: But you will pay with your head if you have not cleared the Isthmus before Phoebus raises bright day.

But the marriage rites summon me, the festive day of Hymen calls me to prayer.

*(Exeunt CREON and MEDEA severally.)*

CHORUS: Too bold the man who first ploughed the treacherous sea with frail bark, who saw his familiar mainland receding behind him and entrusted his life to the fickle winds; slicing through the unbroken surface in his uncertain course he dared put his faith in a thin board which drew too tenuous a line between the paths of life and death.

No one as yet knew the constellations nor understood the use of the stars which spangle the ether. Not yet could craft avoid the rainy Hyades; unnamed as yet were the lights of the Olenian Goat, or the Attic Wain which creeping old Bootes follows and guides, or yet the North Wind, or yet the West.

'Twas Tiphys who ventured to spread sail over the vast main and to write new laws for winds: now to stretch canvas to belly out full, now to haul the sheet forward to catch cross winds from the south, now to set the yards safely in the middle of the mast, now to make them fast to the very top, when the too eager sailor is greedy for every gust and the ruddy spinnaker flutters aloft.

Stainless the ages our fathers saw, when trickery was far distant. Every man trod his own shore free of ambition and waxed old on his ancestral heath; rich on a pittance, he knew no wealth but what his native soil produced. Worlds well and lawfully dissevered that Thessalian timber forced into one; it bade ocean endure lashes and the hitherto isolated sea to be reckoned among human fears.

Upon that wilful boat a severe penalty was inflicted after it had made its way through far-off perils when two mountains, barriers of the abyss, were driven together from this side and that by a sudden thrust and roared as with heaven's thunder and the trapped sea splattered their peaks and the very clouds. Bold Tiphys blanched and his faltering hand relaxed its hold upon all the reins; Orpheus fell mute, his

lyre stunned to silence; and Argo itself lost its god-given voice. And what panic was there when the maid of Sicilian Pelorus, Scylla, girt about her waist with rabid hounds, opened all her gaping maws at once! Who would not quake in every limb when so many simultaneous barks issued from a single monstrosity? What turmoil when the Sirens, those deadly plagues, mesmerized the Ausonian sea with their melodious chant, when Thracian Orpheus responded to their song on his Muse-given lyre and almost forced the Siren, whose habit it was to hold ships back, herself to follow! And what was the prize of this voyage? The Golden Fleece and Medea, an evil worse than the sea and an appropriate cargo for the first of ships.

Today the sea has capitulated and submits to human terms. There is no need for a famed Argo fashioned by Pallas' hand and manned by princely oars: any skiff may wander at will over the deep. All boundaries have been abolished, cities fix their walls in new lands, nothing is left where it had always been, the whole world may be freely traversed. Indian quaffs cold Araxes, Persians drink Elbe and Rhine. An age shall come in latter years when Ocean shall relax nature's bars, when the whole wide surface of earth shall be open and Tethys shall uncover new worlds; Thule shall no longer be land's end.

### III

*(Enter MEDEA, her movements showing her distraction, followed by the NURSE, whom she ignores and who proceeds to describe her movements.)*

NURSE: Darling, where to abroad in such haste? Stop, control your emotion, bridle your impetuosity.

Like a maenad crazily bounding when she is possessed by the god and beside herself, on the snowy peak of Pindus or Nysa's ridges, so is Medea coursing from this side to that, her movements undirected and signs of frantic fury in her face. Her cheeks are hectic, her breath a deep panting, she shouts,

she floods her eyes with a gush of tears, she beams with ecstasy, she passes through the gamut of every passion. She is frustrated, she threatens, she seethes, she complains, she groans. How will her mind's weight veer, how will her threats be directed, where will that surging wave break? Her fury spills over its bounds. It is no slight or ordinary crime she is brewing; she will outdo herself. I recognize the symptoms of her old intensity; something big is afoot, something monstrous, huge, godless.

*(MEDEA's paroxysm subsides and she pauses to speak.)*

It is the visage of a madman I see: may the gods disprove my fear!

MEDEA: If you ask, poor creature, what limit you should place on your hatred, copy your love. Can such as I tolerate this wedding without vengeance? Can this day, campaigned for with such ado and with such ado granted, drag idly by? So long as earth's core shall bear heaven in balance, so long as the bright universe shall unroll its sure alternations, as sands are numberless and day follows sun and stars night, so long as the pole rotates the waterless Bears and rivers fall into the sea, my passion to exact punishment shall never falter, but ever wax greater. What savagery of wild beasts, what Scylla, what Charybdis, sucking up Ausonian sea and Sicilian, what Aetna resting heavily on heaving Titan shall boil with threats so dire? No rushing torrent, no storm-tossed sea, no Pontus whipped to fury by the north wind or fire sustained by its violent gale could match my drive and my intensity. I shall overturn everything, flatten everything to ruins.

Was Jason afraid of Creon and the saber-rattling Thessalian chief? True love can fear no one. But suppose that he gave in under duress and yielded his hand: at least he could have come for a last conversation with his wife. Even this he was afraid to do, for all his fierceness. Surely a son-in-law could procure a postponement for the harsh sentence—one single day was given me for two children. But I do not complain of the shortness of time; it shall stretch far. This day shall bring

to pass a deed, aye, it shall bring to pass a deed which no other day can overlook. I will assail the gods, I will make the universe totter.

NURSE: Master your heart, mistress, which your woes have set in turmoil; mollify your spirit.

MEDEA: (I can be quiet only if I see everything overwhelmed along with my ruin. As you go down it is a satisfaction to drag others with you.)

(Exit MEDEA.)

NURSE: See how much we have to fear if you persist. No one can attack the powerful and remain safe.

(Exit NURSE; enter JASON.)

JASON: Ah, fate always hard and fortune harsh, malignant alike when she rages and when she forbears. How often does the god find us remedies worse than our perils! If I should choose to keep faith with my wife's deserts, I should have to yield my head to death; but if I should choose not to die, I must, poor wretch, prove faithless. Yet it is not fear that has vanquished faith, but the apprehension of a conscientious father, for surely the children would follow their parents to death. Hallowed justice, if thy seat is in heaven, I invoke thy divinity to witness: the sons have prevailed over the father. Nay, I do believe that fierce as she is in heart and impatient of the yoke, she would herself be more concerned for her children than for her marriage. Angry though she be, I am determined to ply her with prayer. (Enter MEDEA.) And look, at sight of me she bridles, shows her fury, makes her hate plain to see; all her passion is in her face.

MEDEA: I am on the run, Jason, on the run. That is nothing new, to scurry from shelter to shelter; it is the cause of my running that is new: it was for you I used to run. You force me to fly from your house—I leave it, I go away; but where are you sending me? Shall I make my goal Phasis and the Colchians, my father's kingdom and the fields drenched with my brother's blood? What country do you direct me to? What



seas do you point out to me? Shall it be the jaws of the Pontic strait through which I carried back that noble band of princes when I followed an adulterer through the Symplegades? Shall I make for little Iolcus or Tempe in Thessaly? Every road I opened up for you I closed for myself. Where would you have me go? You decree expulsion for the refugee, but assign no place of exile. But I am on my way; a king's son-in-law has issued his orders, and I accept them. Heap cruel tortures upon me! I have deserved them. Let regal wrath crush your concubine with bloody torments, load her hands with chains, bury her in the rocky dungeon of eternal night: my sufferings will be less than I deserve.

Ingrate! Let your mind dwell on the fiery puffing of that bull; on the blazing crew in Aetes' arms-sprouting field amidst the wild terror of that untamed race; on the weapons of the instantaneously ripened enemy, when, at my bidding, the soldiery born of earth fell at each other's hands. Recall, too, the spoil of the ram of Phrixus; the sleepless dragon compelled to close his eyes in unprecedented slumber; the brother done to death, and the compounding of the crime when he was dismembered; the daughters who minced the limbs of the old man, deceived by my trick into thinking he would be resurrected. By the hopes of your children, your secure home, by the monsters vanquished, by these hands which I have never spared in your service, by the perils we have passed through, by heaven and sea, the witnesses of my marriage, pity me. You are happy: give the suppliant her turn. Gaining kingdoms for others, I abandoned my own. Of all the wealth the Scythians accumulate, raided from as far afield as the sun-scorched folk of India and so abundant that our palaces are too full to hold more treasure and we decorate the woodland with gold—of all this I took nothing away with me except my brother's limbs, and those, too, I squandered for you. For you my country is lost, my father, my brother, my chastity; that was the dowry I brought when I married you: now that I am rejected, give me back my own.

JASON: When Creon was resolved to do away with you it was my tears that prevailed upon him to grant you banishment.

MEDEA: And I thought it was a punishment; I see now that exile is a favor.

JASON: Escape while you can still leave, get yourself away. The anger of kings always falls heavy.

MEDEA: So you urge me in Creusa's interest; you are trying to rid her of a paramour she loathes.

JASON: Is Medea taking exception to love?

MEDEA: And to murder, and to guile.

JASON: But what act of mine can you really take exception to?

MEDEA: Every act I committed.

JASON: That is all that is wanting, that I, too, should be guilty of your crimes!

MEDEA: They are yours, they are yours, indeed! The one who profits by a crime is guilty of it. Though the world should insist your wife is infamous, you alone must defend her, you alone declare her innocent. In your sight she should be guiltless if her guilt is for your sake.

JASON: Life is thankless when one is ashamed of having received it.

MEDEA: One should not cling to it when one is ashamed of having received it.

JASON: Nay, try to master your angry and excited heart, be reconciled for the children's sake.

MEDEA: I resign them, disclaim them, disown them! Shall Creusa bear brothers to *my* children?

JASON: A queen to the sons of aliens, a lady of position to the afflicted.

MEDEA: Never may so black a day befall the unhappy as shall adulterate a noble stock with a vile, the issue of Phoebus with the issue of Sisyphus.

JASON: Why, wretched woman, are you dragging us both down to destruction? Go away, please!

MEDEA: Creon listened to a suppliant.

JASON: Tell me what I can do.

MEDEA: For me? Crime.

JASON: On this side a king and on that—

MEDEA: —Medea, a greater terror. The two of us should compete, with Jason as the prize.

JASON: I give up, I am worn down by my troubles. But you had better be wary of tempting chance too often.

MEDEA: Fortune has always stood inferior to me.

JASON: Acastus is on the offensive.

MEDEA: Creon is a nearer enemy. Flee them both, Jason. Medea is not forcing you to take arms against your father-in-law or to pollute yourself with the murder of your kinsman Acastus; flee with me, free of guilt.

JASON: But who will defend us if twin wars assail us, if Creon and Acastus join forces?

MEDEA: Add the Colchians, too, add Aeetes to be their general, combine Scythians with Pelasgians: I will overwhelm them all.

JASON: I am terribly afraid of lofty scepters.

MEDEA: Are you sure you do not covet them?

JASON: Our long colloquy will arouse suspicion; cut it short.

MEDEA: Now, supreme Jupiter, thunder in all heaven, stretch forth your right hand, prepare your avenging flames, cleave the clouds and set the whole world atremble. Poise your weapons, with hand indifferent, against me or him; whichever of us falls, a criminal will perish. Against us your bolt cannot mis-strike.

JASON: Do begin to think rationally and speak sanely. If any consolation from my father-in-law's house can ease your flight, ask for it.

MEDEA: You know that my spirit is able and accustomed

to despise royal riches. All that I ask is that I may have my children as companions in my exile, so that I can pour my tears into their bosom. *You* can expect new sons.

JASON: I confess I should like to comply with your request, but paternal obligation forbids. Not even king or father-in-law could compel me to agree to their leaving. They are my reason for living, the solace of a heart burned black with cares. Sooner would I be deprived of breath, of limbs, of light.

MEDEA (*aside*): Has he such love for his children? Fine! I have him, the place to wound him is uncovered. (*To JASON*) At least allow me to give them my last injunctions, allow me a final embrace; even that will be appreciated. This is my last plea: I beg you, if my despair and grief have overflowed, do not let what I have said stick in your mind. I would have you retain a better memory of myself; ascribe the other to my passion and blot it out.

JASON: All that I have put out of my mind. And I, too, pray that you govern your hot temper and cultivate placidity. Calm mollifies misery.

(*Exit JASON.*)

MEDEA: He has gone. Is this how it is? Do you walk away forgetful of me and all I have done? Have I become a cipher to you? I shall never be a cipher. To work! Summon all your powers and skills. The profit of your crimes is to count nothing a crime. For guile there is no chance; fear has alerted them. Attack where no one could fear. Oh, now, be bold, venture what Medea is capable of, and what she is not capable of.

(*Enter NURSE.*)

(*To NURSE*) You, my loyal nurse, companion of my sorrow and my changing fortunes, help my poor schemes. I have a robe, a divine heirloom which is the glory of our house and kingdom, bestowed on Aetes by the Sun as a pledge of his fatherhood. There is also a necklace woven of shining gold, and a gold band for binding the hair set with brilliant gems. These things my sons shall take as a gift to the bride, but first they must be smeared and steeped with baneful art. In-

voke Hecate and prepare the lethal rites. Have altars set up, and let their flames crackle inside the house.

(*Exeunt.*)

CHORUS: No force of fire or of whistling wind or of hurtling spear is so violent as a wife's blazing hatred when she is robbed of her marriage—not when cloud-laden South-wind brings wintry rain and the Danube in spate sweeps bridges apart and wanders unchanneled; not when Rhone pounds the sea or when invigorated Sun melts the snows into torrents as Haemus dissolves in mid-Spring. Blind is love's fire when goaded by anger; it scorns guidance, will not tolerate check-reins, has no fear of death; it strains to advance upon ready swords.

Spare him, ye gods; we pray your indulgence for the man who subdued the sea. Let him live unhurt, though the lord of the deep resents the conquest of the realm second to heaven's. The youth who made bold to drive the Sun's immortal chariot disregarded the limits his father had set, and was himself victim of the sparks he so madly scattered over heaven's vault. High is the price of the pioneer path; walk where former generations have found it safe, nor breach, wilful man, the hallowed covenants of the universe.

All who laid hand to the noble beams of that audacious ship and despoiled Pelion of its sacred woodland's thick shade, all who passed between the wandering rocks and traversed the sea's many perils, who tied hawser to barbaric shore to ravish and bring back the prize of foreign gold, expiated the violated rights of the sea by some dire doom.

Challenged, the sea exacts its penalty. First of all Tiphys, who tamed the deep, left his rudder to a novice pilot. Dying on a foreign strand, far from his ancestral kingdom, he lies covered in a contemptible grave, among alien shades. Aulis remembered the king it had lost, and its windless harbor holds the Greek fleet, which chafes at standing still.

Orpheus born of the melodious Muse, whose plectrum evoked chords at which torrents halted and winds fell silent,

at whose music the birds left off their song and with the whole woodland attending followed the singer—Orpheus lies mangled over the Thracian plains while his head floats down mournful Hebrus. He reached Tartarus and the Styx he already knew, but this time never to return.

Hercules laid North Wind's sons in the dust and slew Neptune's scion whose habit had been to transform himself into numberless shapes. But Hercules himself, after he had brought peace to land and sea, after he had forced open the realm of cruel Dis, laid him down on blazing Oeta while he was yet alive, and to the pitiless flames gave his limbs eroded by his wife's gift, mingled of the gore of Nessus and the Hydra.

Ancaeus was laid low by the fierce charge of the bristly boar, whereat, Melcager, you impiously slew your mother's brother and yourself died at your angry mother's hand. All these deserved the punishment which tender Hylas incurred, the lad Hercules could not find because he had been ravished away amidst waters which held no dread. Then proceed, my stalwarts, to plough the sea whose waters are full of dread!

Idmon, though clairvoyant of others' fate, was despatched by a serpent in the sands of Libya. Mopsus, truthful to others but to himself false, succumbed far from his Thebes. If Mopsus prophesied truly, Thetis' husband Peleus shall be a roaming exile. Nauplius shall fall headlong into the deep as he seeks to wreck the Argives with spurious beacons, and his son Palamedes shall pay with his life for his father's voyage in the Argo. Ajax died by lightning and the sea. Alcestis ransomed her husband and paid her life for Admetus'. Pelias himself, by whose orders the prize of the golden spoil was fetched back on that first ship, was boiled in a hot cauldron, in whose narrow waters he, too, was a wanderer, and so burned to death. Enough, ye gods, have you avenged the sea: spare him who was ordered to his deed.

## IV

(Enter NURSE.)

NURSE: My spirit quakes and shudders; great calamity looms near. Her passion grows prodigious; it stokes its own fires and keeps its violence undiminished. Often have I seen her in a frenzy, assailing the gods and pulling heaven down; but this is bigger. Medea is preparing some bigger monstrosity. With step distraught she strode forth to gain her deadly shrine. There she is pouring forth all her stock; phials she herself had feared she now broaches. She is unwrapping her whole baneful pharmacopeia, specifics arcane, occult, uncanny. With her left hand she conjures her baleful witchery and invokes her pestilential powers—all that the burning sands of Libya bring forth and all that frozen Taurus, stiff with Arctic cold, holds imprisoned in everlasting snow, and everything that is monstrous. Drawn by her magic chants the scaly throng leave their lurking and stand at attention. Here a savage serpent drags its huge length along, darts out its forked tongue, and asks to whom it shall deal death; when it hears the chant it yields its own will, twines its swelling mass into piled folds, and shapes them into coils. "Puny the evils and paltry the weapons which lowly earth begets," says she; "from heaven will I seek my drugs. Now is the time, now, to transcend common trickery. Hither descends serpent Draco, who stretches over heaven like a torrent, whose enormous knots the two Bears feel—the Greater used by Pelasgians, the Lesser by Sidonians; let Ophiuchus at last relax his tight grip and pour his virus forth. Come Python to my chant, who dared assail Apollo and Diana. Let Hydra, which renewed its heads as Hercules lopped them off, and every snake that Hercules scotched come back. Even you, wakeful dragon, first lulled by my incantations, leave the Colchians and come to serve me."

After she had conjured up the whole tribe of snakes, she heaped together the virulence of her noxious herbs. Whatever

impassable Eryx produces on its rocky heights; whatever the ridges of Caucasus, swathed in endless winter and spattered with Prometheus' blood, bring forth; tinctures which the rich Arabs apply to their arrows, or the Mede, whose prowess is in his quiver, or the nimble Parthians; the extracts which Suebian ladies collect under the wintry sky in the Hyrcanian forests; whatever earth produces in the nesting season of spring or when stiff winter has shaken off the woodland's crowning glory and has congealed all things with flaky frost; every shrub whose burgeoning bloom is lethal or which generates noxious juices in its twisted roots—all these she is manipulating. These poisons Haemonian Athos contributed, those towering Pindus; that surrendered its tender foliage to the ruthless sickle on the ridges of Pangaeus; these Tigris checked its deep eddies to nurture, those the Danube, those the gem-bearing Hydaspes whose warm waters course through stretches of desert, and the Baetis, after which the Spanish province is named, whose slow waters batter the western seas. This plant suffered the knife while Phoebus was readying the day, that growth was culled in deepest night, and this was harvested with finger-nail and incantation.

These death-dealing herbs she grasps, squeezes over them the venom of serpents, and adds obscene birds to the brew—the heart of a hoot-owl, and the vitals cut out of a living screech-owl. Other properties that artificer of wickedness arranges in separate heaps; some hold within them the tearing violence of fire, others the frigid stiffness of inert cold. To her witch's brew she adds mutterings no less formidable.—But look, hear the mad beat of her footsteps, the sound of her chant. At her opening lines the whole world shudders.

*(Enter MEDEA, chanting.)*

MEDEA: I conjure the mob of the silent, and you, dcities of the dead, and blind Chaos, and the opaque dwelling of shadowy Dis, and the enclaves of foul Death fixed to the banks of Tartarus. Leave your torments, ghosts, and hie you to the new marriage. Halt the wheel that whirls Ixion's limbs



and let him touch ground; let Tantalus quaff Pirene's waters unfrustrated; come you, too, Danaids, mocked by the vain task of fetching water in perforated pitchers: this day requires the service of your hands. Let only Sisyphus, father of my husband's father-in-law, stay back for a heavier punishment: let the slippery stone carry him with it as it rolls back down the rocks.

Summoned now by my sacraments, thou luminary of night, come clothed in thy most baneful visage, thy three forms all threatening.

For thee, after the manner of my race, I have loosed my hair from its band and paced the mystic grove with bare feet. I have evoked water from dry clouds; I have driven the seas back to their depths; Ocean has bestowed his mighty waves deep within, his tides defeated. Heaven's law, too, have I confounded: the world has seen sun and stars together, and the Bears have touched the sea forbidden them. The order of seasons I have rearranged: by my witchcraft earth has blossomed in summer, and at my bidding Ceres has seen harvest in winter. Violent Phasis has turned its waters back to their source, and Hister, divided into many mouths, has constricted his truculent billows and fallen spiritless in all his banks. Waves have crashed and the sea has raged and swelled, though the winds were still. The home of the ancient woodland lost its shadows when daylight returned at my imperious voice. Phoebus has halted in mid-course, and at my incantation the Hyades totter and collapse.

It is time, Phoebe, to attend to thy rites. (*She holds her offerings up in turn as she presents them to Hecate.*) For you these wreaths woven with bloody hand, each knotted with nine serpents; for you these members which the fractious serpent Typhoeus bore when he shook Jove's throne. In this is the blood of Nessus which the perfidious ferryman presented to Alcmena when he gasped his last. These ashes are the residue of the pyre on Oeta which consumed Hercules and the venom that afflicted him. Here you see the brand Althaea burned when she proved a dutiful sister but unduti-

ful mother. These feathers the Harpy abandoned in her trackless covert when she fled from Zetes. With them are the quills of the Stymphalian bird, whom the darts of Hercules, steeped in the Lernaean Hydra's venom, wounded.

You have rumbled, my altars; I perceive my tripods are stirred by my divine patroness.

Trivia's nimble car I see, not as when she drives it with full face lighted all through the night, but with the livid and gloomy aspect she bears when she is assailed by Thessalian witchcraft and skirts heaven with a nearer rein. Such a gloomy night do thou now diffuse through the heavens with thy pallid torch; terrify the peoples with a new horror, and make them sound costly Corinthian bronzes, Dictynna, to relieve thine eclipse. To thee we offer our solemn rites on bloody turf: for thee a torch snatched from a burning funeral pyre heaves its blaze up in the night; for thee I toss my head and writhe my neck and utter incantations; for thee a fillet flattened in the funereal fashion binds my loosened locks; for thee I brandish this mournful branch from the Stygian pool; for thee I bare my bosom like a maenad and strike my arms with ritual blade. Let my blood drip upon the altars; inure yourself, my hand, to draw sword and endure shedding dear blood—I have struck, I have supplied the hallowed liquid.

But if you complain that you are too often summoned by my petitions, forgive me, I pray; the reason for my too frequent invocation of your aid, Hecate, is always one and the same—Jason.

*(She takes up various flasks and caskets as she addresses them.)* Do you tinge Creusa's robe, so that as soon as she puts it on the creeping flame shall burn her inmost marrow. In this golden casket lies hidden a fire given me by Prometheus, who expiates its theft from heaven with the new growth of his vitals; he taught me how to keep its force safe stored. Mulciber also gave me fire, concealed in powdered sulphur; and from my kinsman Phaethon I received bolts of living flame. I have gifts from Chimaera's fiery middle section, and I have flames snatched from the scorched gorge of that bull;

these I have mixed with Medusa's gall, and so enjoined them to keep their evil power in silence.

Sharpen my poisons with thy stings, Hecate, and preserve the seeds of fire which I am hiding in my presents. Let them deceive sight and endure touch till their heat penetrates heart and veins. Let her limbs ooze and her bones smoke; let her blazing hair outshine the new bride's wedding torches.

My prayers have been received: thrice has bold Hecate uttered her bark, and her luminous torch has spurted its mystic flames.

All my power has now been exercised. Call my sons here to carry these costly gifts to the bride.

(MEDEA's sons are led in.)

Go, my sons, go. The mother that bore you is unlucky; placate your mistress and step-mother with presents and humble prayer. March, now, and quickly come home again, to give me the pleasure of a last embrace.

(*Exeunt, MEDEA into the house, the children toward CREON's palace.*)

CHORUS: Whither is savage love sweeping this bloody maenad headlong? What crime is she preparing in her unbridled frenzy? Her expression is rigid with stark passion, her head she weaves with gesture fierce and proud, and threatens even the king: who would believe her an exile?

Her cheeks burn red, then ruddiness makes way for pallor; her aspect is changeable, she keeps no complexion long. She dashes to this side and that, just as a tigress bereft of her cubs scours the jungles of the Ganges in frenzied arcs.

The curbing of neither anger nor love does Medea understand; and now that anger and love are joined in their suit, what will the issue be? When will that unspeakable Colchian rid Pelasgian fields of her presence and liberate king and kingdom from terror? Do give your team their head, Phoebus, spare the reins; let welcome darkness shroud the light, let night's herald Hesperus sink this terrifying day!

## V

(Enter MESSENGER at a run.)

MESSENGER: Ruin, total ruin! Our royalty is annihilated. Daughter and father are one low heap of ashes.

CHORUS: How were they trapped?

MESSENGER: As kings regularly are, by gifts.

CHORUS: But what trap could those gifts entail?

MESSENGER: I, too, wonder, and though the evil deed is accomplished, I can scarcely believe it could have been. The disaster is endless; through every part of the palace the fire rages as if it were under orders. Now the whole structure has collapsed, and the city is feared for.

CHORUS: Water can quench flames.

MESSENGER: This is another strange aspect of that disaster: water *feeds* the flames. The more it is fought, the harder the fire burns; of itself it seizes upon its adversary.

(MEDEA and NURSE enter as the MESSENGER completes his speech; exit MESSENGER.)

NURSE: Out of the Peloponnese at the double quick, Medea! Go anywhere, but make haste!

MEDEA: *I* retreat? Even if I had already fled I would have come back for this. It is a novel wedding I witness. (*Soliloquizing.*) Why, my soul, do you falter? Exploit your successful sally. How small a fraction of your revenge elates you! You are still in love, madwoman, if you are satisfied with Jason celibate. Find some species of punishment wholly unexampled; this is how to make yourself ready: away with every scruple, out every trace of conscience! Paltry the punishment which innocent hands inflict. Put your weight into your passion, goad your lethargy, from deep down in your heart force up your elan of old. Give the name of piety to what you have perpetrated up to this point. Put forth your efforts to make them realize how trifling and of what common brand were

the crimes I obliged him with. Those were merely school exercises for my passion; could prentice hands achieve a masterpiece, could a girl's temper? Now I am Medea; my genius has matured with evils.

A fine thing that I wrenched off my brother's head, it is a fine thing! A fine thing that I minced his body and robbed my father of that mystic symbol; a fine thing that I instigated the daughters to arm themselves for the destruction of their old father. Find fresh scope, my passion; there is no crime for which your hand is not sufficiently schooled.

What then is your objective, my anger, with what weapons will you ply your treacherous foe? The fierce spirit within me has determined upon a measure, but does not yet dare acknowledge it to itself. I have been foolish in my breathless haste—my enemy should have had a few children by his bed-fellow. But your children by him have Creusa for mother. On that mode of punishment I am resolved, and rightly resolved. I must prepare my temper, I realize, for the ultimate crime. Children once mine, you must pay the price for your father's wickedness.

Horror has knocked at my heart, my limbs are numb with cold, my breast is atremble. Anger has yielded place; the wife in me is banished, the mother wholly returned. Shall I slaughter my own children, my own flesh and blood? Forfend it, mad passion! Far be a crime so unprecedented, an enormity so accursed, even from me! What sin have the children to atone? That Jason is their father is a sin, but that Medea is their mother, a greater sin. They are not mine, let them die. Shall they indeed perish? They are mine. They are without crime or fault, they are innocent—true enough, but so was my brother. Why, soul of mine, do you teeter? Why are my cheeks flooded with tears, why do I waver and let anger now jerk me this way and now love that? I am buffeted by a riptide, as when rushing winds wage ruthless war and from both sides opposing waves lash the seas and the cornered surface seethes; just so does my heart oscillate: anger routs affection and affection anger. Yield, anger, to affection.

(Enter MEDEA's sons.)

Here, dear children, sole solace of a house overthrown, come here and fuse your limbs with mine in close embrace. Your father may have you unharmed, provided your mother, too, may have you. But exile and flight press hard; any moment they will be torn from my bosom, weeping and sighing amidst their kisses as they are snatched away. They are lost to their mother; let them be lost to their father. Again my passion waxes and my hatred boils; the old Erinys reaches for my unwilling hand. Where you lead, wrath, I follow. Would that proud Niobe's brood had issued from my womb, that I had given birth to twice seven sons! I have been too sterile for vengeance, but two I did bear, enough for a brother and a father.

That unruly crowd of Furies—where are they rushing, whom are they seeking, for whom preparing their flaming strokes? Against whom is that hellish band stretching forth their bloody torches? A whip cracks and a monstrous snake hisses. Whom is Megaera attacking with her menacing beam? Whose ghost is that approaching? Its limbs are scattered and it is hard to recognize; it is my brother, and he is demanding vengeance. I shall pay, the whole account. Thrust your torches into my eyes, mangle, burn; see, my breast is bared to the Furies.

Tell the avenging deities to leave me, brother, tell them to return content to the ghosts below. Leave me to myself, brother, use this hand of mine; it holds a drawn sword. With this victim I placate your ghost. (*She kills one son.*)

What is that sudden tumult? Arms are brandished, they are seeking me to destroy me. I shall mount the lofty roof of our palace; my slaughter is incomplete. (*To the living son.*) You come along with me; (*to the murdered son*) your corpse also I will carry away with me. Now to work, my soul: your prowess must not be wasted in obscurity; demonstrate your handiwork for popular approval.

(Exit MEDEA, carrying the body of one son and leading the

*other by the hand; presently she appears on the roof. Enter JASON at the head of an excited crowd.)*

JASON: Here, quickly, every loyal subject who grieves over royalty's ruin! Let us seize the author of this horrible crime herself! This way, aim your weapons this way, stout soldiers, turn the house upside down!

MEDEA (*from the rooftop*): Now, now have I recovered my scepter, my brother, my father; again the Colchians hold the prize of the gilded ram; my royal state is restored, my virginity returned. O divinities complaisant, at last, O festive day, O joyous wedding! Onward, the crime is consummated, but not yet vengeance. Finish the task while your hands are at it. Why delay now, my soul? Why hesitate when you have the power? But now wrath has subsided. I am sorry for my deed, ashamed of it. What, poor wretch, have I done? Poor wretch? Though I am sorry, I did it; a delicious pleasure steals over me, without my will, and look, it is growing: all that was missing was yonder man to be spectator. What I have done so far I count as nothing; any crime I committed without his seeing it is wasted.

JASON: Look, there she is, leaning over the steep part of the roof! Bring fire, someone, quickly! Let her burn and fall in her own flames!

MEDEA: For your sons, Jason, you must heap a funeral pyre and build a tomb. Your wife and father-in-law have already received the rites of the dead; it is I that buried them. This son has met his fate; this other shall be delivered to like destruction as you look on.

JASON: By every deity, by our shared flights and shared bed, which my faith has not violated, spare the boy. If there is any crime it is mine. I devote myself to death; immolate my guilty head.

MEDEA: Nay, *here* will I drive my sword, where you like it least, where it will hurt you most. Go now, proud man, find maids to marry and abandon mothers.

JASON: One is enough to punish me.

MEDEA: If this hand of mine could be satisfied with one death it would have sought none; even though I slay two, the number is too petty for my passion. If any pledge of yours is lurking in my womb, even now, I shall rummage my vitals with a sword and with iron drag it forth.

JASON: Presently carry out what you have begun, I will not beseech you further; only give me a respite for my punishment.

MEDEA: Enjoy your deliberate revenge, my grief, do not hurry. This day is mine, and I am using the time allotted me.

JASON: 'Tis me you loathe: kill me.

MEDEA: You bid me be merciful; (*she kills the boy*) very well, it is finished. I have nothing more to offer you for atonement, my passion.

(*A car drawn by dragons appears at MEDEA's side.*)

Lift your swollen eyes this way, ingrate Jason. Do you recognize your wife? This is how I am accustomed to flee. A path is opened in the sky and twin serpents submit their scaly necks to the yoke. Take your sons back now, father. (*She throws the bodies down to him.*) On my winged chariot I shall ride through the air.

JASON: Ride through the lofty spaces of high heaven, and wherever you go bear witness that there are no gods.

FINIS