Medea

by Euripides
Medea

Scene One:

Nurse enters from skenê.

Nurse
If only the hull of the Argo had not flown through the dark Clashing Rocks to the land of Kolchis. If the pine in Mt. Pelion’s forests had never been cut and supplied oars for the Argonauts in quest of the Golden Fleece for Pelias. Then my mistress Medea would not have sailed to the towers of Iolkos, her heart dazed with love for Jason, nor persuaded the daughters of Pelias to kill their father. Then she would not be living here in Korinth with her husband and children. Pleasing the people in her land of exile, she helped Jason himself in every way. When a woman does not oppose her man, the greatest security is hers.

Now hate infects all the closest bonds of love. Betraying his own sons and my mistress, Jason beds down in a royal marriage, having wed the daughter of Kreon, the king. Wretched Medea, finding herself dishonored, cries out his oaths to her, their joined right hands, the greatest pledge of all. She invokes the gods to witness exactly how Jason repays her. She lies there without eating, surrendering to pain, dissolving in tears time and time again,
knowing her husband has wronged her.
Without raising her eyes or lifting her face
from the ground, she listens like a rock
or sea wave to her friends’ advice.
Sometimes she turns her pale face away
30
to mourn for her own dear father, her country
and family, since she betrayed all of them
to follow a husband who has dishonored her.
That woman, so miserable, knows through misfortune
what it means to abandon her homeland.
35
Filled with hate, she finds no joy in the sight of her sons.
I’m afraid she’s planning something;
Her hard mind won’t stand for mistreatment.
I know her. I fear she may silently
enter the house where the marriage bed is laid
40
and stab her heart with a sharp sword,
or kill the king and the bridegroom,
provoking a greater disaster.
She is a strange one. No one battling her
as an enemy will easily claim sweet victory.
45

Enter Tutor and two boys from City Path.

Ah, here come the boys, done with their games.
They’re not thinking of their mother’s troubles.
Young hearts are not fond of sorrow.

Tutor
Old household slave of my mistress,
why are you standing alone outside the gates?
50
Crying to yourself about your troubles?
Does Medea wish to be left alone?
Medea

Nurse
Ancient companion of Jason’s children, when the dice of our masters’ fortune roll badly, it touches the heart of good slaves. I felt such an overwhelming grief that I longed to come out here and tell Earth and Sky about my mistress’s bad luck.

Tutor
Isn’t that poor wretch done moaning yet?

Nurse
I envy your ignorance. Her pain isn’t halfway gone.

Tutor
The fool – if one may call masters that. She knows nothing of the latest troubles.

Nurse
What is it, old man? Don’t hold back.

Tutor
Nothing. I regret what I’ve already said.

Nurse
By your beard, don’t hide this from a fellow slave! I’ll keep quiet about it, if I must.

Tutor
I heard some talk, while pretending not to listen, by the gaming tables where the old men sit near the holy spring of Pirene. They say Kreon, Lord of Korinth, intends to banish these boys.
with their mother. I do not know whether this tale is true. I hope not.

Nurse
Even if Jason has a quarrel with their mother, will he allow his own sons to suffer exile?

Tutor
Old marriage ties are abandoned for new and he is no friend of this house.

Nurse
We're sunk if new troubles wash over before we bail out the old!

Tutor
You keep quiet. It's not the right time for your mistress to learn this. Keep the news secret.

Nurse
Oh children, do you hear what a father you have? May he be cursed – no, he is my master – but he is caught in cruelty to his family.

Tutor
What man is not? Did you just learn that everyone loves himself best of all? Because of his new bedmate, their father does not love these boys.

Nurse
Go inside the house, children; it will be all right.

To Tutor:
You must keep them out of the way as much as possible –
do not let them near their ill-tempered mother.
I have seen her eye them like a bull,
as if she has something in mind. Her rage
won’t end, I know well, until it blasts someone.
May it strike enemies and not friends.

Medea wails from offstage inside skene.

MEDEA
Oh! Misery, I’m miserable in my troubles.
Oimoi! I wish I were dead.

NURSE
Here she goes. Dear boys, your mother
stirs her heart, stirs her rage.
Hurry faster into the house.
Don’t let her see you;
stay away from her.

To Tutor:
Guard against her fierce temper and
the hateful nature of her willful mind.
Now go. Go in as quickly as possible.

Tutor and children exit skene as Nurse continues.
Clearly that cloud of woe,
rising from its source, will soon flash
with still greater passion. What
will her enraged and untamed spirit
do when bitten by such evil?

MEDEA
Oh! I’ve suffered miserably, misery
worthy of great woe. O cursèd sons
of a hateful mother, may you die
with your father! May his entire line vanish.

**Nurse**

Oimoi! Miserable indeed! What share
do your sons have in their father's crime?
Why hate them? Dear children,
I'm worried, afraid that you might suffer.
The tempers of tyrants are strange.
They have so much power and so little guidance
that their moods change violently.
To face life on equal terms is better.
For me at least, may I grow old
without greatness, secure.
To speak the word moderation,
then to act on it, is best for men
by far. There's no right time for excess
in human life, but when a god
becomes angry with a household,
even greater ruin follows.

Entrance Song: Chorus enters from City Path.

**Chorus (sings)**

We hear her voice,
we hear the cry
of the unhappy woman of Kolchis.
Is she not yet calm? Old woman, tell us.
We hear her cry within the gated hall.
Woman, since we are her friends,
we do not rejoice
at the grief of this house.
Medea

Nurse
What house? It's already gone.
The bed of a royal family claims him,
while my mistress wastes her life away
in her room. No words from friends
or family comfort her in any way.

Medea
May lightning from heaven strike my head.
What do I gain by living any longer?
Oh, in death may I take my rest,
abandoning this hateful life.

Chorus (sings)
Zeus, Earth, and light,
do you hear the miserable bride
sing such a dirge?
Foolish woman, why do you
desire that cold, cruel rest?
Why hurry death's end?
Don't pray for this.
If your husband
worships at a new bed,
do not be sharp with him.
Zeus will take your case. Do not waste away
weeping too much for your bed partner.

Medea
Great Themis and Lady Artemis,
do you see what I suffer, despite binding
my accursed husband with sacred oaths?
May I gaze upon him and his bride
gouged out, scraped away, house and all. They dared to wrong me first.
O father! Homeland I abandoned, shamefully killing my brother!

**Nurse**

You hear what she says? She shouts an invocation to Themis and to Zeus, whom mortals honor as overseer of the oath. The rage of my mistress will not end with some trivial deed.

**Chorus (sings)**

We wish she would let us see her, come out and hear our voice, listen to our words, dismiss her mind’s temper and angry passion. Let our willing support not abandon our friends.

Step in, bring her out of the house, and tell her we, too, are friends. Hurry in before she harms someone. This sorrow rushes on and grows.

**Nurse**

I’ll do it. But I fear I won’t persuade my mistress. I’ll do you this favor of my labor – although she glares like a bull, like a lioness with newborn cubs, whenever a slave approaches to have a word. If you said that men of old were foolish