

ALCEA, HECUBA, HIPPOLYTUS, THE TROJAN WOMEN, THE BACCHAE

Euripides

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MEDEA, HECUBA, HIPPOLYTUS, THE TROJAN WOMEN, THE BACCHANTES

MEDEA, HECUBA, HIPPOLYTUS, THE TROJAN WOMEN, THE BACCHANTES

Euripides

MEDEA

by Euripides

translated by E. P. Coleridge

CHARACTERS IN THE PLAY

NURSE OF MEDEA

ATTENDANT ON HER CHILDREN

MEDEA

CHORUS OF CORINTHIAN WOMEN

CREON, King of Corinth

JASON

AEGEUS, King of Athens

MESSENGER

THE TWO SONS OF JASON AND MEDEA

(SCENE:—Before MEDEA's house in Corinth, near the palace Of CREON. The NURSE enters from the house.)

NURSE

AH! WOULD to Heaven the good ship Argo ne'er had sped its course to the Colchian land through the misty blue Symplegades, nor ever in the glens of Pelion the pine been felled to furnish with oars the chieftain's hands, who went to fetch the golden fleece for Pelias; for then would my own mistress Medea never have sailed to the turrets of Iolcos, her soul with love for Jason smitten, nor would she have beguiled the daughters of Pelias to slay their father and come to live here in the land of Corinth with her husband and children, where her exile found favour with the citizens to whose land she had come, and in all things of her own accord was she at one with Jason, the greatest safeguard this when wife and husband do agree; but now their love is all turned to hate, and tenderest ties are weak. For Jason hath betrayed his own children and my mistress dear for the love of a royal bride, for he hath wedded the daughter of Creon, lord of this land. While Medea, his hapless wife, thus scorned, appeals to the oaths he swore, recalls the strong pledge his right hand gave, and bids heaven be witness what requital she is finding from Jason. And here she lies fasting, yielding her body to her grief, wasting away in tears ever since she learnt that she was wronged by her husband, never lifting her eye nor raising her face from off the ground; and she lends as deaf an ear to her friend's warning as if she were a rock or ocean billow, save when she turns her snow-white neck aside and softly to herself bemoans her father dear, her country and her home, which she gave up to come hither with the man who now holds her in dishonour. She, poor lady, hath by sad experience

MEDEA

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learnt how good a thing it is never to quit one's native land. And she hates her children now and feels no joy at seeing them; I fear she may contrive some untoward scheme; for her mood is dangerous nor will she brook her cruel treatment; full well I know her, and I much do dread that she will plunge the keen sword through their hearts, stealing without a word into the chamber where their marriage couch is spread, or else that she will slay the prince and bridegroom too, and so find some calamity still more grievous than the present; for dreadful is her wrath; verily the man that doth incur her hate will have no easy task to raise o'er her a song of triumph. Lo! where her sons come hither from their childish sports; little they reckon of their mother's woes, for the soul of the young is no friend to sorrow.

(The ATTENDANT leads in MEDEA'S children.)

ATTENDANT

Why dost thou, so long my lady's own handmaid, stand here at the gate alone, loudly lamenting to thyself the piteous tale? how comes it that Medea will have thee leave her to herself?

NURSE

Old man, attendant on the sons of Jason, our masters' fortunes when they go awry make good slaves grieve and touch their hearts. Oh! have come to such a pitch of grief that there stole a yearning wish upon me to come forth hither and proclaim to heaven and earth my mistress's hard fate.

ATTENDANT

What! has not the poor lady ceased yet from her lamentation?

NURSE

Would I were as thou art! the mischief is but now beginning; it has not reached its climax yet.

ATTENDANT

O foolish one, if I may call my mistress such a name; how little she reckons of evils yet more recent!

NURSE

What mean'st, old man? grudge not to tell me.

ATTENDANT

'Tis naught; I do repent me even of the words I have spoken.

NURSE

Nay, by thy beard I conjure thee, hide it not from thy fellow-slave; will be silent, if need be, on that text.

ATTENDANT

I heard one say, pretending not to listen as I approached the place where our greybeards sit playing draughts near Pirene's sacred spring, that Creon, the ruler of this land, is bent on driving these children and their mother from the boundaries of Corinth; but I know not whether the news is to be relied upon, and would fain it were not.

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NURSE

What! will Jason brook such treatment of his sons, even though he be at variance with their mother?

ATTENDANT

Old ties give way to new; he bears no longer any love to this family.

NURSE

Undone, it seems, are we, if to old woes fresh ones we add, ere we have drained the former to the dregs.

ATTENDANT

Hold thou thy peace, say not a word of this; 'tis no time for our mistress to learn hereof.

NURSE

O children, do ye hear how your father feels towards you? Perdition catch him, but no he is my master still; yet is he proved a very traitor to his nearest and dearest.

ATTENDANT

And who 'mongst men is not? Art learning only now, that every single man cares for himself more than for his neighbour, some from honest motives, others for mere gain's sake? seeing that to indulge his passion their father has ceased to love these children.

NURSE

Go, children, within the house; all will be well. Do thou keep them as far away as may be, and bring them not near their mother in her evil hour. For ere this have I seen her eyeing them savagely, as though she were minded to do them some hurt, and well I know she will not cease from her fury till she have pounced on some victim. At least may she turn her hand against her foes, and not against her friends.

MEDEA (*chanting within*)

Ah, me! a wretched suffering woman I! O would that I could die!

NURSE (*chanting*)

'Tis as I said, my dear children; wild fancies stir your mother's heart, wild fury goads her on. Into the house without delay, come not near her eye, approach her not, beware her savage mood, the fell tempest of her reckless heart. In, in with what speed ye may. For 'tis plain she will soon redouble her fury; that cry is but the herald of the gathering storm—cloud whose lightning soon will flash; what will her proud restless soul, in the anguish of despair, be guilty of?

(The ATTENDANT takes the children into the house.)

MEDEA (*chanting within*)

MEDEA

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Ah, me! the agony I have suffered, deep enough to call for these laments! Curse you and your father too, ye children damned, sons of a doomed mother! Ruin seize the whole family!

NURSE (*chanting*)

Ah me! ah me! the pity of it! Why, pray, do thy children share their father's crime? Why hatest thou them? Woe is you, poor children, how do I grieve for you lest ye suffer some outrage! Strange are the tempers of princes, and maybe because they seldom have to obey, and mostly lord it over others, change they their moods with difficulty. 'Tis better then to have been trained to live on equal terms. Be it mine to reach old age, not in proud pomp, but in security! Moderation wins the day first as a better word for men to use, and likewise it is far the best course for them to pursue; but greatness that doth o'erreach itself, brings no blessing to mortal men; but pays a penalty of greater ruin whenever fortune is wroth with a family.

(The CHORUS enters. The following lines between the NURSE, CHORUS, and MEDEA are sung.)

CHORUS

I heard the voice, uplifted loud, of our poor Colchian lady, nor yet is she quiet; speak, aged dame, for as I stood by the house with double gates I heard a voice of weeping from within, and I do grieve, lady, for the sorrows of this house, for it hath won my love.

NURSE

'Tis a house no more; all that is passed away long since; a royal bride keeps Jason at her side, while our mistress pines away in her bower, finding no comfort for her soul in aught her friends can say.

MEDEA (*within*)

Oh, oh! Would that Heaven's levin bolt would cleave this head in twain! What gain is life to me? Woe, woe is me! O, to die and win release, quitting this loathed existence!

CHORUS

Didst hear, O Zeus, thou earth, and thou, O light, the piteous note of woe the hapless wife is uttering? How shall a yearning for that insatiate resting-place ever hasten for thee, poor reckless one, the end that death alone can bring? Never pray for that. And if thy lord prefers a fresh love, be not angered with him for that; Zeus will judge 'twixt thee and him herein. Then mourn not for thy husband's loss too much, nor waste thyself away.

MEDEA (*within*)

Great Themis, and husband of Themis, behold what I am suffering now, though I did bind that accursed one, my husband, by strong oaths to me! O, to see him and his bride some day brought to utter destruction, they and their house with them, for that they presume to wrong me thus unprovoked. O my father, my country, that I have left to my shame, after slaying my own brother.

NURSE

Do ye hear her words, how loudly she adjures Themis, oft invoked, and Zeus, whom men regard as

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keeper of their oaths? On no mere trifle surely will our mistress spend her rage.

CHORUS

Would that she would come forth for us to see, and listen to the words of counsel we might give, if haply she might lay aside the fierce fury of her wrath, and her temper stern. Never be my zeal at any rate denied my friends! But go thou and bring her hither outside the house, and tell her this our friendly thought; haste thee ere she do some mischief to those inside the house, for this sorrow of hers is mounting high.

NURSE

This will I do; but I doubt whether I shall persuade my mistress; still willingly will I undertake this trouble for you; albeit, she glares upon her servants with the look of a lioness with cubs, whenso anyone draws nigh to speak to her. Wert thou to call the men of old time rude uncultured boors thou wouldst not err, seeing that they devised their hymns for festive occasions, for banquets, and to grace the board, a pleasure to catch the ear, shed o'er our life, but no man hath found a way to allay hated grief by music and the minstrel's varied strain, whence arise slaughters and fell strokes of fate to o'erthrow the homes of men. And yet this were surely a gain, to heal men's wounds by music's spell, but why tune they their idle song where rich banquets are spread? For of itself doth the rich banquet, set before them, afford to men delight.

CHORUS

I heard a bitter cry of lamentation! loudly, bitterly she calls on the traitor of her marriage bed, her perfidious spouse; by grievous wrongs oppressed she invokes Themis, bride of Zeus, witness of oaths, who brought her unto Hellas, the land that fronts the strand of Asia, o'er the sea by night through ocean's boundless gate.

(AS the CHORUS finishes its song, MEDEA enters from the house.)

MEDEA

From the house I have come forth, Corinthian ladies, for fear lest you be blaming me; for well I know that amongst men many by showing pride have gotten them an ill name and a reputation for indifference, both those who shun men's gaze and those who move amid the stranger crowd, and likewise they who choose a quiet walk in life. For there is no just discernment in the eyes of men, for they, or ever they have surely learnt their neighbour's heart, loathe him at first sight, though never wronged by him; and so a stranger most of all should adopt a city's views; nor do I commend that citizen, who, in the stubbornness of his heart, from churlishness resents the city's will.

But on me hath fallen this unforeseen disaster, and sapped my life; ruined I am, and long to resign the boon of existence, kind friends, and die. For he who was all the world to me, as well thou knowest, hath turned out the worst of men, my own husband. Of all things that have life and sense we women are the most hapless creatures; first must we buy a husband at a great price, and o'er ourselves a tyrant set which is an evil worse than the first; and herein lies the most important issue, whether our choice be good or bad. For divorce is not honourable to women, nor can we disown our lords. Next must the wife, coming as she does to ways and customs new, since she hath not learnt the lesson in her home, have a diviner's eye to see how best to treat the partner of her life. If haply we perform these tasks with thoroughness and tact, and the husband live with us, without resenting the yoke, our life is a happy one; if not, 'twere best to die. But when a man is vexed with what he finds indoors, he goeth forth and rids his soul of its disgust, betaking him to some friend or comrade of like age; whilst we must needs regard his single self.

And yet they say we live secure at home, while they are at the wars, with their sorry reasoning, for I would gladly take my stand in battle array three times o'er, than once give birth. But enough! this language suits not thee as it does me; thou hast a city here, a father's house, some joy in life, and friends to share thy thoughts,

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but I am destitute, without a city, and therefore scorned by my husband, a captive I from a foreign shore, with no mother, brother, or kinsman in whom to find a new haven of refuge from this calamity. Wherefore this one boon and only this I wish to win from thee,—thy silence, if haply I can some way or means devise to avenge me on my husband for this cruel treatment, and on the man who gave to him his daughter, and on her who is his wife. For though woman be timorous enough in all else, and as regards courage, a coward at the mere sight of steel, yet in the moment she finds her honour wronged, no heart is filled with deadlier thoughts than hers.

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

This will I do; for thou wilt be taking a just vengeance on thy husband, Medea. That thou shouldst mourn thy lot surprises me not. But lo! I see Creon, king of this land coming hither, to announce some new resolve.

(CREON enters, with his retinue.)

CREON

Hark thee, Medea, I bid thee take those sullen looks and angry thoughts against thy husband forth from this land in exile, and with thee take both thy children and that without delay, for I am judge in this sentence, and I will not return unto my house till I banish thee beyond the borders of the land.

MEDEA

Ah, me! now is utter destruction come upon me, unhappy that I am! For my enemies are bearing down on me full sail, nor have I any landing—place to come at in my trouble. Yet for all my wretched plight I will ask thee, Creon, wherefore dost thou drive me from the land?

CREON

I fear thee,—no longer need I veil my dread 'neath words,—lest thou devise against my child some cureless ill. Many things contribute to this fear of mine; thou art a witch by nature, expert in countless sorceries, and thou art chafing for the loss of thy husband's affection. I hear, too, so they tell me, that thou dost threaten the father of the bride, her husband, and herself with some mischief; wherefore I will take precautions ere our troubles come. For 'tis better for me to incur thy hatred now, lady, than to soften my heart and bitterly repent it hereafter.

MEDEA

Alas! this is not now the first time, but oft before, O Creon, hath my reputation injured me and caused sore mischief. Wherefore whoso is wise in his generation ought never to have his children taught to be too clever; for besides the reputation they get for idleness, they purchase bitter odium from the citizens. For if thou shouldst import new learning amongst dullards, thou wilt be thought a useless trifler, void of knowledge; while if thy fame in the city o'ertops that of the pretenders to cunning knowledge, thou wilt win their dislike. I too myself share in this ill—luck. Some think me clever and hate me, others say I am too reserved, and some the very reverse; others find me hard to please and not so very clever after all. Be that as it may, thou dost fear me lest I bring on thee something to mar thy harmony. Fear me not, Creon, my position scarce is such that should seek to quarrel with princes. Why should I, for how hast thou injured me? Thou hast betrothed thy daughter where thy fancy prompted thee. No, 'tis my husband I hate, though I doubt not thou hast acted wisely herein. And now I grudge not thy prosperity; betroth thy child, good luck to thee, but let me abide in this land, for though I have been wronged I will be still and yield to my superiors.

CREON

Thy words are soft to hear, but much I dread lest thou art devising some mischief in thy heart, and less

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than ever do I trust thee now; for cunning woman, and man likewise, is easier to guard against when quick-tempered than when taciturn. Nay, begone at once! speak me no speeches, for this is decreed, nor hast thou any art whereby thou shalt abide amongst us, since thou hatest me.

MEDEA

O, say not so! by thy knees and by thy daughter newlywed, I do implore!

CREON

Thou wastest words; thou wilt never persuade me.

MEDEA

What, wilt thou banish me, and to my prayers no pity yield?

CREON

I will, for I love not thee above my own family.

MEDEA

O my country! what fond memories I have of thee in this hour!

CREON

Yea, for I myself love my city best of all things save my children.

MEDEA

Ah me! ah me! to mortal man how dread a scourge is love!

CREON

That, I deem, is according to the turn our fortunes take.

MEDEA

O Zeus! let not the author of these my troubles escape thee.

CREON

Begone, thou silly woman, and free me from my toil.

MEDEA

The toil is mine, no lack of it.

CREON

Soon wilt thou be thrust out forcibly by the hand of servants.

MEDEA

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MEDEA

Not that, not that, I do entreat thee, Creon

CREON

Thou wilt cause disturbance yet, it seems.

MEDEA

I will begone; I ask thee not this boon to grant.

CREON

Why then this violence? why dost thou not depart?

MEDEA

Suffer me to abide this single day and devise some plan for the manner of my exile, and means of living for my children, since their father cares not to provide his babes therewith. Then pity them; thou too hast children of thine own; thou needs must have a kindly heart. For my own lot I care naught, though I an exile am, but for those babes I weep, that they should learn what sorrow means.

CREON

Mine is a nature anything but harsh; full oft by showing pity have suffered shipwreck; and now albeit I clearly see my error, yet shalt thou gain this request, lady; but I do forewarn thee, if tomorrow's rising sun shall find thee and thy children within the borders of this land, thou diest; my word is spoken and it will not lie. So now, if abide thou must, stay this one day only, for in it thou canst not do any of the fearful deeds I dread.

(CREON and his retinue go out.)

CHORUS (*chanting*)

Ah! poor lady, woe is thee! Alas, for thy sorrows! Whither wilt thou turn? What protection, what home or country to save thee from thy troubles wilt thou find? O Medea, in what a hopeless sea of misery heaven hath plunged thee!

MEDEA

On all sides sorrow pens me in. Who shall gainsay this? But all is not yet lost! think not so. Still are there troubles in store for the new bride, and for her bridegroom no light toil. Dost think I would ever have fawned on yonder man, unless to gain some end or form some scheme? Nay, would not so much as have spoken to him or touched him with my hand. But he has in folly so far stepped in that, though he might have checked my plot by banishing me from the land, he hath allowed me to abide this day, in which I will lay low in death three of my enemies—a father and his daughter and my husband too. Now, though I have many ways to compass their death, I am not sure, friends, which I am to try first. Shall I set fire to the bridal mansion, or plunge the whetted sword through their hearts, softly stealing into the chamber where their couch is spread? One thing stands in my way. If I am caught making my way into the chamber, intent on my design, I shall be put to death and cause my foes to mock, 'Twere best to take the shortest way—the way we women are most skilled in—by poison to destroy them. Well, suppose them dead; what city will receive me? What friendly host will give me a shelter in his land, a home

MEDEA

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secure, and save my soul alive? None. So I will wait yet a little while in case some tower of defence rise up for me; then will I proceed to this bloody deed in crafty silence; but if some unexpected mischance drive me forth, I will with mine own hand seize the sword, e'en though I die for it, and slay them, and go forth on my bold path of daring. By that dread queen whom I revere before all others and have chosen to share my task, by Hecate who dwells within my inmost chamber, not one of them shall wound my heart and rue it not. Bitter and sad will I make their marriage for them; bitter shall be the wooing of it, bitter my exile from the land. Up, then, Medea, spare not the secrets of thy art in plotting and devising; on to the danger. Now comes a struggle needing courage. Dost see what thou art suffering? 'Tis not for thee to be a laughing-stock to the race of Sisyphus by reason of this wedding of Jason, sprung, as thou art, from noble sire, and of the Sun-god's race. Thou hast cunning; and, more than this, we women, though by nature little apt for virtuous deeds, are most expert to fashion any mischief.

CHORUS (*singing*)

strophe 1

Back to their source the holy rivers turn their tide. Order and the universe are being reversed. 'Tis men whose counsels are treacherous, whose oath by heaven is no longer sure. Rumour shall bring a change o'er my life, bringing it into good repute. Honour's dawn is breaking for woman's sex; no more shall the foul tongue of slander fix upon us.

antistrophe 1

The songs of the poets of old shall cease to make our faithlessness their theme. Phoebus, lord of minstrelsy, hath not implanted in our mind the gift of heavenly song, else had I sung an answering strain to the race of males, for time's long chapter affords many a theme on their sex as well as ours.

strophe 2

With mind distraught didst thou thy father's house desert on thy voyage betwixt ocean's twin rocks, and on a foreign strand thou dwellest thy bed left husbandless, poor lady, and thou an exile from the land, dishonoured, persecuted.

antistrophe 2

Gone is the grace that oaths once had. Through all the breadth of Hellas honour is found no more; to heaven hath it sped away. For thee no father's house is open, woe is thee! to be a haven from the troublous storm, while o'er thy home is set another queen, the bride that is preferred to thee.

(As the CHORUS finishes its song, JASON enters, alone. MEDEA comes out of the house.)

JASON

It is not now I first remark, but oft ere this, how unruly a pest is a harsh temper. For instance, thou, hadst thou but patiently endured the will of thy superiors, mightest have remained here in this land and house, but now for thy idle words wilt thou be banished. Thy words are naught to me. Cease not to call Jason basest of men; but for those words thou hast spoken against our rulers, count it all gain that exile is thy only punishment. I ever tried to check the outbursts of the angry monarch, and would have had thee stay, but thou wouldst not forego thy silly rage, always reviling our rulers, and so thou wilt be banished. Yet even after all this I weary not of my goodwill, but am come with thus much forethought, lady, that thou mayst not be destitute nor want for aught, when, with thy sons, thou art cast out. Many an evil doth exile bring in its train with it; for even though thou hatest me, never will I harbour hard thoughts of thee.

MEDEA

Thou craven villain (for that is the only name my tongue can find for thee, a foul reproach on thy unmanliness), comest thou to me, thou, most hated foe of gods, of me, and of all mankind? 'Tis no proof of courage or hardihood to confront thy friends after injuring them, but that worst of all human diseases—loss of shame. Yet hast thou done well to come; for I shall ease my soul by reviling thee, and thou wilt be vexed at my

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recital. I will begin at the very beginning. I saved thy life, as every Hellene knows who sailed with thee aboard the good ship Argo, when thou wert sent to tame and yoke fire-breathing bulls, and to sow the deadly tilth. Yea, and I slew the dragon which guarded the golden fleece, keeping sleepless watch o'er it with many a wreathed coil, and I raised for thee a beacon of deliverance. Father and home of my free will I left and came with thee to Iolcos, 'neath Pelion's hills, for my love was stronger than my prudence. Next I caused the death of Pelias by a doom most grievous, even by his own children's hand, beguiling them of all their fear. All this have I done for thee, thou traitor! and thou hast cast me over, taking to thyself another wife, though children have been born to us. Hadst thou been childless still, I could have pardoned thy desire for this new union. Gone is now the trust I put in oaths. I cannot even understand whether thou thinkest that the gods of old no longer rule, or that fresh decrees are now in vogue amongst mankind, for thy conscience must tell thee thou hast not kept faith with me. Ah! poor right hand, which thou didst often grasp. These knees thou didst embrace! All in vain, I suffered a traitor to touch me! How short of my hopes I am fallen! But come, I will deal with thee as though thou wert my friend. Yet what kindness can I expect from one so base as thee? But yet I will do it, for my questioning will show thee yet more base. Whither can I turn me now? to my father's house, to my own country, which I for thee deserted to come hither? to the hapless daughters of Pelias? A glad welcome, I trow, would they give me in their home, whose father's death I compassed! My case stands even thus: I am become the bitter foe to those of mine own home, and those whom I need ne'er have wronged I have made mine enemies to pleasure thee. Wherefore to reward me for this thou hast made me doubly blest in the eyes of many a wife in Hellas; and in thee I own a peerless, trusty lord. O woe is me, if indeed I am to be cast forth an exile from the land, without one friend; one lone woman with her babes forlorn! Yea, a fine reproach to thee in thy bridal hour, that thy children and the wife who saved thy life are beggars and vagabonds! O Zeus! why hast thou granted unto man clear signs to know the sham in gold, while on man's brow no brand is stamped whereby to gauge the villain's heart?

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

There is a something terrible and past all cure, when quarrels arise 'twixt those who are near and dear.

JASON

Needs must I now, it seems, turn orator, and, like a good helmsman on a ship with close-reefed sails, weather that wearisome tongue of thine. Now, I believe, since thou wilt exaggerate thy favours, that to Cypri, alone of gods or men I owe the safety of my voyage. Thou hast a subtle wit enough; yet were it a hateful thing for me to say that the Love-god constrained thee by his resistless shaft to save my life. However, I will not reckon this too nicely; 'twas kindly done, however thou didst serve me. Yet for my safety hast thou received more than ever thou gavest, as I will show. First, thou dwellest in Hellas, instead of thy barbarian land, and hast learnt what justice means and how to live by law, not by the dictates of brute force; and all the Hellenes recognize thy cleverness, and thou hast gained a name; whereas, if thou hadst dwelt upon the confines of the earth, no tongue had mentioned thee. Give me no gold within my halls, nor skill to sing a fairer strain than ever Orpheus sang, unless there—with my fame be spread abroad! So much I say to thee about my own toils, for 'twas thou didst challenge me to this retort. As for the taunts thou urgest against my marriage with the princess, I will prove to thee, first, that I am prudent herein, next chastened in my love, and last powerful friend to thee and to thy sons; only hold thy peace. Since I have here withdrawn from Iolcos with many a hopeless trouble at my back, what happier device could I, an exile, frame than marriage with the daughter of the king? 'Tis not because I loathe thee for my wife—the thought that rankles in thy heart; 'tis not because I am smitten with desire for a new bride, nor yet that I am eager to vie with others in begetting many children, for those we have are quite enough, and I do not complain. Nay, 'tis that we—and this is most important—may dwell in comfort, instead of suffering want (for well I know that every whilom friend avoids the poor), and that I might rear my sons as doth befit my house; further, that I might be the father of brothers for the children thou hast borne, and raise these to the same high rank, uniting the family in one,—to my lasting bliss. Thou, indeed, hast no need of more children, but me it profits to help my present family by that which is to be. Have I miscarried here? Not even thou wouldest say so unless a rival's charms rankled in thy bosom. No, but you women have such strange ideas, that you think all is well so long as your married life runs smooth; but if some mischance occur to ruffle your love, all that was good and lovely erst you reckon as your foes. Yea, men should have begotten children from some other source, no female race

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existing; thus would no evil ever have fallen on mankind.

LEADER

This speech, O Jason, hast thou with specious art arranged; but yet I think—albeit in speaking I am indiscreet—that thou hast sinned in thy betrayal of thy wife.

MEDEA

No doubt I differ from the mass of men on many points; for, to my mind, whoso hath skill to fence with words in an unjust cause, incurs the heaviest penalty; for such an one, confident that he can cast a decent veil of words o'er his injustice, dares to practise it; and yet he is not so very clever after all. So do not thou put forth thy specious pleas and clever words to me now, for one word of mine will lay thee low. Hadst thou not had a villain's heart, thou shouldst have gained my consent, then made this match, instead of hiding it from those who loved thee.

JASON

Thou wouldest have lent me ready aid, no doubt, in this proposal, if had told thee of my marriage, seeing that not even now canst thou restrain thy soul's hot fury.

MEDEA

This was not what restrained thee; but thine eye was turned towards old age, and a foreign wife began to appear a shame to thee.

JASON

Be well assured of this: 'twas not for the woman's sake I wedded the king's daughter, my present wife; but, as I have already told thee, I wished to insure thy safety and to be the father of royal sons bound by blood to my own children—a bulwark to our house.

MEDEA

May that prosperity, whose end is woe, ne'er be mine, nor such wealth as would ever sting my heart!

JASON

Change that prayer as I will teach thee, and thou wilt show more wisdom. Never let happiness appear in sorrow's guise, nor, when thy fortune smiles, pretend she frowns!

MEDEA

Mock on; thou hast a place of refuge; I am alone, an exile soon to be.

JASON

Thy own free choice was this; blame no one else.

MEDEA

What did I do? Marry, then betray thee?

JASON

MEDEA

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Against the king thou didst invoke an impious curse.

MEDEA

On thy house too maybe I bring the curse.

JASON

Know this, I will no further dispute this point with thee. But, if thou wilt of my fortune somewhat take for the children or thyself to help thy exile, say on; for I am ready to grant it with ungrudging hand, yea and to bend tokens to my friends elsewhere who shall treat thee well. If thou refuse this offer, thou wilt do a foolish deed, but if thou cease from anger the greater will be thy gain.

MEDEA

I will have naught to do with friends of thine, naught will I receive of thee, offer it not to me; a villain's gifts can bring no blessing.

JASON

At least I call the gods to witness, that I am ready in all things to serve thee and thy children, but thou dost scorn my favours and thrustest thy friends stubbornly away; wherefore thy lot will be more bitter still.

MEDEA

Away! By love for thy young bride entrapped, too long thou lingerest outside her chamber; go wed, for, if God will, thou shalt have such a marriage as thou wouldst fain refuse.

(JASON goes out.)

CHORUS (*singing*)

strophe 1

When in excess and past all limits Love doth come, he brings not glory or repute to man; but if the Cyprian queen in moderate might approach, no goddess is so full of charm as she. Never, O never, lady mine, discharge at me from thy golden bow a shaft invincible, in passion's venom dipped.

antistrophe 1

On me may chastity, heaven's fairest gift, look with a favouring eye; never may Cypris, goddess dread, fasten on me a temper to dispute, or restless jealousy, smiting my soul with mad desire for unlawful love, but may she hallow peaceful married life and shrewdly decide whom each of us shall wed.

strophe 2

O my country, O my own dear home! God grant I may never be an outcast from my city, leading that cruel helpless life, whose every day is misery. Ere that may I this life complete and yield to death, ay, death; for there is no misery that doth surpass the loss of fatherland.

antistrophe 2

I have seen with mine eyes, nor from the lips of others have I the lesson learnt; no city, not one friend doth pity thee in this thine awful woe. May he perish and find no favour, whoso hath not in him honour for his friends, freely unlocking his heart to them. Never shall he be friend of mine.

(MEDEA has been seated in despair on her door-step during the choral song. AEGEUS and his attendants enter.)

MEDEA

MEDEA, HECUBA, HIPPOLYTUS, THE TROJAN WOMEN, THE BACCHANTES

AEGEUS

All hail, Medea! no man knoweth fairer prelude to the greeting of friends than this.

MEDEA

All hail to thee likewise, Aegeus, son of wise Pandion. Whence comest thou to this land?

AEGEUS

From Phoebus' ancient oracle.

MEDEA

What took thee on thy travels to the prophetic centre of the earth?

AEGEUS

The wish to ask how I might raise up seed unto myself.

MEDEA

Pray tell me, hast thou till now dragged on a childless life?

AEGEUS

I have no child owing to the visitation of some god.

MEDEA

Hast thou a wife, or hast thou never known the married state?

AEGEUS

I have a wife joined to me in wedlock's bond.

MEDEA

What said Phoebus to thee as to children?

AEGEUS

Words too subtle for man to comprehend.

MEDEA

Surely I may learn the god's answer?

AEGEUS

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Most assuredly, for it is just thy subtle wit it needs.

MEDEA

What said the god? speak, if I may hear it.

AEGEUS

He bade me "not loose the wineskin's pendent neck."

MEDEA

Till when? what must thou do first, what country visit?

AEGEUS

Till I to my native home return.

MEDEA

What object hast thou in sailing to this land?

AEGEUS

O'er Troezen's realm is Pittheus king.

MEDEA

Pelops' son, a man devout they say.

AEGEUS

To him I fain would impart the oracle of the god.

MEDEA

The man is shrewd and versed in such-like lore.

AEGEUS

Aye, and to me the dearest of all my warrior friends.

MEDEA

Good luck to thee! success to all thy wishes!

AEGEUS

But why that downcast eye, that wasted cheek?

MEDEA

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O Aegeus, my husband has proved most evil.

AEGEUS

What meanest thou? explain to me clearly the cause of thy despondency.

MEDEA

Jason is wronging me though I have given him no cause.

AEGEUS

What hath he done? tell me more clearly.

MEDEA

He is taking another wife to succeed me as mistress of his house.

AEGEUS

Can he have brought himself to such a dastard deed?

MEDEA

Be assured thereof; I, whom he loved of yore, am in dishonour now.

AEGEUS

Hath he found a new love? or does he loathe thy bed?

MEDEA

Much in love is he! A traitor to his friend is he become.

AEGEUS

Enough! if he is a villain as thou sayest.

MEDEA

The alliance he is so much enamoured of is with a princess.

AEGEUS

Who gives his daughter to him? go on, I pray.

MEDEA

Creon, who is lord of this land of Corinth.

AEGEUS

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Lady, I can well pardon thy grief.

MEDEA

I am undone, and more than that, am banished from the land.

AEGEUS

By whom? fresh woe this word of thine unfolds.

MEDEA

Creon drives me forth in exile from Corinth.

AEGEUS

Doth Jason allow it? This too I blame him for.

MEDEA

Not in words, but he will not stand out against it. O, I implore thee by this beard and by thy knees, in suppliant posture, pity, O pity my sorrows; do not see me cast forth forlorn, but receive me in thy country, to a seat within thy halls. So may thy wish by heaven's grace be crowned with a full harvest of offspring, and may thy life close in happiness! Thou knowest not the rare good luck thou findest here, for I will make thy childlessness to cease and cause thee to beget fair issue; so potent are the spells I know.

AEGEUS

Lady, on many grounds I am most fain to grant thee this thy boon, first for the gods' sake, next for the children whom thou dost promise I shall beget; for in respect of this I am completely lost. 'Tis thus with me; if e'er thou reach my land, I will attempt to champion thee as I am bound to do. Only one warning I do give thee first, lady; I will not from this land bear thee away, yet if of thyself thou reach my halls, there shalt thou bide in safety and I will never yield thee up to any man. But from this land escape without my aid, for I have no wish to incur the blame of my allies as well.

MEDEA

It shall be even so; but wouldst thou pledge thy word to this, I should in all be well content with thee.

AEGEUS

Surely thou dost trust me? or is there aught that troubles thee?

MEDEA

Thee I trust; but Pelias' house and Creon are my foes. Wherefore, if thou art bound by an oath, thou wilt not give me up to them when they come to drag me from the land, but, having entered into a compact and sworn by heaven as well, thou wilt become my friend and disregard their overtures. Weak is any aid of mine, whilst they have wealth and a princely house.

AEGEUS

MEDEA

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Lady, thy words show much foresight, so if this is thy will, I do not, refuse. For I shall feel secure and safe if I have some pretext to offer to thy foes, and thy case too the firmer stands. Now name thy gods.

MEDEA

Swear by the plain of Earth, by Helios my father's sire, and, in one comprehensive oath, by all the race of gods.

AEGEUS

What shall I swear to do, from what refrain? tell me that.

MEDEA

Swear that thou wilt never of thyself expel me from thy land, nor, whilst life is thine, permit any other, one of my foes maybe, to hale me thence if so he will.

AEGEUS

By Earth I swear, by the Sun-god's holy beam and by all the host of heaven that I will stand fast to the terms I hear thee make.

MEDEA

'Tis enough. If thou shouldst break this oath, what curse dost thou invoke upon thyself?

AEGEUS

Whate'er betides the impious.

MEDEA

Go in peace; all is well, and I with what speed I may, will to thy city come, when I have wrought my purpose and obtained my wish.

(AEGEUS and his retinue depart.)

CHORUS (*chanting*)

May Maia's princely son go with thee on thy way to bring thee to thy home, and mayest thou attain that on which thy soul is set so firmly, for to my mind thou seemest a generous man, O Aegeus.

MEDEA

O Zeus, and Justice, child of Zeus, and Sun-god's light, now will triumph o'er my foes, kind friends; on victory's road have I set forth; good hope have I of wreaking vengeance on those I hate. For where we were in most distress this stranger hath appeared, to be a haven in my counsels; to him will we make fast the cables of our ship when we come to the town and citadel of Pallas. But now will I explain to thee my plans in full; do not expect to hear a pleasant tale. A servant of mine will I to Jason send and crave an interview; then when he comes I will address him with soft words, say, "this pleases me," and, "that is well," even the marriage with the princess, which my treacherous lord is celebrating, and add "it suits us both, 'twas well thought out"; then will I entreat that

MEDEA, HECUBA, HIPPOLYTUS, THE TROJAN WOMEN, THE BACCHANTES

here my children may abide, not that I mean to leave them in a hostile land for foes to flout, but that I may slay the king's daughter by guile. For I will send them with gifts in their hands, carrying them unto the bride to save them from banishment, a robe of finest woof and a chaplet of gold. And if these ornaments she take and put them on, miserably shall she die, and likewise everyone who touches her; with such fell poisons will I smear my gifts. And here I quit this theme; but I shudder at the deed I must do next; for I will slay the children I have borne; there is none shall take them from my toils; and when I have utterly confounded Jason's house I will leave the land, escaping punishment for my dear children's murder, after my most unholy deed. For I cannot endure the taunts of enemies, kind friends; enough! what gain is life to me? I have no country, home, or refuge left. O, I did wrong, that hour I left my father's home, persuaded by that Hellene's words, who now shall pay the penalty, so help me God, Never shall he see again alive the children I bore to him, nor from his new bride shall he beget issue, for she must die a hideous death, slain by my drugs. Let no one deem me a poor weak woman who sits with folded hands, but of another mould, dangerous to foes and well-disposed to friends; for they win the fairest fame who live then, life like me.

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

Since thou hast imparted this design to me, I bid thee hold thy hand, both from a wish to serve thee and because I would uphold the laws men make.

MEDEA

It cannot but be so; thy words I pardon since thou art not in the same sorry plight that I am.

LEADER

O lady, wilt thou steel thyself to slay thy children twain?

MEDEA

I will, for that will stab my husband to the heart.

LEADER

It may, but thou wilt be the saddest wife alive.

MEDEA

No matter; wasted is every word that comes 'twixt now and then. Ho! (The NURSE enters in answer to her call.) Thou, go call me Jason hither, for thee I do employ on every mission of trust. No word divulge of all my purpose, as thou art to thy mistress loyal and likewise of my sex.

(The NURSE goes out.)

CHORUS (*singing*)

strophe 1

Sons of Erechtheus, heroes happy from of yore, children of the blessed gods, fed on wisdom's glorious food in a holy land ne'er pillaged by its foes, ye who move with sprightly step through a climate ever bright and clear, where, as legend tells, the Muses nine, Pieria's holy maids, were brought to birth by Harmonia with the golden hair.

antistrophe 1

And poets sing how Cypris drawing water from the streams of fair-flowing Cephissus breathes o'er the land a gentle breeze of balmy winds, and ever as she crowns her tresses with a garland of sweet rose-buds sends forth the Loves to sit by wisdom's side, to take part in every excellence.

strophe 2

How then shall the city of sacred streams, the land that welcomes those it loves, receive thee, the murderess of thy children, thee whose presence with others is a pollution? Think on the murder of thy children, consider the bloody deed thou takest on thee. Nay, by thy knees we, one and all, implore thee, slay not thy babes.

MEDEA

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antistrophe 2

Where shall hand or heart find hardihood enough in wreaking such a fearsome deed upon thy sons? How wilt thou look upon thy babes, and still without a tear retain thy bloody purpose? Thou canst not, when they fall at thy feet for mercy, steel thy heart and dip in their blood thy hand.

(JASON enters.)

JASON

I am come at thy bidding, for e'en though thy hate for me is bitter thou shalt not fail in this small boon, but I will hear what new request thou hast to make of me, lady.

MEDEA

Jason, I crave thy pardon for the words I spoke, and well thou mayest brook my burst of passion, for ere now we twain have shared much love. For I have reasoned with my soul and railed upon me thus, "Ah! poor heart! why am I thus distraught, why so angered 'gainst all good advice, why have I come to hate the rulers of the land, my husband too, who does the best for me he can, in wedding with a princess and rearing for my children noble brothers? Shall I not cease to fret? What possesses me, when heaven its best doth offer? Have I not my children to consider? do I forget that we are fugitives, in need of friends?" When I had thought all this I saw how foolish I had been, how senselessly enraged. So now do commend thee and think thee most wise in forming this connection for us; but I was mad, I who should have shared in these designs, helped on thy plans, and lent my aid to bring about the match, only too pleased to wait upon thy bride. But what we are, we are, we women, evil I will not say; wherefore thou shouldst not sink to our sorry level nor with our weapons meet our childishness.

I yield and do confess that I was wrong then, but now have I come to a better mind. Come hither, my children, come, leave the house, step forth, and with me greet and bid farewell to your father, be reconciled from all past bitterness unto your friends, as now your mother is; for we have made a truce and anger is no more.

(The ATTENDANT comes out of the house with the children.)

Take his right hand; ah me! my sad fate! when I reflect, as now, upon the hidden future. O my children, since there awaits you even thus a long, long life, stretch forth the hand to take a fond farewell. Ah me! how new to tears am I, how full of fear! For now that I have at last released me from my quarrel with your father, I let the tear-drops stream adown my tender cheek.

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

From my eyes too bursts forth the copious tear; O, may no greater ill than the present e'er befall!

JASON

Lady, I praise this conduct, not that I blame what is past; for it is but natural to the female sex to vent their spleen against a husband when he trafficks in other marriages besides his own. But thy heart is changed to wiser schemes and thou art determined on the better course, late though it be; this is acting like a woman of sober sense. And for you, my sons, hath your father provided with all good heed a sure refuge, by God's grace; for ye, I trow, shall with your brothers share hereafter the foremost rank in this Corinthian realm. Only grow up, for all the rest your sire and whoso of the gods is kind to us is bringing to pass. May I see you reach man's full estate, high o'er the heads of those I hate! But thou, lady, why with fresh tears dost thou thine eyelids wet, turning away thy wan cheek, with no welcome for these my happy tidings?

MEDEA

'Tis naught; upon these children my thoughts were turned.

JASON

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Then take heart; for I will see that it is well with them.

MEDEA

I will do so; nor will I doubt thy word; woman is a weak creature, ever given to tears.

JASON

Why prithee, unhappy one, dost moan o'er these children?

MEDEA

I gave them birth; and when thou didst pray long life for them, pity entered into my soul to think that these things must be. But the reason of thy coming hither to speak with me is partly told, the rest will I now mention. Since it is the pleasure of the rulers of the land to banish me, and well I know 'twere best for me to stand not in the way of thee or of the rulers by dwelling here, enemy as I am thought unto their house, forth from this land in exile am I going, but these children,—that they may know thy fostering hand, beg Creon to remit their banishment.

JASON

I doubt whether I can persuade him, yet must I attempt it.

MEDEA

At least do thou bid thy wife ask her sire this boon, to remit the exile of the children from this land.

JASON

Yea, that will I; and her methinks I shall persuade, since she is woman like the rest.

MEDEA

I too will aid thee in this task, for by the children's hand I will send to her gifts that far surpass in beauty, I well know, aught that now is seen 'mongst men, a robe of finest tissue and a chaplet of chased gold. But one of my attendants must haste and bring the ornaments hither. (A servant goes into the house.) Happy shall she be not once alone but ten thousand-fold, for in thee she wins the noblest soul to share her love, and gets these gifts as well which on a day my father's sire, the Sun-god, bestowed on his descendants. (The servant returns and hands the gifts to the children.) My children, take in your hands these wedding gifts, and bear them as an offering to the royal maid, the happy bride; for verily the gifts she shall receive are not to be scorned.

JASON

But why so rashly rob thyself of these gifts? Dost think a royal palace wants for robes or gold? Keep them, nor give them to another. For well I know that if my lady hold me in esteem, she will set my price above all wealth.

MEDEA

Say not so; 'tis said that gifts tempt even gods; and o'er men's minds gold holds more potent sway than countless words. Fortune smiles upon thy bride, and heaven now doth swell her triumph; youth is hers and

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princely power; yet to save my children from exile I would barter life, not dross alone. Children, when we are come to the rich palace, pray your father's new bride, my mistress, with suppliant voice to save you from exile, offering her these ornaments the while; for it is most needful that she receive the gifts in her own hand. Now go and linger not; may ye succeed and to your mother bring back the glad tidings she fain would hear

(JASON, the ATTENDANT, and the children go out together.)

CHORUS (*singing*)

strophe 1

Gone, gone is every hope I had that the children yet might live; forth to their doom they now proceed. The hapless bride will take, ay, take the golden crown that is to be her ruin; with her own hand will she lift and place upon her golden locks the garniture of death.

antistrophe 1

Its grace and sheen divine will tempt her to put on the robe and crown of gold, and in that act will she deck herself to be a bride amid the dead. Such is the snare whereinto she will fall, such is the deadly doom that waits the hapless maid, nor shall she from the curse escape.

strophe 2

And thou, poor wretch, who to thy sorrow art wedding a king's daughter, little thinkest of the doom thou art bringing on thy children's life, or of the cruel death that waits thy bride. Woe is thee! how art thou fallen from thy high estate!

antistrophe 2

Next do I bewail thy sorrows, O mother hapless in thy children, thou who wilt slay thy babes because thou hast a rival, the babes thy husband hath deserted impiously to join him to another bride.

(The ATTENDANT enters with the children.)

ATTENDANT

Thy children, lady, are from exile freed, and gladly did the royal bride accept thy gifts in her own hands, and so thy children made their peace with her.

MEDEA

Ah!

ATTENDANT

Why art so disquieted in thy prosperous hour? Why turnest thou thy cheek away, and hast no welcome for my glad news?

MEDEA

Ah me!

ATTENDANT

These groans but ill accord with the news I bring.

MEDEA

Ah me! once more I say.

ATTENDANT

MEDEA

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Have I unwittingly announced some evil tidings? Have I erred in thinking my news was good?

MEDEA

Thy news is as it is; I blame thee not.

ATTENDANT

Then why this downcast eye, these floods of tears?

MEDEA

Old friend, needs must I weep; for the gods and I with fell intent devised these schemes.

ATTENDANT

Be of good cheer; thou too of a surety shalt by thy sons yet be brought home again.

MEDEA

Ere that shall I bring others to their home, ah! woe is me

ATTENDANT

Thou art not the only mother from thy children reft. Bear patiently thy troubles as a mortal must.

MEDEA

I will obey; go thou within the house and make the day's provision for the children. (The ATTENDANT enters the house. MEDEA turns to the children.) O my babes, my babes, ye have still a city and a home, where far from me and my sad lot you will live your lives, reft of your mother for ever; while I must to another land in banishment, or ever I have had my joy of you, or lived to see you happy, or ever I have graced your marriage couch, your bride, your bridal bower, or lifted high the wedding torch. Ah me! a victim of my own self-will. So it was all in vain I reared you, O my sons; in vain did suffer, racked with anguish, enduring the cruel pangs of childbirth. 'Fore Heaven I once had hope, poor me! high hope of ye that you would nurse me in my age and deck my corpse with loving hands, a boon we mortals covet; but now is my sweet fancy dead and gone; for I must lose you both and in bitterness and sorrow drag through life. And ye shall never with fond eyes see your mother more for o'er your life there comes a change. Ah me! ah me! why do ye look at me so, my children? why smile that last sweet smile? Ah me! what am I to do? My heart gives way when I behold my children's laughing eyes. O, I cannot; farewell to all my former schemes; I will take the children from the land, the babes I bore. Why should I wound their sire by wounding them, and get me a twofold measure of sorrow? No, no, I will not do it. Farewell my scheming! And yet what possesses me? Can I consent to let those foes of mine escape from punishment, and incur their mockery? I must face this deed. Out upon my craven heart! to think that I should even have let the soft words escape my soul. Into the house, children! (The children go into the house.) And whoso feels he must not be present at my sacrifice, must see to it himself; I will not spoil my handiwork. Ah! ah! do not, my heart, O do not do this deed! Let the children go, unhappy one, spare the babes! For if they live, they will cheer thee in our exile there. Nay, by the fiends of hell's abyss, never, never will I hand my children over to their foes to mock and flout. Die they must in any case, and since 'tis so, why I, the mother who bore them, will give the fatal blow. In any case their doom is fixed and there is no escape. Already the crown is on her head, the robe is round her, and she is

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dying, the royal bride; that do I know full well. But now since I have a piteous path to tread, and yet more piteous still the path I send my children on, fain would I say farewell to them. (The children come out at her call. She takes them in her arms.) O my babes, my babes, let your mother kiss your hands. Ah! hands I love so well, O lips most dear to me! O noble form and features of my children, I wish ye joy, but in that other land, for here your father robs you of your home. O the sweet embrace, the soft young cheek, the fragrant breath! my children! Go, leave me; I cannot bear to longer look upon ye; my sorrow wins the day. At last I understand the awful deed I am to do; but passion, that cause of direst woes to mortal man, hath triumphed o'er my sober thoughts.

(She goes into the house with the children.)

CHORUS (*chanting*)

Oft ere now have I pursued subtler themes and have faced graver issues than woman's sex should seek to probe; but then e'en we aspire to culture, which dwells with us to teach us wisdom; I say not all; for small is the class amongst women—(one maybe shalt thou find 'mid many)—that is not incapable of wisdom. And amongst mortals I do assert that they who are wholly without experience and have never had children far surpass in happiness those who are parents. The childless, because they have never proved whether children grow up to be a blessing or curse to men are removed from all share in many troubles; whilst those who have a sweet race of children growing up in their houses do wear away, as I perceive, their whole life through; first with the thought how they may train them up in virtue, next how they shall leave their sons the means to live; and after all this 'tis far from clear whether on good or bad children they bestow their toil. But one last crowning woe for every mortal man now will name; suppose that they have found sufficient means to live, and seen their children grow to man's estate and walk in virtue's path, still if fortune so befall, comes Death and bears the children's bodies off to Hades. Can it be any profit to the gods to heap upon us mortal men beside our other woes this further grief for children lost, a grief surpassing all?

(MEDEA comes out of the house.)

MEDEA

Kind friends, long have I waited expectantly to know how things would at the palace chance. And lo! I see one of Jason's servants coming hither, whose hurried gasps for breath proclaim him the bearer of some fresh tidings.

(A MESSENGER rushes in.)

MESSENGER

Fly, fly, Medea! who hast wrought an awful deed, transgressing every law: nor leave behind or sea-borne bark or car that scours the plain.

MEDEA

Why, what hath chanced that calls for such a flight of mine?

MESSENGER

The princess is dead, a moment gone, and Creon too, her sire, slain by those drugs of thine.

MEDEA

Tidings most fair are thine! Henceforth shalt thou be ranked amongst my friends and benefactors.

MESSENGER

MEDEA, HECUBA, HIPPOLYTUS, THE TROJAN WOMEN, THE BACCHANTES

Ha! What? Art sane? Art not distraught, lady, who hearest with joy the outrage to our royal house done, and art not at the horrid tale afraid?

MEDEA

Somewhat have I, too, to say in answer to thy words. Be not so hasty, friend, but tell the manner of their death, for thou wouldst give me double joy, if so they perished miserably.

MESSENGER

When the children twain whom thou didst bear came with their father and entered the palace of the bride, right glad were we thralls who had shared thy griefs, for instantly from ear to ear a rumour spread that thou and thy lord had made up your former quarrel. One kissed thy children's hands, another their golden hair, while I for very joy went with them in person to the women's chambers. Our mistress, whom now we do revere in thy room, cast a longing glance at Jason, ere she saw thy children twain; but then she veiled her eyes and turned her blanching cheek away, disgusted at their coming; but thy husband tried to check his young bride's angry humour with these words: "O, be not angered 'gainst thy friends; cease from wrath and turn once more thy face this way, counting as friends whomso thy husband counts, and accept these gifts, and for my sake crave thy sire to remit these children's exile." Soon as she saw the ornaments, no longer she held out, but yielded to her lord in all; and ere the father and his sons were far from the palace gone, she took the broidered robe and put it on, and set the golden crown about her tresses, arranging her hair at her bright mirror, with many a happy smile at her breathless counterfeit. Then rising from her seat she passed across the chamber, tripping lightly on her fair white foot, exulting in the gift, with many a glance at her uplifted ankle. When lo! a scene of awful horror did ensue. In a moment she turned pale, reeled backwards, trembling in every limb, and sinks upon a seat scarce soon enough to save herself from falling to the ground. An aged dame, one of her company, thinking belike it was a fit from Pan or some god sent, raised a cry of prayer, till from her mouth she saw the foam-flakes issue, her eyeballs rolling in their sockets, and all the blood her face desert; then did she raise a loud scream far different from her former cry. Forthwith one handmaid rushed to her father's house, another to her new bridegroom to tell his bride's sad fate, and the whole house echoed with their running to and fro. By this time would a quick walker have made the turn in a course of six plethra and reached the goal, when she with one awful shriek awoke, poor sufferer, from her speechless trance and oped her closed eyes, for against her a twofold anguish was warring. The chaplet of gold about her head was sending forth a wondrous stream of ravening flame, while the fine raiment, thy children's gift, was preying on the hapless maiden's fair white flesh; and she starts from her seat in a blaze and seeks to fly, shaking her hair and head this way and that, to cast the crown therefrom; but the gold held firm to its fastenings, and the flame, as she shook her locks, blazed forth the more with double fury. Then to the earth she sinks, by the cruel blow o'ercome; past all recognition now save to a father's eye; for her eyes had lost their tranquil gaze, her face no more its natural look preserved, and from the crown of her head blood and fire in mingled stream ran down; and from her bones the flesh kept peeling off beneath the gnawing of those secret drugs, e'en as when the pine-tree weeps its tears of pitch, a fearsome sight to see. And all were afraid to touch the corpse, for we were warned by what had chanced. Anon came her hapless father unto the house, all unwitting of her doom, and stumbles o'er the dead, and loud he cried, and folding his arms about her kissed her, with words like these the while, "O my poor, poor child, which of the gods hath destroyed thee thus foully? Who is robbing me of thee, old as I am and ripe for death? O my child, alas! would I could die with thee!" He ceased his sad lament, and would have raised his aged frame, but found himself held fast by the fine-spun robe as ivy that clings to the branches of the bay, and then ensued a fearful struggle. He strove to rise, but she still held him back; and if ever he pulled with all his might, from off his bones his aged flesh he tore. At last he gave it up, and breathed forth his soul in awful suffering; for he could no longer master the pain. So there they lie, daughter and aged sire, dead side by side, a grievous sight that calls for tears. And as for thee, I leave thee out of my consideration, for thyself must discover a means to escape punishment. Not now for the first time I think this human life a shadow; yea, and without shrinking I will say that they amongst men who pretend to wisdom and expend deep thought on words do

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incur a serious charge of folly; for amongst mortals no man is happy; wealth may pour in and make one luckier than another, but none can happy be.

(The MESSENGER departs.)

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

This day the deity, it seems, will mass on Jason, as he well deserves, heavy load of evils. Woe is thee, daughter of Creon We pity thy sad fate, gone as thou art to Hades' halls as the price of thy marriage with Jason.

MEDEA

My friends, I am resolved upon the deed; at once will I slay my children and then leave this land, without delaying long enough to hand them over to some more savage hand to butcher. Needs must they die in any case; and since they must, I will slay them—I, the mother that bare them. O heart of mine, steel thyself! Why do I hesitate to do the awful deed that must be done? Come, take the sword, thou wretched hand of mine! Take it, and advance to the post whence starts thy life of sorrow! Away with cowardice! Give not one thought to thy babes, how dear they are or how thou art their mother. This one brief day forget thy children dear, and after that lament; for though thou wilt slay them yet they were thy darlings still, and I am a lady of sorrows.

(MEDEA enters the house.)

CHORUS (*chanting*)

O earth, O sun whose beam illumines all, look, look upon this lost woman, ere she stretch forth her murderous hand upon her sons for blood; for lo! these are scions of thy own golden seed, and the blood of gods is in danger of being shed by man. O light, from Zeus proceeding, stay her, hold her hand, forth from the house chase this fell bloody fiend by demons led. Vainly wasted were the throes thy children cost thee; vainly hast thou borne, it seems, sweet babes, O thou who hast left behind thee that passage through the blue Symplegades, that strangers justly hate. Ah! hapless one, why doth fierce anger thy soul assail? Why in its place is fell murder growing up? For grievous unto mortal men are pollutions that come of kindred blood poured on the earth, woes to suit each crime hurled from heaven on the murderer's house.

FIRST SON (*within*)

Ah, me; what can I do? Whither fly to escape my mother's blows?

SECOND SON (*within*)

I know not, sweet brother mine; we are lost.

CHORUS (*chanting*)

Didst hear, didst hear the children's cry? O lady, born to sorrow, victim of an evil fate! Shall I enter the house? For the children's sake I am resolved to ward off the murder.

FIRST SON (*within*)

Yea, by heaven I adjure you; help, your aid is needed.

SECOND SON (*within*)

Even now the toils of the sword are closing round us.

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CHORUS (*chanting*)

O hapless mother, surely thou hast a heart of stone or steel to slay the offspring of thy womb by such a murderous doom. Of all the wives of yore I know but one who laid her hand upon her children dear, even Ino, whom the gods did madden in the day that the wife of Zeus drove her wandering from her home. But she, poor sufferer, flung herself into the sea because of the foul murder of her children, leaping o'er the wave-beat cliff, and in her death was she united to her children twain. Can there be any deed of horror left to follow this? Woe for the wooing of women fraught with disaster! What sorrows hast thou caused for men ere now!

(JASON and his attendants enter.)

JASON

Ladies, stationed near this house, pray tell me is the author of these hideous deeds, Medea, still within, or hath she fled from hence? For she must hide beneath the earth or soar on wings towards heaven's vault, if she would avoid the vengeance of the royal house. Is she so sure she will escape herself unpunished from this house, when she hath slain the rulers of the land? But enough of this! I am forgetting her children. As for her, those whom she hath wronged will do the like by her; but I am come to save the children's life, lest the victim's kin visit their wrath on me, in vengeance for the murder foul, wrought by my children's mother.

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

Unhappy man, thou knowest not the full extent of thy misery, else had thou never said those words.

JASON

How now? Can she want to kill me too?

LEADER

Thy sons are dead; slain by their own mother's hand.

JASON

O God! what sayest thou? Woman, thou hast sealed my doom.

LEADER

Thy children are no more; be sure of this.

JASON

Where slew she them; within the palace or outside?

LEADER

Throw wide the doors and see thy children's murdered corpses.

JASON

Haste, ye slaves, loose the bolts, undo the fastenings, that I may see the sight of twofold woe, my murdered sons and her, whose blood in vengeance I will shed.

(MEDEA appears above the house, on a chariot drawn by

MEDEA, HECUBA, HIPPOLYTUS, THE TROJAN WOMEN, THE BACCHANTES

dragons; the children's corpses are beside her.)

MEDEA

Why shake those doors and attempt to loose their bolts, in quest of the dead and me their murderess? From such toil desist. If thou wouldst aught with me, say on, if so thou wilt; but never shalt thou lay hand on me, so swift the steeds the sun, my father's sire, to me doth give to save me from the hand of my foes.

JASON

Accursed woman! by gods, by me and all mankind abhorred as never woman was, who hadst the heart to stab thy babes, thou their mother, leaving me undone and childless; this hast thou done and still dost gaze upon the sun and earth after this deed most impious. Curses on thee! now perceive what then I missed in the day I brought thee, fraught with doom, from thy home in a barbarian land to dwell in Hellas, traitress to thy sire and to the land that nurtured thee. On me the gods have hurled the curse that dogged thy steps, for thou didst slay thy brother at his hearth ere thou cam'st aboard our fair ship, Argo. Such was the outset of thy life of crime; then didst thou wed with me, and having borne me sons to glut thy passion's lust, thou now hast slain them. Not one amongst the wives of Hellas e'er had dared this deed; yet before them all I chose thee for my wife, wedding a foe to be my doom, no woman, but a lioness fiercer than Tyrrhene Scylla in nature. But with reproaches heaped thousandfold I cannot wound thee, so brazen is thy nature. Perish, vile sorceress, murderess of thy babes! Whilst I must mourn my luckless fate, for I shall ne'er enjoy my new-found bride, nor shall I have the children, whom I bred and reared, alive to say the last farewell to me; nay, I have lost them.

MEDEA

To this thy speech I could have made a long reply, but Father Zeus knows well all I have done for thee, and the treatment thou hast given me. Yet thou wert not ordained to scorn my love and lead a life of joy in mockery of me, nor was thy royal bride nor Creon, who gave thee a second wife, to thrust me from this land and rue it not. Wherefore, if thou wilt, call me e'en a lioness, and Scylla, whose home is in the Tyrrhene land; for I in turn have wrung thy heart, as well I might.

JASON

Thou, too, art grieved thyself, and sharest in my sorrow.

MEDEA

Be well assured I am; but it relieves my pain to know thou canst not mock at me.

JASON

O my children, how vile a mother ye have found!

MEDEA

My sons, your father's feeble lust has been your ruin!

JASON

'Twas not my hand, at any rate, that slew them.

MEDEA

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No, but thy foul treatment of me, and thy new marriage.

JASON

Didst think that marriage cause enough to murder them?

MEDEA

Dost think a woman counts this a trifling injury?

JASON

So she be self-restrained; but in thy eyes all is evil.

MEDEA

Thy sons are dead and gone. That will stab thy heart.

JASON

They live, methinks, to bring a curse upon thy head.

MEDEA

The gods know, whoso of them began this troublous coil.

JASON

Indeed, they know that hateful heart of thine.

MEDEA

Thou art as hateful. I am aweary of thy bitter tongue.

JASON

And I likewise of thine. But parting is easy.

MEDEA

Say how; what am I to do? for I am fain as thou to go.

JASON

Give up to me those dead, to bury and lament.

MEDEA

No, never! I will bury them myself, bearing them to Hera's sacred field, who watches o'er the Cape, that

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none of their foes may insult them by pulling down their tombs; and in this land of Sisyphus I will ordain hereafter a solemn feast and mystic rites to atone for this impious murder. Myself will now to the land of Erechtheus, to dwell with Aegeus, Pandion's son. But thou, as well thou mayst, shalt die a caitiff's death, thy head crushed 'neath a shattered relic of Argo, when thou hast seen the bitter ending of my marriage.

JASON

The curse of our sons' avenging spirit and of justice, that calls for blood, be on thee!

MEDEA

What god or power divine hears thee, breaker of oaths and every law of hospitality?

JASON

Fie upon thee! cursed witch! child-murderess!

MEDEA

To thy house! go, bury thy wife.

JASON

I go, bereft of both my sons.

MEDEA

Thy grief is yet to come; wait till old age is with thee too.

JASON

O my dear, dear children!

MEDEA

Dear to their mother, not to thee.

JASON

And yet thou didst slay them?

MEDEA

Yea, to vex thy heart.

JASON

One last fond kiss, ah me! I fain would on their lips imprint.

MEDEA

MEDEA, HECUBA, HIPPOLYTUS, THE TROJAN WOMEN, THE BACCHANTES

Embraces now, and fond farewells for them; but then a cold repulse!

JASON

By heaven I do adjure thee, let me touch their tender skin.

MEDEA

No, no! in vain this word has sped its flight.

JASON

O Zeus, dost hear how I am driven hence; dost mark the treatment I receive from this she-lion, fell murderess of her young? Yet so far as I may and can, I raise for them a dirge, and do adjure the gods to witness how thou hast slain my sons, and wilt not suffer me to embrace or bury their dead bodies. Would I had never begotten them to see thee slay them after all!

(The chariot carries MEDEA away.)

CHORUS (*chanting*)

Many a fate doth Zeus dispense, high on his Olympian throne; oft do the gods bring things to pass beyond man's expectation; that, which we thought would be, is not fulfilled, while for the unlooked-for god finds out a way; and such hath been the issue of this matter.

–THE END–

HECUBA

by Euripides

translated by E. P. Coleridge

CHARACTERS IN THE PLAY

THE GHOST OF POLYDORUS, son of HECUBA and Priam, King of Troy

HECUBA, wife of Priam

CHORUS OF CAPTIVE TROJAN WOMEN

POLYXENA, daughter of HECUBA and Priam

ODYSSEUS

TALTHYBIUS, herald of AGAMEMNON

MAID OF HECUBA

AGAMEMNON

POLYMESTOR, King of the Thracian Chersonese

Children Of POLYMESTOR, Attendants, and guards

(SCENE:—Before AGAMEMNON'S tent in the Greek camp upon the shore of the Thracian Chersonese. The GHOST OF POLYDORUS appears.)

GHOST

Lo! I AM come from out the charnel-house and gates of gloom, where Hades dwells apart from gods, I Polydorus, a son of Hecuba the daughter of Cisseus and of Priam. Now my father, when Phrygia's capital was threatened with destruction by the spear of Hellas, took alarm and conveyed me secretly from the land of Troy unto Polymestor's house, his friend in Thrace, who sows these fruitful plains of Chersonese, curbing by his might a nation delighting in horses. And with me my father sent great store of gold by stealth, that, if ever Ilium's walls should fall, his children that survived might not want for means to live. I was the youngest of Priam's sons; and this it was that caused my stealthy removal from the land; for my childish arm availed not to carry weapons or to wield the spear. So long then as the bulwarks of our land stood firm, and Troy's battlements abode unshaken, and my brother Hector prospered in his warring, I, poor child, grew up and flourished, like some vigorous shoot, at the court of the Thracian, my father's friend. But when Troy fell and Hector lost his life and my father's hearth was rooted up, and himself fell butchered at the god-built altar by the hands of Achilles' murderous son; then did my father's friend slay me his helpless guest for the sake of the gold, and thereafter cast me into the swell of the sea, to keep the gold for himself in his house. And there I lie one time upon the strand, another in the salt sea's surge, drifting ever up and down upon the billows, unwept, unburied; but now am I hovering o'er the head of my dear

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mother Hecuba, a disembodied spirit, keeping my airy station these three days, ever since my poor mother came from Troy to linger here in Chersonese. Meantime all the Achaeans sit idly here in their ships at the shores of Thrace; for the son of Peleus, even Achilles, appeared above his tomb and stayed the whole host of Hellas, as they were making straight for home across the sea, demanding to have my sister Polyxena offered at his tomb, and to receive his guerdon. And he will obtain this prize, nor will they that are his friends refuse the gift; and on this very day is fate leading my sister to her doom. So will my mother see two children dead at once, me and that ill-fated maid. For I, to win a grave, ah me! will appear amid the rippling waves before her bond-maid's feet. Yes! I have won this boon from the powers below, that I should find tomb and fall into my mother's hands; so shall I get my heart's desire; wherefore I will go and waylay aged Hecuba, for yonder she passeth on her way from the shelter of Agamemnon's tent, terrified at my spectre. Woe is thee! ah, mother mine! from a palace dragged to face a life of slavery! how sad thy lot, as sad as once 'twas blest! Some god is now destroying thee, setting this in the balance to outweigh thy former bliss.

(The GHOST vanishes. HECUBA enters from the tent of AGAMEMNON, supported by her attendants, captive Trojan women.)

HECUBA (*chanting*)

Guide these aged steps, my servants, forth before the house; support your fellow-slave, your queen of yore, ye maids of Troy. Take hold upon my aged hand, support me, guide me, lift me up; and I will lean upon your bended arm as on a staff and quicken my halting footsteps onwards. O dazzling light of Zeus! O gloom of night! why am I thus scared by fearful visions of the night? O earth, dread queen, mother of dreams that flit on sable wings! I am seeking to avert the vision of the night, the sight of horror which I saw so clearly in my dreams touching my son, who is safe in Thrace, and Polyxena my daughter dear. Ye gods of this land! preserve my son, the last and only anchor of my house, now settled in Thrace, the land of snow, safe in the keeping of his father's friend. Some fresh disaster is in store, a new strain of sorrow will be added to our woe. Such ceaseless thrills of terror never wrung my heart before. Oh! where, ye Trojan maidens, can I find inspired Helenus or Cassandra, that they may read me my dream? For I saw a dappled hind mangled by a wolf's bloody fangs, torn from my knees by force in piteous wise. And this too filled me with affright; o'er the summit of his tomb appeared Achilles' phantom, and for his guerdon he would have one of the luckless maids of Troy. Wherefore, I implore you, powers divine, avert this horror from my daughter, from my child.

(The CHORUS OF CAPTIVE TROJAN WOMEN enters.)

CHORUS (*singing*)

Hecuba, I have hastened away to thee, leaving my master's tent, where the lot assigned me as his appointed slave, in the day that was driven from the city of Ilium, hunted by Achaeans thence at the point of the spear; no alleviation bring I for thy sufferings; nay have laden myself with heavy news, and am a herald of sorrow to thee, lady. 'Tis said the Achaeans have determined in full assembly to offer thy daughter in sacrifice to Achilles; for thou knowest how one day he appeared standing on his tomb in golden harness, and stayed the sea-borne barques, though they had their sails already hoisted, with this pealing cry, "Whither away so fast, ye Danaï, leaving my tomb without its prize?" Thereon arose a violent dispute with stormy altercation, and opinion was divided in the warrior host of Hellas, some being in favour of offering the sacrifice at the tomb, others dissenting. There was Agamemnon, all eagerness in thy interest, because of his love for the frenzied prophetess; but the two sons of Theseus, scions of Athens, though supporting different proposals, yet agreed on the same decision, which was to crown Achilles' tomb with fresh-spilt blood; for they said they never would set Cassandra's love before Achilles' valour. Now the zeal of the rival disputants was almost equal, until that shifty, smooth-mouthed varlet, the son of Laertes, whose tongue is ever at the service of the mob, persuaded the army not to put aside the best of all the Danaï for want of a bond-maid's sacrifice, nor have it said by any of the dead that stand beside Persephone, "The Danaï have left the plains of Troy without one thought of gratitude for their brethren who died for Hellas." Odysseus will be here in an instant, to drag the tender maiden from thy breast and tear her from thy aged arms. To the temples, to the altars with thee! at Agamemnon's knees throw thyself as a suppliant! Invoke alike the gods in heaven and those beneath the earth. For either shall thy prayers avail to spare thee the loss of thy unhappy child, or thou must live to see thy daughter fall before the tomb, her crimson blood

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sputring in deep dark jets from her neck with gold encircled.

(THE following lines between HECUBA and POLYXENA are chanted responsively.)

HECUBA

Woe, woe is me! What words, or cries, or lamentations can I utter? Ah me! for the sorrows of my closing years! for slavery too cruel to brook or bear! Woe, woe is me! What champion have I? Sons, and city—where are they? Aged Priam is no more; no more my children now. Which way am I to go, or this or that? Whither shall I turn my steps? Where is any god or power divine to succour me? Ah, Trojan maids! bringers of evil tidings! messengers of woe! ye have made an end, an utter end of me; life on earth has no more charm for me. Ah! luckless steps, lead on, guide your aged mistress to yon tent. (calling) My child, come forth; come forth, thou daughter of the queen of sorrows; listen to thy mother's voice, my child, that thou mayst know the hideous rumour I now hear about thy life.

(POLYXENA enters from the tent.)

POLYXENA

O mother, mother mine! why dost thou call so loud? what news is it thou hast proclaimed, scaring me, like a cowering bird, from my chamber by this alarm?

HECUBA

Alas, my daughter!

POLYXENA

Why this ominous address? it bodeth sorrow for me.

HECUBA

Woe for thy life!

POLYXENA

Tell all, hide it no longer. Ah mother! how I dread, ay dread the import of thy loud laments.

HECUBA

Ah my daughter! a luckless mother's child!

POLYXENA

Why dost thou tell me this?

HECUBA

The Argives with one consent are eager for thy sacrifice to the son of Peleus at his tomb.

POLYXENA

Ah! mother mine! how canst thou speak of such a horror? Yet tell me all, yes all, O mother dear!

HECUBA

'Tis a rumour ill-boding I tell, my child; they bring me word that sentence is passed upon thy life by the Argives' vote.

POLYXENA

Alas, for thy cruel sufferings! my persecuted mother! woe for thy life of grief! What grievous outrage some fiend hath sent on thee, hateful, horrible! No more shall I thy daughter share thy bondage, hapless youth on hapless age attending. For thou, alas! wilt see thy hapless child torn from thy arms, as a calf of the hills is torn

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from its mother, and sent beneath the darkness of the earth with severed throat for Hades, where with the dead shall I be laid, ah me! For thee I weep with plaintive wail, mother doomed to a life of sorrow! for my own life, its ruin and its outrage, never a tear I shed; nay, death is become to me a happier lot than life.

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

See where Odysseus comes in haste, to announce some fresh command to thee, Hecuba.
(ODYSSEUS enters, with his attendants.)

ODYSSEUS

Lady, methinks thou knowest already the intention of the host, and the vote that has been passed; still will I declare it. It is the Achaeans' will to sacrifice thy daughter Polyxena at the mound heaped o'er Achilles' grave; and they appoint me to take the maid and bring her thither, while the son of Achilles is chosen to preside o'er the sacrifice and act as priest. Dost know then what to do? Be not forcibly torn from her, nor match thy might 'gainst mine; recognize the limits of thy strength, and the presence of thy troubles. Even in adversity 'tis wise to yield to reason's dictates.

HECUBA

Ah me! an awful trial is nigh, it seems, fraught with mourning, rich in tears. Yes, I too escaped death where death had been my due, and Zeus destroyed me not but is still preserving my life, that I may witness in my misery fresh sorrows surpassing all before. Still if the bond may ask the free of things that grieve them not nor wrench their heart-strings, 'tis well that thou shouldst make an end and hearken to my questioning.

ODYSSEUS

Granted; put thy questions; that short delay I grudge thee not.

HECUBA

Dost remember the day thou camest to spy on Ilium, disguised in rags and tatters, while down thy cheek ran drops of blood?

ODYSSEUS

Remember it! yes; 'twas no slight impression it made upon my heart.

HECUBA

Did Helen recognize thee and tell me only?

ODYSSEUS

I well remember the awful risk I ran.

HECUBA

Didst thou embrace my knees in all humility?

ODYSSEUS

Yea, so that my hand grew dead and cold upon thy robe.

HECUBA

What saidst thou then, when in my power?

ODYSSEUS

Doubtless I found plenty to say, to save my life.

HECUBA

Was it I that saved and sent thee forth again?

ODYSSEUS

Thou didst, and so I still behold the light of day.

HECUBA

Art not thou then playing a sorry part to plot against me thus, after the kind treatment thou didst by thy

HECUBA

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own confession receive from me, showing me no gratitude but all the ill thou canst? A thankless race! all ye who covet honour from the mob for your oratory. Oh that ye were unknown to me ye who harm your friends and think no more of it, if ye can but say a word to win the mob. But tell me, what kind of cleverness did they think it, when against this child they passed their bloody vote? Was it duty led them to slay a human victim at the tomb, where sacrifice of oxen more befits? or does Achilles, if claiming the lives of those who slew him as his recompense, show his justice by marking her out for death? No! she at least ne'er injured him. He should have demanded Helen as a victim at his tomb, for she it was that proved his ruin, bringing him to Troy; or if some captive of surpassing beauty was to be singled out for doom, this pointed not to us; for the daughter of Tyndareus was fairer than all womankind, and her injury to him was proved no less than ours. Against the justice of his plea I pit this argument. Now hear the recompense due from thee to me at my request. On thy own confession, thou didst fall at my feet and embrace my hand and aged cheek; I in my turn now do the same to thee, and claim the favour then bestowed; and I implore thee, tear not my child from my arms, nor slay her. There be dead enough; she is my only joy, in her I forget my sorrows; My one comfort she in place of many a loss, my city and my nurse, my staff and journey's guide. 'Tis never right that those in power should use it out of season, or when prosperous suppose they will be always so. For I like them was prosperous once, but now my life is lived, and one day robbed me of all my bliss. Friend, by thy beard, have some regard and pity for me; go to Achaea's host, and talk them over, saying how hateful a thing it is to slay women whom at first ye spared out of pity, after dragging them from the altars. For amongst you the self-same law holds good for bond and free alike respecting bloodshed; such influence as thine will persuade them even though thy words are weak; for the same argument, when proceeding from those of no account, has not the same force as when it is uttered by men of mark.

LEADER

Human nature is not so stony-hearted as to hear thy plaintive tale and catalogue of sorrows, without shedding a tear.

ODYSSEUS

O Hecuba! be schooled by me, nor in thy passion count him a foe who speaketh wisely. Thy life I am prepared to save, for the service I received; I say no otherwise. But what I said to all, I will not now deny, that after Troy's capture I would give thy daughter to the chiefest of our host because he asked a victim. For herein is a source of weakness to most states, whene'er a man of brave and generous soul receives no greater honour than his inferiors. Now Achilles, lady, deserves honour at our hands, since for Hellas he died as nobly as a mortal can. Is not this a foul reproach to treat a man as a friend in life, but, when he is gone from us, to treat him so no more? How now? what will they say, if once more there comes gathering of the host and a contest with the foe? "Shall we fight or nurse our lives, seeing the dead have no honours?" For myself, indeed, though in life my daily store were scant, yet would it be all-sufficient, but as touching a tomb I should wish mine to be an object of respect, for this gratitude has long to run. Thou speakest of cruel sufferings; hear my answer. Amongst us are aged dames and grey old men no less miserable than thou, and brides of gallant husbands reft, o'er whom this Trojan dust has closed. Endure these sorrows; for us, if we are wrong in resolving to honour the brave, we shall bring upon ourselves a charge of ignorance; but as for you barbarians, regard not your friends as such and pay no homage to your gallant dead, that Hellas may prosper and ye may reap the fruits of such policy.

LEADER

Alas! how cursed is slavery alway in its nature, forced by the might of the stronger to endure unseemly treatment.

HECUBA

Daughter, my pleading to avert thy bloody death was wasted idly on the air; do thou, if in aught endowed with greater power to move than thy mother, make haste to use it, uttering every pleading note like the tuneful nightingale, to save thy soul from death. Throw thyself at Odysseus' knees to move his pity, and try to move him. Here is thy plea: he hath children, so that he can feel for thy sad fate.

POLYXENA

HECUBA

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Odysseus, I see thee hiding thy right hand beneath thy robe and turning away thy face, that I may not touch thy beard. Take heart; thou art safe from the suppliant's god in my case, for I will follow thee, alike because I must and because it is my wish to die; for were I loth, a coward should I show myself, a woman faint of heart. Why should I prolong my days? I whose sire was king of all the Phrygians?—my chiefest pride in life, Then was I nursed on fair fond hopes to be a bride for kings, the centre of keen jealousy amongst suitors, to see whose home I would make my own; and o'er each dame of Ida I was queen; ah me! a maiden marked amid her fellows, equal to a goddess, save for death alone, but now slave! That name first makes me long for death, so strange it sounds; and then maybe my lot might give me to some savage master, one that would buy me for money,—me the sister of Hector and many another chief,—who would make me knead him bread within his halls, or sweep his house or set me working at the loom, leading a life of misery; while some slave, bought I know not whence, will taint my maiden charms, once deemed worthy of royalty. No, never! Here I close my eyes upon the light, free as yet, and dedicate myself to Hades. Lead me hence, Odysseus, and do thy worst, for I see naught within my reach to make me hope or expect with any confidence that I am ever again to be happy. Mother mine! seek not to hinder me by word or deed, but join in my wish for death ere I meet with shameful treatment undeserved. For whoso is not used to taste of sorrow's cup, though he bears it, yet it galls him when he puts his neck within the yoke; far happier would he be dead than alive, for life of honour reft is toil and trouble.

LEADER

A wondrous mark, most clearly stamped, doth noble birth imprint on men, and the name goeth still further where it is deserved.

HECUBA

A noble speech, my daughter! but there is sorrow linked with its noble sentiments.

Odysseus, if ye must pleasure the son of Peleus, and avoid reproach, slay not this maid, but lead me to Achilles' pyre and torture me unsparingly: 'twas I that bore Paris, whose fatal shaft laid low the son of Thetis.

ODYSSEUS

'Tis not thy death, old dame, Achilles' wraith hath demanded of the Achaeans, but hers.

HECUBA

At least then slaughter me with my child; so shall there be a double draught of blood for the earth and the dead that claims this sacrifice.

ODYSSEUS

The maiden's death suffices; no need to add a second to the first; would we needed not e'en this!

HECUBA

Die with my daughter I must and will.

ODYSSEUS

How so? I did not know I had a master.

HECUBA

I will cling to her like ivy to an oak.

ODYSSEUS

Not if thou wilt hearken to those who are wiser than thyself.

HECUBA

Be sure I will never willingly relinquish my child.

ODYSSEUS

Well, be equally sure I will never go away and leave her here.

POLYXENA

Mother, hearken to me; and thou, son of Laertes, make allowance for a parent's natural wrath. My poor

HECUBA

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mother, fight not with our masters. Wilt thou be thrown down, be roughly thrust aside and wound thy aged skin, and in unseemly wise be torn from me by youthful arms? This wilt thou suffer; do not so, for 'tis not right for thee. Nay, dear mother mine give me thy hand beloved, and let me press thy cheek to mine; for never, nevermore, but now for the last time shall I behold the dazzling sun—god's orb. My last farewells now take! O mother, mother mine! beneath the earth I pass.

HECUBA

O my daughter, I am still to live and be a slave.

POLYXENA

Unwedded I depart, never having tasted the married joys that were my due!

HECUBA

Thine, my daughter, is a piteous lot, and sad is mine also.

POLYXENA

There in Hades' courts shall I be laid apart from thee.

HECUBA

Ah me, what shall I do? where shall I end my life?

POLYXENA

Daughter of a free—born sire, a slave I am to die.

HECUBA

Not one of all my fifty children left!

POLYXENA

What message can I take for thee to Hector or thy aged lord?

HECUBA

Tell them that of all women I am the most miserable.

POLYXENA

Ah! bosom and breasts that fed me with sweet food!

HECUBA

Woe is thee, my child, for this untimely fate!

POLYXENA

Farewell, my mother! farewell, Cassandra!

HECUBA

"Fare well!" others do, but not thy mother, no!

POLYXENA

Thou too, my brother Polydorus, who art in Thrace, the home of steeds!

HECUBA

Aye, if he lives, which much I doubt; so luckless am I every way.

HECUBA

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POLYXENA

Oh yes, he lives; and, when thou diest, he will close thine eyes.

HECUBA

I am dead; sorrow has forestalled death here.

POLYXENA

Come veil my head, Odysseus, and take me hence; for now, ere falls the fatal blow, my heart is melted by my mother's wailing, and hers no less by mine. O light of day! for still may I call thee by thy name, though now my share in thee is but the time I take to go 'twixt this and the sword at Achilles' tomb.

(ODYSSEUS and his attendants lead POLYXENA away.)

HECUBA

Woe is me! I faint; my limbs sink under me. O my daughter, embrace thy mother, stretch out thy hand, give it me again; leave me not childless! Ah, friends! 'tis my death-blow. Oh! to see that Spartan woman, Helen, sister of the sons of Zeus, in such a plight; for her bright eyes have caused the shameful fall of Troy's once prosperous town.

(HECUBA sinks fainting to the ground.)

CHORUS (*singing*)

strophe 1

O breeze from out the deep arising, that waftest swift galleys, ocean's coursers, across the surging main! whither wilt thou bear me the child of sorrow? To whose house shall I be brought, to be his slave and chattel? to some haven in the Dorian land, or in Phthia, where men say Apidanus, father of fairest streams, makes fat and rich the tilth?

antistrophe 1

or to an island home, sent on a voyage of misery by oars that sweep the brine, leading a wretched existence in halls where the first-created palm and the bay-tree put forth their sacred shoots for dear Latona, memorial fair of her divine travail? and there with the maids of Delos shall I hymn the golden snood and bow of Artemis their goddess?

strophe 2

Or in the city of Pallas, the home of Athena of the beauteous chariot, shall I upon her saffron robe yoke horses to the car, embroidering them on my web in brilliant varied shades, or the race of Titans, whom Zeus the son of Cronos lays to their unending sleep with bolt of flashing flame?

antistrophe 2

Woe is me for my children! woe for my ancestors, and my country which is falling in smouldering ruin 'mid the smoke, sacked by the Argive spear! while I upon a foreign shore am called a slave for-sooth, leaving Asia, Europe's handmaid, and receiving in its place deadly marriage-bower.

(The herald, TALTHYBIUS, enters.)

TALTHYBIUS

Where can I find Hecuba, who once was queen of Ilium, ye Trojan maidens?

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

There she lies near thee, Talthybius, stretched full length upon the ground, wrapt in her robe.

TALTHYBIUS

Great Zeus! what can I say? that thine eye is over man? or that we hold this false opinion all to no purpose, thinking there is any race of gods, when it is chance that rules the mortal sphere? Was not this the queen of wealthy Phrygia, the wife of Priam highly blest? And now her city is utterly o'erthrown by the foe, and she, a slave in her old age, her children dead, lies stretched upon the ground, soiling her hair, poor lady in the dust. Well,

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well; old as I am, may death be my lot before I am caught in any foul mischance. Arise, poor queen! lift up thyself and raise that hoary head.

HECUBA (*stirring*)

Ah! who art thou that wilt not let my body rest? why disturb me in my anguish, whosoe'er thou art?

TALTHYBIUS

'Tis I, Talthybius, who am here, the minister of the Danai; Agamemnon has sent me for thee, lady.

HECUBA (*rising*)

Good friend, art come because the Achaeans are resolved to slay me to at the grave? How welcome would thy tidings be! Let us hasten and lose no time; prithee, lead the way, old sir.

TALTHYBIUS

I am come to fetch thee to bury thy daughter's corpse, lady; and those that send me are the two sons of Atreus and the Achaean host.

HECUBA

Ah! what wilt thou say? Art thou not come, as I had thought, to fetch me to my doom, but to announce ill news? Lost, lost, my child! snatched from thy mother's arms! and I am childless now, at least as touches thee; ah, woe is me!

How did ye end her life? was any mercy shown? or did ye deal ruthlessly with her as though your victim were a foe, old man? Speak, though thy words must be pain to me.

TALTHYBIUS

Lady, thou art bent on making mine a double meed of tears in pity for thy child; for now too as I tell the sad tale a tear will wet my eye, as it did at the tomb when she was dying.

All Achaea's host was gathered there in full array before the tomb to see thy daughter offered; and the son of Achilles took Polyxena by the hand and set her on the top of the mound, while I stood near; and a chosen band of young Achaeans followed to hold thy child and prevent her struggling. Then did Achilles' son take in his hands a brimming cup of gold and poured an offering to his dead sire, making a sign to me to proclaim silence throughout the Achaean host. So I stood at his side and in their midst proclaimed, "Silence, ye Achaeans! hushed be the people all! peace! be still! "Therewith I hushed the host. Then spake he, "Son of Peleus, father mine, accept the offering I pour thee to appease thy spirit, strong to raise the dead; and come to drink the black blood of a virgin pure, which I and the host are offering thee; oh! be propitious to us; grant that we may loose our prows and the cables of our ships, and, meeting with prosperous voyage from Ilium, all to our country come." So he; and all the army echoed his prayer. Then seizing his golden sword by the hilt he drew it from its scabbard, signing the while to the picked young Argive warriors to hold the maid. But she, when she was ware thereof, uttered her voice and said: "O Argives, who have sacked my city! of my free will I die; let none lay hand on me; for bravely will I yield my neck. Leave me free, I do beseech; so slay me, that death may find me free; for to be called a slave amongst the dead fills my royal heart with shame." Thereat the people shouted their applause, and king Agamemnon bade the young men loose the maid. So they set her free, as soon as they heard this last command from him whose might was over all. And she, hearing her captors' words took her robe and tore it open from the shoulder to the waist, displaying a breast and bosom fair as a statue's; then sinking on her knee, one word she spake more piteous than all the rest, "Young prince, if 'tis my breast thou'dst strike, lo! here it is, strike home! or if at my neck thy sword thou'lt aim, behold! that neck is bared."

Then he, half glad, half sorry in his pity for the maid, cleft with the steel the channels of her breath, and streams of blood gushed forth; but she, e'en in death's agony, took good heed to fall with maiden grace, hiding from gaze of man what modest maiden must. Soon as she had breathed her last through the fatal gash, each Argive set his hand to different tasks, some strewing leaves o'er the corpse in handfuls, others bringing pine-logs and heaping up a pyre; and he, who brought nothing, would hear from him who did such taunts as these, "Stand'st

MEDEA, HECUBA, HIPPOLYTUS, THE TROJAN WOMEN, THE BACCHANTES

thou still, ignoble wretch, with never a robe or ornament to bring for the maiden? Wilt thou give naught to her that showed such peerless bravery and spirit?"

Such is the tale I tell about thy daughter's death, and I regard thee as blest beyond all mothers in thy noble child, yet crossed in fortune more than all.

LEADER

Upon the race of Priam and my city some fearful curse hath burst; 'tis sent by God, and we must bear it.

HECUBA

O my daughter! 'mid this crowd of sorrows I know not where to turn my gaze; for if I set myself to one, another will not give me pause; while from this again a fresh grief summons me, finding a successor to sorrow's throne. No longer now can I efface from my mind the memory of thy sufferings sufficiently to stay my tears; yet hath the story of thy noble death taken from the keenness of my grief. Is it not then strange that poor land, when blessed by heaven with a lucky year, yields a good crop, while that which is good, if robbed of needful care, bears but little increase; yet 'mongst men the knave is never other than a knave, the good man aught but good, never changing for the worse because of misfortune, but ever the same? Is then the difference due to birth or bringing up? Good training doubtless gives lessons in good conduct, and if a man have mastered this, he knows what is base by the standard of good. Random shafts of my soul's shooting these, I know.

(To TALTHYBIUS) Go thou and proclaim to the Argives that they touch not my daughter's body but keep the crowd away. For when countless host is gathered, the mob knows no restraint, and the unruliness of sailors exceeds that of fire, all abstinence from evil being counted evil.

(TALTHYBIUS goes out.)

(Addressing a servant) My aged handmaid, take a pitcher and dip it in the salt sea and bring hither thereof, that I for the last time may wash my child, a virgin wife, a widowed maid, and lay her out,—as she deserves, ah! whence can I? impossible! but as best I can; and what will that be? I will collect adornment from the captives, my companions in these tents, if haply any of them escaping her master's eye have some secret store from her old home.

(The MAID departs.)

O towering halls, O home so happy once, O Priam, rich in store of fairest wealth, most blest of sires, and I no less, the grey-haired mother of thy race, how are we brought to naught, stripped of our former pride! And spite of all we vaunt ourselves, one on the riches of his house, another be, cause he has an honoured name amongst his fellow-citizens! But these things are naught; in vain are all our thoughtful schemes, in vain our vaunting words. He is happiest who meets no sorrow in his daily walk.

(HECUBA enters the tent.)

CHORUS (*singing*)

strophe Woe and tribulation were made my lot in life, soon as ever Paris felled his beams of pine in Ida's woods, to sail across the heaving main in quest of Helen's hand, fairest bride on whom the sun-god turns his golden eye.

antistrophe

For here beginneth trouble's cycle, and, worse than that, relentless fate; and from one man's folly came a universal curse, bringing death to the land of Simois, with trouble from an alien shore. The strife the shepherd decided on Ida 'twixt three daughters of the blessed gods,

epode

brought as its result war and bloodshed and the ruin of my home; and many a Spartan maiden too is weeping bitter tears in her halls on the banks of fair Eurotas, and many a mother whose sons are slain, is smiting her hoary head and tearing her cheeks, making her nails red in the furrowed gash.

MAID (entering excitedly, attended by bearers bringing in a covered corpse)

Oh! where, ladies, is Hecuba, our queen of sorrow, who far surpasses all in tribulation, men and women both alike? None shall wrest the crown from her.

MEDEA, HECUBA, HIPPOLYTUS, THE TROJAN WOMEN, THE BACCHANTES

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

What now, thou wretched bird of boding note? Thy evil tidings never seem to rest.

MAID

'Tis to Hecuba I bring my bitter news; no easy task is it for mortal lips to speak smooth words in sorrow's hour.

LEADER

Lo! she is coming even now from the shelter of the tent appearing just in time to hear thee speak.
(HECUBA comes out of the tent.)

MAID

Alas for thee! most hapless queen, ruined beyond all words of mine to tell; robbed of the light of life; of children, husband, city reft; hopelessly undone!

HECUBA

This is no news but insult; I have heard it all before. But why art thou come, bringing hither to me the corpse of Polyxena, on whose burial Achaea's host was reported to be busily engaged?

MAID (*aside*)

She little knows what I have to tell, but mourns Polyxena, not grasping her new sorrows.

HECUBA

Ah! woe is me! thou art not surely bringing hither mad Cassandra, the prophetic maid?

MAID

She lives, of whom thou speakest; but the dead thou dost not weep is here. (Uncovering the corpse)
Mark well the body now laid bare; is not this a sight to fill thee with wonder, and upset thy hopes?

HECUBA

Ah me! 'tis the corpse of my son Polydorus I behold, whom he of Thrace was keeping safe for me in his halls. Alas! this is the end of all; my life is o'er.

(Chanting) O my son, my son, alas for thee! a frantic strain I now begin; thy fate I learnt, a moment gone, from some foul fiend.

MAID

What! so thou knewest thy son's fate, poor lady.

HECUBA (*chanting*)

I cannot, cannot credit this fresh sight I see. Woe succeeds to woe; time will never cease henceforth to bring me groans and tears.

LEADER

Alas poor lady, our sufferings are cruel indeed.

HECUBA (*chanting*)

O my son, child of a luckless mother, what was the manner of thy death? what lays thee dead at my feet? Who did the deed?

MAID

HECUBA

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I know not. On the sea–shore I found him.

HECUBA (*chanting*)

Cast up on the smooth sand, or thrown there after the murderous blow?

MAID

The waves had washed him ashore.

HECUBA (*chanting*)

Alas! alas! I read aright the vision I saw in my sleep, nor did the phantom dusky–winged escape my ken, even the vision I saw concerning my son, who is now no more within the bright sunshine.

LEADER

Who slew him then? Can thy dream–lore tell us that?

HECUBA (*chanting*)

'Twas my own, own friend, the knight of Thrace, with whom his aged sire had placed the boy in hiding.

LEADER

O horror! what wilt thou say? did he slay him to get the gold?

HECUBA (*chanting*)

O awful crime! O deed without a name! beggaring wonder! impious! intolerable! Where are now the laws 'twixt guest and host? Accursed monster! how hast thou mangled his flesh, slashing the poor child's limbs with ruthless sword, lost to all sense of pity!

LEADER

Alas for thee! how some deity, whose hand is heavy on thee, hath sent thee troubles beyond all other mortals! But yonder I see our lord and master Agamemnon coming; so let us be still henceforth, my friends.

(AGAMEMNON enters.)

AGAMEMNON

Hecuba, why art thou delaying to come and bury thy daughter? for it was for this that Talthybius brought me thy message begging that none of the Argives should touch thy child. And so I granted this, and none is touching her, but this long delay of thine fills me with wonder. Wherefore am I come to send thee hence; for our part there is well performed; if herein there be any place for "well."

(He sees the body.)

Ha! what man is this I see near the tents, some Trojan's corpse? 'tis not an Argive's body; that the garments it is clad in tell me.

HECUBA (*aside*)

Unhappy one! in naming thee I name myself; O Hecuba, what shall do? throw myself here at Agamemnon's knees, or bear my sorrows in silence?

AGAMEMNON

Why dost thou turn thy back towards me and weep, refusing to say, what has happened, or who this is?

HECUBA (*aside*)

But should he count me as a slave and foe and spurn me from his knees, I should but add to my anguish.

AGAMEMNON

HECUBA

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I am no prophet born; wherefore, if I be not told, I cannot learn the current of thy thoughts.

HECUBA (*aside*)

Can it be that in estimating this man's feelings I make him out too ill-disposed, when he is not really so?

AGAMEMNON

If thy wish really is that I should remain in ignorance, we are of one mind; for I have no wish myself to listen.

HECUBA (*aside*)

Without his aid I shall not be able to avenge my children. Why do still ponder the matter? I must do and dare whether I win or lose. (Turning to AGAMEMNON) O Agamemnon! by thy knees, by thy beard and conquering hand I implore thee.

AGAMEMNON

What is thy desire? to be set free? that is easily done.

HECUBA

Not that; give me vengeance on the wicked, and evermore am I willing to lead a life of slavery.

AGAMEMNON

Well, but why dost thou call me to thy aid?

HECUBA

'Tis a matter thou little reckest of, O king. Dost see this corpse, for whom my tears now flow?

AGAMEMNON

I do; but what is to follow, I cannot guess.

HECUBA

He was my child in days gone by; I bore him in my womb.

AGAMEMNON

Which of thy sons is he, poor sufferer?

HECUBA

Not one of Priam's race who fell 'neath Ilium's walls.

AGAMEMNON

Hadst thou any son besides those, lady?

HECUBA

Yes, him thou seest here, of whom, methinks, I have small gain.

AGAMEMNON

Where then was he, when his city was being destroyed?

HECUBA

His father, fearful of his death, conveyed him out of Troy.

HECUBA

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AGAMEMNON

Where did he place him apart from all the sons he then had?

HECUBA

Here in this very land, where his corpse was found.

AGAMEMNON

With Polymestor, the king of this country?

HECUBA

Hither was he sent in charge of gold, most bitter trust!

AGAMEMNON

By whom was he slain? what death o'ertook him?

HECUBA

By whom but by this man? His Thracian host slew him.

AGAMEMNON

The wretch! could he have been so eager for the treasure?

HECUBA

Even so; soon as ever he heard of the Phrygians' disaster.

AGAMEMNON

Where didst find him? or did some one bring his corpse?

HECUBA

This maid, who chanced upon it on the sea-shore.

AGAMEMNON

Was she seeking it, or bent on other tasks?

HECUBA

She had gone to fetch water from the sea to wash Polyxena.

AGAMEMNON

It seems then his host slew him and cast his body out to sea.

HECUBA

Aye, for the waves to toss, after mangling him thus.

AGAMEMNON

Woe is thee for thy measureless troubles!

HECUBA

I am ruined; no evil now is left, O Agamemnon.

AGAMEMNON

Look you! what woman was ever born to such misfortune?

HECUBA

MEDEA, HECUBA, HIPPOLYTUS, THE TROJAN WOMEN, THE BACCHANTES

HECUBA

There is none, unless thou wouldst name misfortune herself. But hear my reason for throwing myself at thy knees. If my treatment seems to thee deserved, I will be content; but, if otherwise, help me to punish this most godless host, that hath wrought a deed most damned, fearless alike of gods in heaven or hell; who, though full oft he had shared my board and been counted first of all my guest—friends and after meeting with every kindness he could claim and receiving my consideration, slew my son, and bent though he was on murder, deigned not to bury him but cast his body forth to sea.

I may be a slave and weak as well, but the gods are strong, and custom too which prevails o'er them, for by custom it is that we believe in them and set up bounds of right and wrong for our lives. Now if this principle, when referred to thee, is to be set at naught, and they are to escape punishment who murder guests or dare to plunder the temples of gods, then is all fairness in things human at an end. Deem this then a disgrace and show regard for me, have pity on me, and, like an artist standing back from his picture, look on me and closely scan my piteous state. I was once queen, but now I am thy slave; a happy mother once, but now childless and old alike, left of city, utterly forlorn, the most wretched woman living. Ah! woe is me! whither wouldst thou withdraw thy steps from me? (as AGAMEMNON is turning away) My efforts then will be in vain, ah me! ah me! Why, oh! why do we mortals toil, as needs we must, and seek out all other sciences, but persuasion, the only real mistress of mankind, we take no further pains to master completely by offering to pay for the knowledge, so that any man might upon occasion convince his fellows as he pleased and gain his point as well? How shall anyone hereafter hope for prosperity? All those my sons are gone from me, and I, their mother, am led away into captivity to suffer shame, while yonder I see the smoke leaping up o'er my city. Further—though perhaps this were idly urged, to plead thy love, still will I put the case:—at thy side lies my daughter, Cassandra, the maid inspired, as the Phrygians call her. How then, king, wilt thou acknowledge those nights of rapture, or what return shall she my daughter or I her mother have for all the love she has lavished on her lord? For from darkness and the endearments of the night mortals reap by far their keenest joys. Harken then; dost see this corpse? By doing him a service thou wilt do it to a kinsman of thy bride's. One thing only have I yet to urge. Oh! would I had a voice in arms, in hands, in hair and feet, placed there by the arts of Daedalus or some god, that all together they might with tears embrace thy knees, bringing a thousand pleas to bear on thee! O my lord and master, most glorious light of Hellas, listen, stretch forth a helping hand to this aged woman, for all she is a thing of naught; still do so. For 'tis ever a good man's duty to succour the right, and to punish evil—doers wherever found.

LEADER

'Tis strange how each extreme doth meet in human life! Custom determines even our natural ties, making the most bitter foes friends, and regarding as foes those who formerly were friends.

AGAMEMNON

Hecuba, I feel compassion for thee and thy son and thy ill—fortune, as well as for thy suppliant gesture, and I would gladly see yon impious host pay thee this forfeit for the sake of heaven and justice, could I but find some way to help thee without appearing to the army to have plotted the death of the Thracian king for Cassandra's sake. For on one point I am assailed by perplexity; the army count this man their friend, the dead their foe; that he is dear to thee is a matter apart, wherein the army has no share. Reflect on this; for though thou find'st me ready to share thy toil and quick to lend my aid, yet the risk of being reproached by the Achaeans makes me hesitate.

HECUBA

Ah! there is not in the world a single man free; for he is either a slave to money or to fortune, or else the people in their thousands or the fear of public prosecution prevents him from following the dictates of his heart.

But since thou art afraid, deferring too much to the rabble, I will rid thee of that fear. Thus; be privy to my plot if I devise mischief against this murderer, but refrain from any share in it. And if there break out among the Achaeans any uproar or attempt at rescue, when the Thracian is suffering his doom, check it, though without seeming to do so for my sake. For what remains, take heart; I will arrange everything well.

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AGAMEMNON

How? what wilt thou do? wilt take a sword in thy old hand and slay the barbarian, or hast thou drugs or what to help thee? Who will take thy part? whence wilt thou procure friends?

HECUBA

Sheltered beneath these tents is a host of Trojan women.

AGAMEMNON

Dost mean the captives, the booty of the Hellenes?

HECUBA

With their help will I punish my murderous foe.

AGAMEMNON

How are women to master men?

HECUBA

Numbers are a fearful thing, and joined to craft a desperate foe.

AGAMEMNON

True; still I have a mean opinion of the female race.

HECUBA

What? did not women slay the sons of Aegyptus, and utterly clear Lemnos of men? But let it be even thus; put an end to our conference, and send this woman for me safely through the host. And do thou (To servant draw near my Thracian friend and say, "Hecuba, once queen of Ilium, summons thee, on thy own business no less than hers, thy children too, for they also must hear what she has to say." (The servant goes out.) Defer awhile, Agamemnon, the burial of Polyxena lately slain, that brother and sister may be laid on the same pyre and buried side by side, a double cause of sorrow to their mother.

AGAMEMNON

So shall it be; yet had the host been able to sail, I could not have granted thee this boon; but, as it is, since the god sends forth no favouring breeze, we needs must abide, seeing, as we do, that sailing cannot be. Good luck to thee! for this is the interest alike of citizen and state, that the wrong-doer be punished and the good man prosper.

(AGAMEMNON departs as HECUBA withdraws into the tent.)

CHORUS (*singing*)

strophe 1

No more, my native Ilium, shalt thou be counted among the towns ne'er sacked; so thick a cloud of Hellene troops is settling all around, wasting thee with the spear; shorn art thou of thy coronal of towers, and fouled most piteously with filthy soot; no more, ah me! shall tread thy streets.

antistrophe 1

'Twas in the middle of the night my ruin came, in the hour when sleep steals sweetly o'er the eyes after the feast is done. My husband, the music o'er, and the sacrifice that sets the dance afoot now ended, was lying in our bridal-chamber, his spear hung on a peg; with never a thought of the sailor-throng encamped upon the Trojan shores;

strophe 2

and I was braiding my tresses 'neath a tight-drawn snood before my golden mirror's countless rays, that I might lay me down to rest; when lo! through the city rose a din, and a cry went ringing down the streets of Troy, "Ye sons of Hellas, when, oh! when will ye sack the citadel of Ilium, and seek your homes?"

HECUBA

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antistrophe 2

Up sprang I from my bed, with only a mantle about me, like Dorian maid, and sought in vain, ah me! to station myself at the holy hearth of Artemis; for, after seeing my husband slain, I was hurried away o'er the broad sea; with many a backward look at my city, when the ship began her homeward voyage and parted me from Ilium's strand; till alas! for very grief I fainted,

epode

cursing Helen the sister of the Dioscuri, and Paris the baleful shepherd of Ida; for 'twas their marriage, which was no marriage but a curse by some demon sent, that robbed me of my country and drove me from my home. Oh! may the sea's salt flood neer carry her home again; and may she never set foot in her father's halls!

(HECUBA comes out of the tent as POLYMESTOR,
his children and guards enter.)

POLYMESTOR

My dear friend Priam, and thou no less, Hecuba, I weep to see thee and thy city thus, and thy daughter lately slain. Alas! there is naught to be relied on; fair fame is insecure, nor is there any guarantee that weal will not be turned to woe. For the gods confound our fortunes, tossing them to and fro, and introduce confusion, that our perplexity may make us worship them. But what boots it to bemoan these things, when it brings one no nearer to heading the trouble? If thou art blaming me at all for my absence, stay a moment; I was away in the very heart of Thrace when thou wast brought hither; but on my return, just as I was starting from my home for the same purpose, thy maid fell in with me, and gave me thy message, which brought me here at once.

HECUBA

Polymestor, I am holden in such wretched plight that I blush to meet thine eye; for my present evil case makes me ashamed to face thee who didst see me in happier days, and I cannot look on thee with unfaltering gaze. Do not then think it ill-will on my part, Polymestor; there is another cause as well, I mean the custom which forbids women to meet men's gaze.

POLYMESTOR

No wonder, surely. But what need hast thou of me? Why didst send for me to come hither from my house?

HECUBA

I wish to tell thee and thy children a private matter of my own; prithee, bid thy attendants withdraw from the tent.

POLYMESTOR (*to his Attendants*)

Retire; this desert spot is safe enough. (The guards go out; to HECUBA) Thou art my friend, and this Achaean host is well-disposed to me. But thou must tell me how prosperity is to succour its unlucky friends; for ready am I to do so.

HECUBA

First tell me of the child Polydorus, whom thou art keeping in thy halls, received from me and his father; is he yet alive? The rest will I ask thee after that.

POLYMESTOR

Yes, thou still hast a share in fortune there.

HECUBA

Well said, dear friend! how worthy of thee!

POLYMESTOR

HECUBA

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What next wouldst learn of me?

HECUBA

Hath he any recollection of me his mother?

POLYMESTOR

Aye, he was longing to steal away hither to thee.

HECUBA

Is the gold safe, which he brought with him from Troy?

POLYMESTOR

Safe under lock and key in my halls.

HECUBA

There keep it, but covet not thy neighbour's goods.

POLYMESTOR

Not I; God grant me luck of what I have, lady!

HECUBA

Dost know what I wish to say to thee and thy children?

POLYMESTOR

Not yet; thy words maybe will declare it.

HECUBA

May it grow as dear to thee as thou now art to me!

POLYMESTOR

What is it that I and my children are to learn?

HECUBA

There be ancient vaults filled full of gold by Priam's line.

POLYMESTOR

Is it this thou wouldst tell thy son?

HECUBA

Yes, by thy lips, for thou art a righteous man.

POLYMESTOR

What need then of these children's presence?

HECUBA

'Tis better they should know it, in case of thy death. **POLYMESTOR.**
True; 'tis also the wiser way.

HECUBA

Well, dost thou know where stands the shrine of Trojan Athena?

HECUBA

MEDEA, HECUBA, HIPPOLYTUS, THE TROJAN WOMEN, THE BACCHANTES

POLYMESTOR

Is the gold there? what is there to mark it?

HECUBA

A black rock rising above the ground.

POLYMESTOR

Is there aught else thou wouldst tell me about the place?

HECUBA

I wish to keep safe the treasure I brought from Troy.

POLYMESTOR

Where can it be? inside thy dress, or hast thou it hidden?

HECUBA

'Tis safe amid a heap of spoils within these tents.

POLYMESTOR

Where? This is the station built by the Achaeans to surround their fleet.

HECUBA

The captive women have huts of their own.

POLYMESTOR

It is safe to enter? are there no men about?

HECUBA

There are no Achaeans within; we are alone. Enter then the tent, for the Argives are eager to set sail from Troy for home; and, when thou hast accomplished all that is appointed thee, thou shalt return with thy children to that bourn where thou hast lodged my son.

(HECUBA leads POLYMESTOR and his children into the tent.)

CHORUS (*chanting*)

Not yet hast thou paid the penalty, but maybe thou yet wilt; like one who slips and falls into the surge with no haven near, so shalt thou lose thy own life for the life thou hast taken. For where the rights of justice and the law of heaven are one, there is ruin fraught with death and doom. Thy hopes of this journey shall cheat thee, for it hath led thee, unhappy wretch! to the halls of death; and to no warrior's hand shalt thou resign thy life.

POLYMESTOR (*within the tent*)

O horror! I am blinded of the light of my eyes, ah me!

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

Heard ye, friends, that Thracian's cry of woe?

POLYMESTOR (*within*)

O horror! horror! my children! O the cruel blow.

LEADER

Friends, new ills are brought to pass in yonder tent.

HECUBA

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POLYMESTOR (*within*)

Nay, ye shall never escape for all your hurried flight; for with my fist will I burst open the inmost recesses of this hall.

LEADER

Hark! how he launches ponderous blows! Shall we force an entry? The crisis calls on us to aid Hecuba and the Trojan women.

(HECUBA enters, calling back into the tent.)

HECUBA

Strike on, spare not, burst the doors! thou shalt ne'er replace bright vision in thy eyes nor ever see thy children, whom I have slain, alive again.

LEADER

What! hast thou foiled the Thracian, and is the stranger in thy power, mistress mine? is all thy threat now brought to pass?

HECUBA

A moment, and thou shalt see him before the tent, his eyes put out, with random step advancing as a blind man must; yea, and the bodies of his two children whom I with my brave daughters of Troy did slay; he hath paid me his forfeit; look where he cometh from the tent. I will withdraw out of his path and stand aloof from the hot fury of this Thracian, my deadly foe.

(POLYMESTOR rushes out. Blood is streaming from his eyes.)

POLYMESTOR (*chanting*)

Woe is me! whither can I go, where halt, or whither turn? shall crawl upon my hands like a wild four-footed beast on their track? Which path shall I take first, this or that, eager as I am to clutch those Trojan murderesses that have destroyed me? Out upon ye, cursed daughters of Phrygia! to what corner have ye fled cowering before me? O sun-god, would thou couldst heal my bleeding orbs, ridding me of my blindness!

Ha! hush! I catch their stealthy footsteps here. Where can I dart on them and gorge me on their flesh and bones, making for myself wild beasts' meal, exacting vengeance in requital of their outrage on me? Ah, woe is me! whither am I rushing, leaving my babes unguarded for hell-hounds to mangle, to be murdered and ruthlessly cast forth upon the hills, a feast of blood for dogs? Where shall I stay or turn my steps? where rest? like a ship that lies anchored at sea, so gathering close my linen robe I rush to that chamber of death, to guard my babes.

LEADER

Woe is thee! what grievous outrage hath been wreaked on thee! fearful penalty for thy foul deed hath the deity imposed, whoe'er he is whose hand is heavy upon thee.

POLYMESTOR (*chanting*)

Woe is me! Ho! my Thracian spearmen, clad in mail, a race of knights whom Ares doth inspire! Ho! Achaeans! sons of Atreus ho! to you I loudly call; come hither, in God's name come! Doth any hearken, or will no man help me? Why do ye delay? Women, captive women have destroyed me. A fearful fate is mine; ah me my hideous outrage! Whither can I turn or go? Shall I take wings and soar aloft to the mansions of the sky, where Orion and Sirius dart from their eyes a flash as of fire, or shall I, in my misery, plunge to Hades' murky flood?

LEADER

'Tis a venial sin, when a man, suffering from evils too heavy to bear, rids himself of a wretched existence.

(AGAMEMNON and his retinue enter.)

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AGAMEMNON

Hearing a cry I am come hither; for Echo, child of the mountain–rock, hath sent her voice loud–ringing through the host, causing a tumult. Had I not known that Troy's towers were levelled by the might of Hellas, this uproar had caused no slight terror.

POLYMESTOR

Best of friends! for by thy voice I know thee, Agamemnon, dost see my piteous state?

AGAMEMNON

What! hapless Polymestor, who hath stricken thee? who hath reft thine eyes of sight, staining the pupils with blood? who hath slain these children? whoe'er he was, fierce must have been his wrath against thee and thy children.

POLYMESTOR

Hecuba, helped by the captive women, hath destroyed me; no! not destroyed, far worse than that.

AGAMEMNON (*addressing HECUBA*)

What hast thou to say? Was it thou that didst this deed, as he avers? thou, Hecuba, that hast ventured on this inconceivable daring?

POLYMESTOR

Ha! what is that? is she somewhere near? show me, tell me where, that I may grip her in my hands and rend her limb from limb, bespattering her with gore.

AGAMEMNON

Ho! madman, what wouldst thou?

POLYMESTOR

By heaven I entreat thee, let me vent on her the fury of my arm.

AGAMEMNON

Hold! banish that savage spirit from thy heart and plead thy cause, that after hearing thee and her in turn I may fairly decide what reason there is for thy present sufferings.

POLYMESTOR

I will tell my tale. There was a son of Priam, Polydorus, the youngest, a child by Hecuba, whom his father Priam sent to me from Troy to bring up in my halls, suspecting no doubt the fall of Troy. Him I slew; but hear my reason for so doing, to show how cleverly and wisely I had planned. My fear was that if that child were left to be thy enemy, he would re–people Troy and settle it afresh; and the Achaeans, knowing that a son of Priam survived, might bring another expedition against the Phrygian land and harry and lay waste these plains of Thrace hereafter, for the neighbours of Troy to experience the very troubles we were lately suffering, O king. Now Hecuba, having discovered the death of her son, brought me hither on this pretext, saying she would tell me of hidden treasure stored up in Ilium by the race of Priam; and she led me apart with my children into the tent, that none but I might hear her news. So I sat me down on a couch in their midst to rest; for there were many of the Trojan maidens seated there, some on my right hand, some on my left, as it had been beside a friend; and they were praising the weaving of our Thracian handiwork, looking at this robe as they held it up to the light; meantime others examined my Thracian spear and so stripped me of the protection of both. And those that were young mothers were dandling my children in their arms, with loud admiration, as they passed them on from hand to hand to remove them far from their father; and then after their smooth speeches (wouldst thou believe it?) in an instant snatching daggers from some secret place in their dress they stab my children; whilst others, like foes, seized me hand and foot; and if I tried to raise my head, anxious to help my babes, they would clutch me by the

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hair; while if I stirred my hands, I could do nothing, poor wretch! for the numbers of the women. At last they wrought a fearful deed, worse than what had gone before; for they took their brooches and stabbed the pupils of my hapless eyes, making them gush with blood, and then fled through the chambers; up I sprang like a wild beast in pursuit of the shameless murderesses, searching along each wall with hunter's care, dealing buffets, spreading ruin. This then is what I have suffered because of my zeal for thee, O Agamemnon, for slaying an enemy of thine. But to spare thee a lengthy speech; if any of the men of former times have spoken ill of women, if any doth so now, or shall do so hereafter, all this in one short sentence will say; for neither land or sea produces a race so pestilent, as whosoever hath had to do with them knows full well.

LEADER

Curb thy bold tongue, and do not, because of thy own woes, thus embrace the whole race of women in one reproach; for though some of us, and those a numerous class, deserve to be disliked, there are others amongst us who rank naturally amongst the good.

HECUBA

Never ought words to have outweighed deeds in this world, Agamemnon. No! if a man's deeds had been good, so should his words have been; if, on the other hand, evil, his words should have betrayed their unsoundness, instead of its being possible at times to give a fair complexion to injustice. There are, 'tis true, clever persons, who have made a science of this, but their cleverness cannot last for ever; a miserable end awaits them; none ever yet escaped. This is a warning I give thee at the outset. Now will I turn to this fellow, and will give thee thy answer, thou who sayest it was to save Achaea double toil and for Agamemnon's sake that thou didst slay my son. Nay, villain, in the first place how could the barbarian race ever be friends with Hellas? Impossible, ever. Again, what interest hadst thou to further by thy zeal? was it to form some marriage, or on the score of kin, or, prithee, why? or was it likely that they would sail hither again and destroy thy country's crops? Whom dost thou expect to persuade into believing that? Wouldst thou but speak the truth, it was the gold that slew my son, and thy greedy spirit. Now tell me this; why, when Troy was victorious, when her ramparts still stood round her, when Priam was alive, and Hector's warring prospered, why didst thou not, if thou wert really minded to do Agamemnon a service, then slay the child, for thou hadst him in thy palace 'neath thy care, or bring him with thee alive to the Argives? Instead of this, when our sun was set and the smoke of our city showed it was in the enemy's power, thou didst murder the guest who had come to thy hearth. Furthermore, to prove thy villainy, hear this; if thou wert really a friend to those Achaeans, thou shouldst have brought the gold, which thou sayst thou art keeping not for thyself but for Agamemnon, and given it to them, for they were in need and had endured a long exile from their native land. Whereas not even now canst thou bring thyself to part with it, but persistest in keeping it in thy palace. Again, hadst thou kept my son safe and sound, as thy duty was, a fair renown would have been thy reward, for it is in trouble's hour that the good most clearly show their friendship; though prosperity of itself in every case finds friends. Wert thou in need of money and he prosperous, that son of mine would have been as a mighty treasure for thee to draw upon; but now thou hast him no longer to be thy friend, and the benefit of the gold is gone from thee, thy children too are dead, and thyself art in this sorry plight.

To thee, Agamemnon, I say, if thou help this man, thou wilt show thy worthlessness; for thou wilt be serving one devoid of honour or piety, a stranger to the claims of good faith, a wicked host; while I shall say thou delightest in evil-doers, being such an one thyself; but I rail not at my masters.

LEADER

Look you! how a good cause ever affords men an opening for a good speech.

AGAMEMNON

To be judge in a stranger's troubles goes much against my grain, but still I must; yea, for to take this matter in hand and then put it from me is a shameful course. My opinion, that thou mayst know it, is that it was not for the sake of the Achaeans or me that thou didst slay thy guest, but to keep that gold in thy own house. In thy trouble thou makest a case in thy own interests. Maybe amongst you 'tis a light thing to murder guests, but with us in Hellas 'tis a disgrace. How can I escape reproach if I judge the not guilty? I cannot do it. Nay, since

MEDEA, HECUBA, HIPPOLYTUS, THE TROJAN WOMEN, THE BACCHANTES

thou didst dare thy horrid crime, endure as well its painful consequence.

POLYMESTOR

Woe is me! worsted by a woman and a slave, I am, it seems, to suffer by unworthy hands.

HECUBA

Is it not just for thy atrocious crime?

POLYMESTOR

Ah, my children! ah, my blinded eyes! woe is me!

HECUBA

Dost thou grieve? what of me? thinkst thou I grieve not for my son?

POLYMESTOR

Thou wicked wretch! thy delight is in mocking me.

HECUBA

I am avenged on thee; have I not cause for joy?

POLYMESTOR

The joy will soon cease, in the day when ocean's flood—

HECUBA

Shall convey me to the shores of Hellas?

POLYMESTOR

Nay, but close o'er thee when thou fallest from the masthead.

HECUBA

Who will force me to take the leap?

POLYMESTOR

Of thy own accord wilt thou climb the ship's mast.

HECUBA

With wings upon my back, or by what means?

POLYMESTOR

Thou wilt become a dog with bloodshot eyes.

HECUBA

How knowest thou of my transformation?

POLYMESTOR

Dionysus, our Thracian prophet, told me so.

HECUBA

And did he tell thee nothing of thy present trouble?

POLYMESTOR

HECUBA

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No; else hadst thou never caught me thus by guile.

HECUBA

Shall I die or live, and so complete my life on earth?

POLYMESTOR

Die shalt thou; and to thy tomb shall be given a name—

HECUBA

Recalling my form, or what wilt thou tell me?

POLYMESTOR

"The hapless hound's grave," a mark for mariners."

HECUBA

'Tis naught to me, now that thou hast paid me forfeit.

POLYMESTOR

Further, thy daughter Cassandra must die.

HECUBA

I scorn the prophecy! I give it to thee to keep for thyself.

POLYMESTOR

Her shall the wife of Agamemnon, grim keeper of his palace, slay.

HECUBA

Never may the daughter of Tyndareus do such a frantic deed!

POLYMESTOR

And she shall slay this king as well, lifting high the axe.

AGAMEMNON

Ha! sirrah, art thou mad? art so eager to find sorrow?

POLYMESTOR

Kill me, for in Argos there awaits thee a murderous bath.

AGAMEMNON

Ho! servants, hale him from my sight

POLYMESTOR

Ha! my words gall thee?

AGAMEMNON

Stop his mouth!

POLYMESTOR

Close it now; for I have spoken.

AGAMEMNON

HECUBA

MEDEA, HECUBA, HIPPOLYTUS, THE TROJAN WOMEN, THE BACCHANTES

Haste and cast him upon some desert island, since his mouth is full of such exceeding presumption. Go thou, unhappy Hecuba, and bury thy two corpses; and you, Trojan women, to your masters' tents repair, for lo! I perceive a breeze just rising to waft us home. God grant we reach our country and find all well at home, released from troubles here!

(POLYMESTOR is dragged away by AGAMEMNON'S guards.)

CHORUS (*chanting*)

Away to the harbour and the tents, my friends, to prove the toils of slavery! for such is fate's relentless hest.

–THE END– –THE END–

MEDEA, HECUBA, HIPPOLYTUS, THE TROJAN WOMEN, THE BACCHANTES

HIPPOLYTUS

by Euripides

translated by E. P. Coleridge

MEDEA, HECUBA, HIPPOLYTUS, THE TROJAN WOMEN, THE BACCHANTES

CHARACTERS IN THE PLAY

APHRODITE

HIPPOLYTUS, bastard son of THESEUS

ATTENDANTS OF HIPPOLYTUS

CHORUS OF TROEZENIAN WOMEN

NURSE OF PHAEDRA

PHAEDRA, wife of THESEUS

THESEUS

MESSENGER

ARTEMIS

(SCENE:—Before the royal palace at Troezen. There is a statue of APHRODITE on one side; on the other, a statue of ARTEMIS. There is an altar before each image. The goddess APHRODITE appears alone.)

APHRODITE

WIDE o'er man my realm extends, and proud the name that I, the goddess Cypris, bear, both in heaven's courts and 'mongst all those who dwell within the limits of the sea and the bounds of Atlas, beholding the sun-god's light; those that respect my power I advance to honour, but bring to ruin all who vaunt themselves at me. For even in the race of gods this feeling finds a home, even pleasure at the honour men pay them. And the truth of this I soon will show; for that son of Theseus, born of the Amazon, Hippolytus, whom holy Pittheus taught, alone of all the dwellers in this land of Troezen, calls me vilest of the deities. Love he scorns, and, as for marriage, will none of it; but Artemis, daughter of Zeus, sister of Phoebus, he doth honour, counting her the chief of goddesses, and ever through the greenwood, attendant on his virgin goddess, he clears the earth of wild beasts with his fleet hounds, enjoying the comradeship of one too high for mortal ken. 'Tis not this I grudge him, no! why should I? But for his sins against me, I will this very day take vengeance on Hippolytus; for long ago I cleared the ground of many obstacles, so it needs but trifling toil. For as he came one day from the home of Pittheus to witness the solemn mystic rites and be initiated therein in Pandion's land, Phaedra, his father's noble wife, caught sight of him, and by my designs she found her heart was seized with wild desire. And ere she came to this Troezenian realm, a temple did she rear to Cypris hard by the rock of Pallas where it o'erlooks this country, for love of the youth in another land; and to win his love in days to come she called after his name the temple she had founded for the goddess. Now, when Theseus left the land of Cecrops, flying the pollution of the blood of Pallas' sons, and with his wife sailed to this shore, content to suffer exile for a year, then began the wretched wife to pine away in silence, moaning 'neath love's cruel scourge, and none of her servants knows what disease afflicts her. But this passion of hers must not fail thus. No, I will discover the matter to Theseus, and all shall be laid bare.

CHARACTERS IN THE PLAY APHRODITE HIPPOLYTUS, bastard son of THESEUS ATTENDANTS OF HIPPOLYTUS

MEDEA, HECUBA, HIPPOLYTUS, THE TROJAN WOMEN, THE BACCHANTES

Then will the father slay his child, my bitter foe, by curses, for the lord Poseidon granted this boon to Theseus; three wishes of the god to ask, nor ever ask in vain. So Phaedra is to die, an honoured death 'tis true, but still to die; for I will not let her suffering outweigh the payment of such forfeit by my foes as shall satisfy my honour. But lo! I see the son of Theseus coming hither—Hippolytus, fresh from the labours of the chase. I will get me hence. At his back follows a long train of retainers, in joyous cries of revelry uniting and hymns of praise to Artemis, his goddess; for little he recks that Death hath oped his gates for him, and that this is his last look upon the light.

(APHRODITE vanishes. HIPPOLYTUS and his retinue of hunting ATTENDANTS enter, singing. They move to worship at the altar of ARTEMIS.)

HIPPOLYTUS

Come follow, friends, singing to Artemis, daughter of Zeus, throned in the sky, whose votaries we are.

ATTENDANTS

Lady goddess, awful queen, daughter of Zeus, all hail! hail! of Latona and of Zeus, peerless mid the virgin choir, who hast thy dwelling in heaven's wide mansions at thy noble father's court, in the golden house of Zeus. All hail! most beautiful Artemis, lovelier far than all the daughters of Olympus!

HIPPOLYTUS (*speaking*)

For thee, O mistress mine, I bring this woven wreath, culled from a virgin meadow, where nor shepherd dares to herd his flock nor ever scythe hath mown, but o'er the mead unshorn the bee doth wing its way in spring; and with the dew from rivers drawn purity that garden tends. Such as know no cunning lore, yet in whose nature self-control, made perfect, hath a home, these may pluck the flowers, but not the wicked world. Accept, I pray, dear mistress, mine this chaplet from my holy hand to crown thy locks of gold; for I, and none other of mortals, have this high guerdon, to be with thee, with thee converse, hearing thy voice, though not thy face beholding. So be it mine to end my life as I began.

LEADER OF THE ATTENDANTS

My prince! we needs must call upon the gods, our lords, so wilt thou listen to a friendly word from me?

HIPPOLYTUS

Why, that will I! else were I proved a fool.

LEADER

Dost know, then, the way of the world?

HIPPOLYTUS

Not I; but wherefore such a question?

LEADER

It hates reserve which careth not for all men's love.

HIPPOLYTUS

And rightly too; reserve in man is ever galling.

LEADER

But there's a charm in courtesy?

HIPPOLYTUS

The greatest surely; aye, and profit, too, at trifling cost.

MEDEA, HECUBA, HIPPOLYTUS, THE TROJAN WOMEN, THE BACCHANTES

LEADER

Dost think the same law holds in heaven as well?

HIPPOLYTUS

I trow it doth, since all our laws we men from heaven draw.

LEADER

Why, then, dost thou neglect to greet an august goddess?

HIPPOLYTUS

Whom speak'st thou of? Keep watch upon thy tongue lest it same mischief cause.

LEADER

Cypris I mean, whose image is stationed o'er thy gate.

HIPPOLYTUS

I greet her from afar, preserving still my chastity.

LEADER

Yet is she an august goddess, far renowned on earth.

HIPPOLYTUS

'Mongst gods as well as men we have our several preferences.

LEADER

I wish thee luck, and wisdom too, so far as thou dost need it.

HIPPOLYTUS

No god, whose worship craves the night, hath charms for me.

LEADER

My son, we should avail us of the gifts that gods confer.

HIPPOLYTUS

Go in, my faithful followers, and make ready food within the house; a well-filled board hath charms after the chase is o'er. Rub down my steeds ye must, that when I have had my fill I may yoke them to the chariot and give them proper exercise. As for thy Queen of Love, a long farewell to her.

(HIPPOLYTUS goes into the palace, followed by all the ATTENDANTS except the LEADER, who prays before the statue of APHRODITE.)

LEADER

Meantime I with sober mind, for I must not copy my young master, do offer up my prayer to thy image, lady Cypris, in such words as it becomes a slave to use. But thou should'st pardon all, who, in youth's impetuous heat, speak idle words of thee; make as though thou hearest not, for gods must needs be wiser than the sons of men.

(The LEADER goes into the palace. The CHORUS OF TROEZENIAN WOMEN enters.)

CHORUS (*singing*)

strophe 1

CHARACTERS IN THE PLAY APHRODITE HIPPOLYTUS, bastard son of THESEUS ATTENDANTS OF HIP

MEDEA, HECUBA, HIPPOLYTUS, THE TROJAN WOMEN, THE BACCHANTES

A rock there is, where, as they say, the ocean dew distils, and from its beetling brow it pours a copious stream for pitchers to be dipped therein; 'twas here I had a friend washing robes of purple in the trickling stream, and she was spreading them out on the face of warm sunny rock; from her I had the tidings, first of all, that my mistress—

antistrophe 1

Was wasting on the bed of sickness, pent within her house, a thin veil o'ershadowing her head of golden hair. And this is the third day I hear that she hath closed her lovely lips and denied her chaste body all sustenance, eager to hide her suffering and reach death's cheerless bourn.

strophe 2

Maiden, thou must be possessed, by Pan made frantic or by Hecate, or by the Corybantes dread, and Cybele the mountain mother. Or maybe thou hast sinned against Dictynna, huntress—queen, and art wasting for thy guilt in sacrifice unoffered. For she doth range o'er lakes' expanse and past the bounds of earth upon the ocean's tossing billows.

antistrophe 2

Or doth some rival in thy house beguile thy lord, the captain of Erechtheus' sons, that hero nobly born, to secret amours hid from thee? Or hath some mariner sailing hither from Crete reached this port that sailors love, with evil tidings for our queen, and she with sorrow for her grievous fate is to her bed confined?

epode

Yea, and oft o'er woman's wayward nature settles a feeling of miserable helplessness, arising from pains of child—birth or of passionate desire. I, too, have felt at times this sharp thrill shoot through me, but I would cry to Artemis, queen of archery, who comes from heaven to aid us in our travail, and thanks to heaven's grace she ever comes at my call with welcome help. Look! where the aged nurse is bringing her forth from the house before the door, while on her brow the cloud of gloom is deepening. My soul longs to learn what is her grief, the canker that is wasting our queen's fading charms.

(PHAEDRA is led out and placed upon a couch by the NURSE and attendants. The following lines between the NURSE and PHAEDRA are chanted.)

NURSE

O, the ills of mortal men! the cruel diseases they endure! What can I do for thee? from what refrain? Here is the bright sunlight, here the azure sky; lo! we have brought thee on thy bed of sickness without the palace; for all thy talk was of coming hither, but soon back to thy chamber wilt thou hurry. Disappointment follows fast with thee, thou hast no joy in aught for long; the present has no power to please; on something absent next thy heart is set. Better be sick than tend the sick; the first is but a single ill, the last unites mental grief with manual toil. Man's whole life is full of anguish; no respite from his woes he finds; but if there is aught to love beyond this life, night's dark pall doth wrap it round. And so we show our mad love of this life because its light is shed on earth, and because we know no other, and have naught revealed to us of all our earth may hide; and trusting to fables we drift at random.

PHAEDRA (*wildly*)

Lift my body, raise my head! My limbs are all unstrung, kind friends. O handmaids, lift my arms, my shapely arms. The tire on my head is too heavy for me to wear; away with it, and let my tresses o'er my shoulders fall.

Be of good heart, dear child; toss not so wildly to and fro. Lie still, be brave, so wilt thou find thy sickness easier to bear; suffering for mortals is nature's iron law.

PHAEDRA

Ah! would I could draw a draught of water pure from some dew—fed spring, and lay me down to rest in the grassy meadow 'neath the poplar's shade!

NURSE

My child, what wild speech is this? O say not such things in public, wild whirling words of frenzy bred!

MEDEA, HECUBA, HIPPOLYTUS, THE TROJAN WOMEN, THE BACCHANTES

PHAEDRA

Away to the mountain take me! to the wood, to the pine-trees will go, where hounds pursue the prey, hard on the scent of dappled fawns. Ye gods! what joy to hark them on, to grasp the barbed dart, to poise Thessalian hunting-spears close to my golden hair, then let them fly.

NURSE

Why, why, my child, these anxious cares? What hast thou to do with the chase? Why so eager for the flowing spring, when hard by these towers stands a hill well watered, whence thou may'st freely draw?

PHAEDRA

O Artemis, who watchest o'er sea-beat Limna and the race-course thundering to the horse's hoofs, would I were upon thy plains curbing Venetian steeds!

NURSE

Why betray thy frenzy in these wild whirling words? Now thou wert for hasting hence to the hills away to hunt wild beasts, and now thy yearning is to drive the steed over the waveless sands. This needs a cunning seer to say what god it is that reins thee from the course, distracting thy senses, child.

PHAEDRA (*more sanely*)

Ah me! alas! what have I done? Whither have I strayed, my senses leaving? Mad, mad! stricken by some demon's curse! Woe is me! Cover my head again, nurse. Shame fills me for the words I have spoken. Hide me then; from my eyes the tear-drops stream, and for very shame I turn them away. 'Tis painful coming to one's senses again, and madness, evil though it be, has this advantage, that one has no knowledge of reason's overthrow.

NURSE

There then I cover thee; but when will death hide my body in the grave? Many a lesson length of days is teaching me. Yea, mortal men should pledge themselves to moderate friendships only, not to such as reach the very heart's core; affection's ties should be light upon them to let them slip or draw them tight. For one poor heart to grieve for twain, as I do for my mistress, is a burden sore to bear. Men say that too engrossing pursuits in life more oft cause disappointment than pleasure, and too oft are foes to health. Wherefore do not praise excess so much as moderation, and with me wise men will agree.

(PHAEDRA lies back upon the couch.)

LEADER OF THE CHORUS (*speaking*)

O aged dame, faithful nurse of Phaedra, our queen, we see her sorry plight; but what it is that ails her we cannot discern, so fain would learn of thee and hear thy opinion.

NURSE

I question her, but am no wiser, for she will not answer.

LEADER

Nor tell what source these sorrows have?

NURSE

The same answer thou must take, for she is dumb on every point.

LEADER

How weak and wasted is her body!

NURSE

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What marvel? 'tis three days now since she has tasted food.

LEADER

Is this infatuation, or an attempt to die?

NURSE

'Tis death she courts; such fasting aims at ending life.

LEADER

A strange story if it satisfies her husband.

NURSE

She hides from him her sorrow, and vows she is not ill.

LEADER

Can he not guess it from her face?

NURSE

He is not now in his own country.

LEADER

But dost not thou insist in thy endeavour to find out her complaint, her mind?

NURSE

I have tried every plan, and all in vain; yet not even now will I relax my zeal, that thou too, if thou stayest, mayst witness my devotion to my unhappy mistress. Come, come, my darling child, let us forget, the twain of us, our former words; be thou more mild, smoothing that sullen brow and changing the current of thy thought, and I, if in aught before failed in humouring thee, will let that be and find some better course. If thou art sick with ills thou canst not name, there be women here to help to set thee right; but if thy trouble can to men's ears be divulged, speak, that physicians may pronounce on it. Come, then, why so dumb? Thou shouldst not so remain, my child, but scold me if I speak amiss, or, if I give good counsel, yield assent. One word, one look this way! Ah me! Friends, we waste our toil to no purpose; we are as far away as ever; she would not relent to my arguments then, nor is she yielding now. Well, grow more stubborn than the sea, yet be assured of this, that if thou diest thou art a traitress to thy children, for they will ne'er inherit their father's halls, nay, by that knightly queen the Amazon who bore a son to lord it over thine, a bastard born but not a bastard bred, whom well thou knowest, e'en Hippolytus— (At the mention of his name PHAEDRA'S attention is suddenly caught.)

PHAEDRA

Oh! oh!

NURSE

Ha! doth that touch the quick?

PHAEDRA

Thou hast undone me, nurse; I do adjure by the gods, mention that man no more.

NURSE

There now! thou art thyself again, but e'en yet refuseth to aid thy children and preserve thy life.

PHAEDRA

My babes I love, but there is another storm that buffets me.

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NURSE

Daughter, are thy hands from bloodshed pure?

PHAEDRA

My hands are pure, but on my soul there rests a stain.

NURSE

The issue of some enemy's secret witchery?

PHAEDRA

A friend is my destroyer, one unwilling as myself.

NURSE

Hath Theseus wronged thee in any wise?

PHAEDRA

Never may I prove untrue to him!

NURSE

Then what strange mystery is there that drives thee on to die?

PHAEDRA

O, let my sin and me alone, 'tis not 'gainst thee I sin.

NURSE

Never willingly! and, if I fail, 'twill rest at thy door.

PHAEDRA

How now? thou usest force in clinging to my hand.

NURSE

Yea, and I will never loose my hold upon thy knees.

PHAEDRA

Alas for thee! my sorrows, shouldst thou learn them, would recoil on thee.

NURSE

What keener grief for me than failing to win thee?

PHAEDRA

'Twill be death to thee; though to me that brings renown.

NURSE

And dost thou then conceal this boon despite my prayers?

PHAEDRA

I do, for 'tis out of shame I am planning an honourable escape.

NURSE

Tell it, and thine honour shall the brighter shine.

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PHAEDRA

Away, I do conjure thee; loose my hand.

NURSE

I will not, for the boon thou shouldst have granted me is denied.

PHAEDRA

I will grant it out of reverence for thy holy suppliant touch.

NURSE

Henceforth I hold my peace; 'tis thine to speak from now.

PHAEDRA

Ah! hapless mother, what a love was thine!

NURSE

Her love for the bull? daughter, or what meanest thou?

PHAEDRA

And woe to thee! my sister, bride of Dionysus.

NURSE

What ails thee, child? speaking ill of kith and kin.

PHAEDRA

Myself the third to suffer! how am I undone!

NURSE

Thou strik'st me dumb! Where will this history end?

PHAEDRA

That "love" has been our curse from time long past.

NURSE

I know no more of what I fain would learn.

PHAEDRA

Ah! would thou couldst say for me what I have to tell.

NURSE

I am no prophetess to unriddle secrets.

PHAEDRA

What is it they mean when they talk of people being in "love--"?

NURSE

At once the sweetest and the bitterest thing, my child.

PHAEDRA

I shall only find the latter half.

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NURSE

Ha! my child, art thou in love?

PHAEDRA

The Amazon's son, whoever he may be—

NURSE

Mean'st thou Hippolytus?

PHAEDRA

'Twas thou, not I, that spoke his name.

NURSE

O heavens! what is this, my child? Thou hast ruined me. Outrageous! friends; I will not live and bear it; hateful is life, hateful to mine eyes the light. This body I resign, will cast it off, and rid me of existence by my death. Farewell, my life is o'er. Yea, for the chaste I have wicked passions, 'gainst their will maybe, but still they have. Cypris, it seems, is not goddess after all, but something greater far, for she hath been the ruin of my lady and of me and our whole family.

CHORUS (*chanting*)

O, too clearly didst thou hear our queen uplift her voice to tell her startling tale of piteous suffering. Come death ere I reach thy state of feeling, loved mistress. O horrible! woe, for these miseries! woe, for the sorrows on which mortals feed! Thou art undone! thou hast disclosed thy sin to heaven's light. What hath each passing day and every hour in store for thee? Some strange event will come to pass in this house. For it is no longer uncertain where the star of thy love is setting, thou hapless daughter of Crete.

PHAEDRA

Women of Troezen, who dwell here upon the frontier edge of Pelops' land, oft ere now in heedless mood through the long hours of night have I wondered why man's life is spoiled; and it seems to me their evil case is not due to any natural fault of judgment, for there be many dowered with sense, but we must view the matter in this light: by teaching and experience to learn the right but neglect it in practice, some from sloth, others from preferring pleasure of some kind or other to duty. Now life has many pleasures, protracted talk, and leisure, that seductive evil; likewise there is shame which is of two kinds, one a noble quality, the other a curse to families; but if for each its proper time were clearly known, these twain could not have had the selfsame letters to denote them. So then since I had made up my mind on these points, 'twas not likely any drug would alter it and make me think the contrary. And I will tell the too the way my judgment went. When love wounded me, I bethought me how I best might bear the smart. So from that day forth I began to hide in silence what I suffered. For I put no faith in counsellors, who know well to lecture others for presumption, yet themselves have countless troubles of their own. Next I did devise noble endurance of these wanton thoughts, striving by continence for victory. And last when I could not succeed in mastering love hereby, methought it best to die; and none can gainsay my purpose. For fain I would my virtue should to all appear, my shame have few to witness it. I knew my sickly passion now; to yield to it I saw how infamous; and more, I learnt to know so well that I was but woman, a thing the world detests. Curses, hideous curses on that wife who first did shame her marriage—vow for lovers other than her lord! 'Twas from noble families this curse began to spread among our sex. For when the noble countenance disgrace, poor folk of course will think that it is right. Those too I hate who make profession of purity, though in secret reckless sinners. How can these, queen Cypris, ocean's child, e'er look their husbands in the face? do they never feel one guilty thrill that their accomplice, night, or the chambers of their house will find a voice and speak? This it is that calls on me to die, kind friends, that so I may ne'er be found to have disgraced my lord, or the children I have borne; no! may they grow up and dwell in glorious Athens, free to speak and act, heirs to such fair fame as a mother can bequeath. For to know that father or mother has sinned doth turn the stoutest

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heart to slavishness. This alone, men say, can stand the buffets of life's battle, a just and virtuous soul in whomsoever found. For time unmasks the villain soon or late, holding up to them a mirror as to some blooming maid. 'Mongst such may I be never seen!

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

Now look! how fair is chastity however viewed, whose fruit is good repute amongst men.

NURSE

My queen, 'tis true thy tale of woe, but lately told, did for the moment strike me with wild alarm, but now I do reflect upon my foolishness; second thoughts are often best even with men. Thy fate is no uncommon nor past one's calculations; thou art stricken by the passion Cypris sends. Thou art in love; what wonder? so are many more. Wilt thou, because thou lov'st, destroy thyself? 'Tis little gain, I trow, for those who love or yet may love their fellows, if death must be their end; for though the Love-Queen's onset in her might is more than man can bear, yet doth she gently visit yielding hearts, and only when she finds a proud unnatural spirit, doth she take and mock it past belief. Her path is in the sky, and mid the ocean's surge she rides; from her all nature springs; she sows the seeds of love, inspires the warm desire to which we sons of earth all owe our being. They who have aught to do with books of ancient scribes, or themselves engage in studious pursuits, know how Zeus of Semele was enamoured, how the bright-eyed goddess of the Dawn once stole Cephalus to dwell in heaven for the love she bore him; yet these in heaven abide nor shun the gods' approach, content, I trow, to yield to their misfortune. Wilt thou refuse to yield? thy sire, it seems, should have begotten thee on special terms or with different gods for masters, if in these laws thou wilt not acquiesce. How many, prithee, men of sterling sense, when they see their wives unfaithful, make as though they saw it not? How many fathers, when their sons have gone astray, assist them in their amours? 'Tis part of human wisdom to conceal the deed of shame. Nor should man aim at too great refinement in his life; for they cannot with exactness finish e'en the roof that covers in a house; and how dost thou, after falling into so deep a pit, think to escape? Nay, if thou hast more of good than bad, thou wilt fare exceeding well, thy human nature considered. O cease, my darling child, from evil thoughts, let wanton pride be gone, for this is naught else, this wish to rival gods in perfectness. Face thy love; 'tis heaven's will thou shouldst. Sick thou art, yet turn thy sickness to some happy issue. For there are charms and spells to soothe the soul; surely some cure for thy disease will be found. Men, no doubt, might seek it long and late if our women's minds no scheme devise.

LEADER

Although she gives thee at thy present need the wiser counsel, Phaedra, yet do I praise thee. Still my praise may sound more harsh and jar more cruelly on thy ear than her advice.

PHAEDRA

'Tis even this, too plausible a tongue, that overthrows good governments and homes of men. We should not speak to please the ear but point the path that leads to noble fame.

NURSE

What means this solemn speech? Thou needst not rounded phrases,—but a man. Straightway must we move to tell him frankly how it is with thee. Had not thy life to such a crisis come, or wert thou with self-control I endowed, ne'er would I to gratify thy passions have urged thee to this course; but now 'tis a struggle fierce to save thy life, and therefore less to blame.

PHAEDRA

Accursed proposal! peace, woman! never utter those shameful words again!

NURSE

Shameful, maybe, yet for thee better than honour's code. Better this deed, if it shall save thy life, than that name thy pride will kill thee to retain.

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PHAEDRA

I conjure thee, go no further! for thy words are plausible but infamous; for though as yet love has not undermined my soul, yet, if in specious words thou dress thy foul suggestion, I shall be beguiled into the snare from which I am now escaping.

NURSE

If thou art of this mind, 'twere well thou ne'er hadst sinned; but as it is, hear me; for that is the next best course; I in my house have charms to soothe thy love,—'twas but now I thought of them;—these shall cure thee of thy sickness on no disgraceful terms, thy mind unhurt, if thou wilt be but brave. But from him thou lovest we must get some token, word or fragment of his robe, and thereby unite in one love's twofold stream.

PHAEDRA

Is thy drug a salve or potion?

NURSE

I cannot tell; be content, my child, to profit by it and ask no questions.

PHAEDRA

I fear me thou wilt prove too wise for me.

NURSE

If thou fear this, confess thyself afraid of all; but why thy terror!

PHAEDRA

Lest thou shouldst breathe a word of this to Theseus' son.

NURSE

Peace, my child! I will do all things well; only be thou, queen Cypris, ocean's child, my partner in the work! And for the rest of my purpose, it will be enough for me to tell it to our friends within the house.

(The NURSE goes into the palace.)

CHORUS (*singing*)

strophe 1

O Love, Love, that from the eyes diffusest soft desire, bringing on the souls of those, whom thou dost camp against, sweet grace, O never in evil mood appear to me, nor out of time and tune approach! Nor fire nor meteor hurls a mightier bolt than Aphrodite's shaft shot by the hands of Love, the child of Zeus.

antistrophe 1

Idly, idly by the streams of Alpheus and in the Pythian shrines of Phoebus, Hellas heaps the slaughtered steers; while Love we worship not, Love, the king of men, who holds the key to Aphrodite's sweetest bower,—worship not him who, when he comes, lays waste and marks his path to mortal hearts by wide—spread woe.

strophe 2

There was that maiden in Oechalia, a girl unwed, that knew no wooer yet nor married joys; her did the Queen of Love snatch from her home across the sea and gave unto Alcmena's son, mid blood and smoke and murderous marriage—hymns, to be to him a frantic fiend of hell; woe! woe for his wooing!

antistrophe 2 Ah! holy walls of Thebes, ah! fount of Dirce, ye could testify what course the love—queen follows. For with the blazing levin—bolt did she cut short the fatal marriage of Semele, mother of Zeus—born Bacchus. All things she doth inspire, dread goddess, winging her flight hither and thither like a bee.

PHAEDRA

CHARACTERS IN THE PLAY APHRODITE HIPPOLYTUS, bastard son of THESEUS ATTENDANTS OF HIPPOLYTUS

MEDEA, HECUBA, HIPPOLYTUS, THE TROJAN WOMEN, THE BACCHANTES

Peace, oh women, peace! I am undone.

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

What, Phaedra, is this dread event within thy house?

PHAEDRA

Hush! let me hear what those within are saying.

LEADER

I am silent; this is surely the prelude to evil.

PHAEDRA (*chanting*)

Great gods! how awful are my sufferings!

CHORUS (*chanting*)

What a cry was there! what loud alarm! say what sudden terror, lady, doth thy soul dismay.

PHAEDRA

I am undone. Stand here at the door and hear the noise arising in the house.

CHORUS (*chanting*)

Thou art already by the bolted door; 'tis for thee to note the sounds that issue from within. And tell me, O tell me what evil can be on foot.

PHAEDRA

'Tis the son of the horse-loving Amazon who calls, Hippolytus, uttering foul curses on my servant.

CHORUS (*chanting*)

I hear a noise but cannot dearly tell which way it comes. Ah! 'tis through the door the sound reached thee.

PHAEDRA

Yes, yes, he is calling her plainly enough a go-between in vice, traitress to her master's honour.

CHORUS (*chanting*)

Woe, woe is me! thou art betrayed, dear mistress! What counsel shall I give thee? thy secret is out; thou art utterly undone.

PHAEDRA

Ah me! ah me!

CHORUS (*chanting*)

Betrayed by friends!

PHAEDRA

She hath ruined me by speaking of my misfortune; 'twas kindly meant, but an ill way to cure my malady.

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

O what wilt thou do now in thy cruel dilemma?

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PHAEDRA

I only know one way, one cure for these my woes, and that is instant death. (HIPPOLYTUS bursts out of the palace, followed closely by the NURSE.)

HIPPOLYTUS

O mother earth! O sun's unclouded orb! What words, unfit for any lips, have reached my ears!

NURSE

Peace, my son, lest some one hear thy outcry.

HIPPOLYTUS

I cannot hear such awful words and hold my peace.

NURSE

I do implore thee by thy fair right hand.

HIPPOLYTUS

Let go my hand, touch not my robe.

NURSE

O by thy knees I pray, destroy me not utterly.

HIPPOLYTUS

Why say this, if, as thou pretendest, thy lips are free from blame?

NURSE

My son, this is no story to be noised abroad.

HIPPOLYTUS

A virtuous tale grows fairer told to many.

NURSE

Never dishonour thy oath, my son.

HIPPOLYTUS

My tongue an oath did take, but not my heart.

NURSE

My son, what wilt thou do? destroy thy friends?

HIPPOLYTUS

Friends indeed! the wicked are no friends of mine.

NURSE

O pardon me; to err is only human, child.

HIPPOLYTUS

Great Zeus, why didst thou, to man's sorrow, put woman, evil counterfeit, to dwell where shines the sun? If thou wert minded that the human race should multiply, it was not from women they should have drawn their stock, but in thy temples they should have paid gold or iron or ponderous bronze and bought a family, each man proportioned to his offering, and so in independence dwelt, from women free. But now as soon as ever we

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would bring this plague into our home we bring its fortune to the ground. 'Tis clear from this how great a curse a woman is; the very father, that begot and nurtured her, to rid him of the mischief, gives her a dower and packs her off; while the husband, who takes the noxious weed into his home, fondly decks his sorry idol in fine raiment and tricks her out in robes, squandering by degrees, unhappy wight! his house's wealth. For he is in this dilemma; say his marriage has brought him good connections, he is glad then to keep the wife he loathes; or, if he gets a good wife but useless kin, he tries to stifle the bad luck with the good. But it is easiest for him who has settled in his house as wife mere cipher, incapable from simplicity. I hate a clever woman; never may she set foot in my house who aims at knowing more than women need; for in these clever women Cypris implants a larger store of villainy, while the artless woman is by her shallow wit from levity debarred. No servant should ever have had access to a wife, but men should put to live with them beasts, which bite, not talk, in which case they could not speak to any one nor be answered back by them. But, as it is, the wicked in their chambers plot wickedness, and their servants carry it abroad. Even thus, vile wretch, thou can'st to make me partner in an outrage on my father's honour; wherefore I must wash that stain away in running streams, dashing the water into my ears. How could I commit so foul a crime when by the very mention of it I feel myself polluted? Be well assured, woman, 'tis only my religious scruple saves thee. For had not I unawares been caught by an oath, 'fore heaven! I would not have refrained from telling all unto my father. But now I will from the house away, so long as Theseus is abroad, and will maintain strict silence. But, when my father comes, I will return and see how thou and thy mistress face him, and so shall I learn by experience the extent of thy audacity. Perdition seize you both! I can never satisfy my hate for women, no! not even though some say this is ever my theme, for of a truth they always are evil. So either let some one prove them chaste, or let me still trample on them for ever.

(HIPPOLYTUS departs in anger.)

CHORUS (*chanting*)

O the cruel, unhappy fate of women! What arts, what arguments have we, once we have made a slip, to loose by craft the tight-drawn knot?

PHAEDRA (*chanting*)

I have met my deserts. O earth, O light of day! How can I escape the stroke of fate? How my pangs conceal, kind friends? What god will appear to help me, what mortal to take my part or help me in unrighteousness? The present calamity of my life admits of no escape. Most hapless I of all my sex!

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

Alas, alas! the deed is done, thy servant's schemes have gone awry, my queen, and all is lost.
PHAEDRA (to the NURSE)

Accursed woman! traitress to thy friends! How hast thou ruined me! May Zeus, my ancestor, smite thee with his fiery bolt and uproot thee from thy place. Did I not foresee thy purpose, did I not bid thee keep silence on the very matter which is now my shame? But thou wouldst not be still; wherefore my fair name will not go with me to the tomb. But now I must another scheme devise. Yon youth, in the keenness of his fury, will tell his father of my sin, and the aged Pittheus of my state and fill the world with stories to my shame. Perdition seize thee and every meddling fool who by dishonest means would serve unwilling friends!

NURSE

Mistress, thou may'st condemn the mischief I have done, for sorrow's sting o'ermasters thy judgment; yet can I answer thee in face of this, if thou wilt hear. 'Twas I who nurtured thee; I love thee still; but in my search for medicine to cure thy sickness I found what least I sought. Had I but succeeded, I had been counted wise, for the credit we get for wisdom is measured by our success.

PHAEDRA

Is it just, is it any satisfaction to me, that thou shouldst wound me first, then bandy words with me?

NURSE

CHARACTERS IN THE PLAY APHRODITE HIPPOLYTUS, bastard son of THESEUS ATTENDANTS OF HIP

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We dwell on this too long; I was not wise, I own; but there are yet ways of escape from the trouble, my child.

PHAEDRA

Be dumb henceforth; evil was thy first advice to me, evil too thy attempted scheme. Begone and leave me, look to thyself; I will my own fortunes for the best arrange.

(The NURSE goes into the palace.)

Ye noble daughters of Troezen, grant me the only boon I crave; in silence bury what ye here have heard.

LEADER

By majestic Artemis, child of Zeus, I swear I will never divulge aught of thy sorrows.

PHAEDRA

'Tis well. But I, with all my thought, can but one way discover out of this calamity, that so I may secure my children's honour, and find myself some help as matters stand. For never, never will I bring shame upon my Cretan home, nor will I, to save one poor life, face Theseus after my disgrace.

LEADER

Art thou bent then on some cureless woe?

PHAEDRA

On death; the means thereto must I devise myself.

LEADER

Hush!

PHAEDRA

Do thou at least advise me well. For this very day shall I gladden Cypris, my destroyer, by yielding up my life, and shall own myself vanquished by cruel love. Yet shall my dying be another's curse, that he may learn not to exult at my misfortunes; but when he comes to share the self-same plague with me, he will take a lesson in wisdom.

(PHAEDRA enters the palace.)

CHORUS (*chanting*)

strophe 1

O to be nestling 'neath some pathless cavern, there by god's creating hand to grow into a bird amid the winged tribes! Away would I soar to Adria's wave-beat shore and to the waters of Eridanus; where a father's hapless daughters in their grief for Phaethon distil into the glooming flood the amber brilliance of their tears.

antistrophe 1

And to the apple-bearing strand of those minstrels in the west then would come, where ocean's lord no more to sailors grants passage o'er the deep dark main, finding there the heaven's holy bound, upheld by Atlas, where water from ambrosial founts wells up beside the couch of Zeus inside his halls, and holy earth, the bounteous mother, causes joy to spring in heavenly breasts.

strophe 2

O white-winged bark, that o'er the booming ocean-wave didst bring my royal mistress from her happy home, to crown her queen 'mongst sorrow's brides! Surely evil omens from either port, at least from Crete, were with that ship, what time to glorious Athens it sped its way, and the crew made fast its twisted cable-ends upon the beach of Munychus, and on the land stepped out.

antistrophe 2

Whence comes it that her heart is crushed, cruelly afflicted by Aphrodite with unholy love; so she by bitter grief o'erwhelmed will tie a noose within her bridal bower to fit it to her fair white neck, to modest for this

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hateful lot in life, prizing o'er all her name and fame, and striving thus to rid her soul of passion's sting.
(The NURSE rushes out of the palace.)

NURSE

Help! ho! To the rescue all who near the palace stand! She hath hung herself, our queen, the wife of Theseus.

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

Woe worth the day! the deed is done; our royal mistress is no more, dead she hangs in the dangling noose.

NURSE

Haste! some one bring a two-edged knife wherewith to cut the knot about her neck. **FIRST SEMI-CHORUS**

Friends, what shall we do? think you we should enter the house, and loose the queen from the tight-drawn noose? **SECOND SEMI-CHORUS**

Why should we? Are there not young servants here? To do too much is not a safe course in life.

NURSE

Lay out the hapless corpse, straighten the limbs. This was a bitter way to sit at home and keep my master's house!

(She goes in.)

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

She is dead, poor lady; 'tis this I hear. Already are they laying out the corpse.
(THESEUS and his retinue have entered, unnoticed.)

THESEUS

Women, can ye tell me what the uproar in the palace means? There came the sound of servants weeping bitterly to mine ear. None of my household deign to open wide the gates and give me glad welcome as traveller from prophetic shrines. Hath aught befallen old Pittheus? No, Though he be well advanced in years, yet should I mourn, were he to quit this house.

LEADER

'Tis not against the old, Theseus, that fate, to strike thee, aims this blow; prepare thy sorrow for a younger corpse.

THESEUS

Woe is me! is it a child's life death robs me of?

LEADER

They live; but, cruellest news of all for thee, their mother is no more.

THESEUS

What! my wife dead? By what cruel stroke of chance?

LEADER

About her neck she tied the hangman's knot.

THESEUS

Had grief so chilled her blood? or what had befallen her?

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LEADER

I know but this, for I am myself but now arrived at the house to mourn thy sorrows, O Theseus.

THESEUS

Woe is me! why have I crowned my head with woven garlands, when misfortune greets my embassy? Unbolt the doors, servants, loose their fastenings, that I may see the piteous sight, my wife, whose death is death to me.

(The central doors of the palace open, disclosing the corpse.)

Woe! woe is thee for thy piteous lot! thou hast done thyself a hurt deep enough to overthrow this family. Ah! ah! the daring of it done to death by violence and unnatural means, the desperate effort of thy own poor hand! Who cast the shadow o'er thy life, poor lady?

THESEUS (*chanting*)

Ah me, my cruel lot! sorrow hath done her worst on me. O fortune, how heavily hast thou set thy foot on me and on my house, by fiendish hands inflicting an unexpected stain? Nay, 'tis complete effacement of my life, making it not to be lived; for I see, alas! so wide an ocean of grief that I can never swim to shore again, nor breast the tide of this calamity. How shall I speak of thee, my poor wife, what tale of direst suffering tell? Thou art vanished like a bird from the covert of my hand, taking one headlong leap from me to Hades' halls. Alas, and woe! this is a bitter, bitter sight! This must be a judgment sent by God for the sins of an ancestor, which from some far source I am bringing on myself.

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

My prince, 'tis not to thee alone such sorrows come; thou hast lost a noble wife, but so have many others.

THESEUS (*chanting*)

Fain would I go hide me 'neath earth's blackest depth, to dwell in darkness with the dead in misery, now that I am reft of thy dear presence! for thou hast slain me than thyself e'en more. Who can tell me what caused the fatal stroke that reached thy heart, dear wife? Will no one tell me what befell? doth my palace all in vain give shelter to a herd of menials? Woe, woe for thee, my wife! sorrows past speech, past bearing, I behold within my house; myself ruined man, my home a solitude, my children orphans!

CHORUS (*chanting*)

Gone and left us hast thou, fondest wife and noblest of all women 'neath the sun's bright eye or night's star-lit radiance. Poor house, what sorrows are thy portion now! My eyes are wet with streams of tears to see thy fate; but the ill that is to follow has long with terror filled me.

THESEUS

Ha! what means this letter? clasped in her dear hand it hath some strange tale to tell. Hath she, poor lady, as a last request, written her bidding as to my marriage and her children? Take heart, poor ghost; no wife henceforth shall wed thy Theseus or invade his house. Ah! how yon en ring affects my sight! Come, I will unfold the sealed packet and read her letter's message to me.

CHORUS (*chanting*)

Woe unto us! Here is yet another evil in the train by heaven sent. Looking to what has happened, I should count my lot in life no longer worth one's while to gain. My master's house, alas! is ruined, brought to naught, I say. Spare it, O Heaven, if it may be. Harken to my prayer, for I see, as with prophetic eye, an omen boding ill.

THESEUS

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O horror! woe on woe! and still they come, too deep for words, too heavy to bear. Ah me!

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

What is it? speak, if I may share in it.

THESEUS (*chanting*)

This letter loudly tells a hideous tale! where can I escape my load of woe? For I am ruined and undone, so awful are the words I find here written clear as if she cried them to me; woe is me!

LEADER

Alas! thy words declare themselves the harbingers of woe.

THESEUS

I can no longer keep the cursed tale within the portal of my lips, cruel though its utterance be. Ah me! Hippolytus hath dared by brutal force to violate my honour, recking naught of Zeus, whose awful eye is over all. O father Poseidon, once didst thou promise to fulfil three prayers of mine; answer one of these and slay my son, let him not escape this single day, if the prayers thou gavest me were indeed with issue fraught.

LEADER

O king, I do conjure thee, call back that prayer; hereafter thou wilt know thy error. Hear, I pray.

THESEUS

It cannot be! Moreover I will banish him from this land, and by one of two fates shall he be struck down; either Poseidon, out of respect to my prayer, will cast his dead body into the house of Hades; or exiled from this land, a wanderer to some foreign shore, shall he eke out a life of misery.

LEADER

Lo! where himself doth come, thy son Hippolytus, in good time; dismiss thy hurtful rage, King Theseus, and bethink thee what is best for thy house,
(HIPPOLYTUS enters.)

HIPPOLYTUS

I heard thy voice, father, and hastened to come hither; yet know I not the cause of thy present sorrow, but would fain learn of thee.

(He sees PHAEDRA'S body.)

Ha! what is this? thy wife is dead? 'Tis very strange; it was but now I left her; a moment since she looked upon the light. How came she thus? the manner of her death? this would I learn of thee, father. Art dumb? silence availeth not in trouble; nay, for the heart that fain would know all must show its curiosity even in sorrow's hour. Be sure it is not right, father, to hide misfortunes from those who love, ay, more than love thee.

THESEUS

O ye sons of men, victims of a thousand idle errors, why teach your countless crafts, why scheme and seek to find a way for everything, while one thing ye know not nor ever yet have made your prize, a way to teach them wisdom whose souls are void of sense?

HIPPOLYTUS

A very master in his craft the man, who can force fools to be wise! But these ill-timed subtleties of thine, father, make me fear thy tongue is running wild through trouble.

THESEUS

Fie upon thee! man needs should have some certain test set up to try his friends, some touchstone of

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their hearts, to know each friend whether he be true or false; all men should have two voices, one the voice of honesty, expediency's the other, so would honesty confute its knavish opposite, and then we could not be deceived.

HIPPOLYTUS

Say, hath some friend been slandering me and hath he still thine ear? and I, though guiltless, banned? I am amazed, for thy random, frantic words fill me with wild alarm.

THESEUS

O the mind of mortal man! to what lengths will it proceed? What limit will its bold assurance have? for if it goes on growing as man's life advances, and each successor outdo the man before him in villainy, the gods will have to add another sphere unto the world, which shall take in the knaves and villains. Behold this man; he, my own son, hath outraged mine honour, his guilt most clearly proved by my dead wife. Now, since thou hast dared this loathly crime, come, look thy father in the face. Art thou the man who dost with gods consort, as one above the vulgar herd? art thou the chaste and sinless saint? Thy boasts will never persuade me to be guilty of attributing ignorance to gods. Go then, vaunt thyself, and drive thy petty trade in viands formed of lifeless food; take Orpheus for thy chief and go a-revelling, with all honour for the vapourings of many a written scroll, seeing thou now art caught. Let all beware, I say, of such hypocrites! who hunt their prey with fine words, and all the while are scheming villainy. She is dead; dost think that this will save thee? Why this convicts thee more than all, abandoned wretch! What oaths, what pleas can outweigh this letter, so that thou shouldst 'scape thy doom? Thou wilt assert she hated thee, that 'twixt the bastard and the true-born child nature has herself put war; it seems then by thy showing she made a sorry bargain with her life, if to gratify her hate of thee she lost what most she prized. 'Tis said, no doubt, that frailty finds no place in man but is innate in woman; my experience is, young men are no more secure than women, whenso the Queen of Love excites a youthful breast; although their sex comes in to help them. Yet why do I thus bandy words with thee, when before me lies the corpse, to be the clearest witness? Begone at once, an exile from this land, and ne'er set foot again in god-built Athens nor in the confines of my dominion. For if I am tamely to submit to this treatment from such as thee, no more will Sinis, robber of the Isthmus, bear me witness how I slew him, but say my boasts are idle, nor will those rocks Scironian, that fringe the sea, call me the miscreants' scourge.

LEADER

I know not how to call happy any child of man; for that which was first has turned and now is last.

HIPPOLYTUS

Father, thy wrath and the tension of thy mind are terrible; yet this charge, specious though its arguments appear, becomes a calumny, if one lay it bare. Small skill have I in speaking to a crowd, but have a readier wit for comrades of mine own age and small companies. Yea, and this is as it should be; for they, whom the wise despise, are better qualified to speak before a mob. Yet am I constrained under the present circumstances to break silence. And at the outset will I take the point which formed the basis of thy stealthy attack on me, designed to put me out of court unheard; dost see yon sun, this earth? These do not contain, for all thou dost deny it, chastity surpassing mine. To reverence God I count the highest knowledge, and to adopt as friends not those who attempt injustice, but such as would blush to propose to their companions aught disgraceful or pleasure them by shameful services; to mock at friends is not my way, father, but I am still the same behind their backs as to their face. The very crime thou thinkest to catch me in, is just the one I am untainted with, for to this day have I kept me pure from women. Nor know I aught thereof, save what I hear or see in pictures, for I have no wish to look even on these, so pure my virgin soul. I grant my claim to chastity may not convince thee; well, 'tis then for thee to show the way I was corrupted. Did this woman exceed in beauty all her sex? Did she aspire to fill the husband's place after thee and succeed to thy house? That surely would have made me out a fool, a creature void of sense. Thou wilt say, "Your chaste man loves to lord it." No, no! say I, sovereignty pleases only those whose hearts are quite corrupt. Now, I would be the first and best at all the games in Hellas, but second in the state, for ever happy thus with the noblest for my friends. For there one may be happy, and the absence of danger gives a charm beyond all princely joys.

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One thing I have not said, the rest thou hast. Had I a witness to attest my purity, and were I pitted 'gainst her still alive, facts would show thee on enquiry who the culprit was. Now by Zeus, the god of oaths, and by the earth, whereon we stand, I swear to thee I never did lay hand upon thy wife nor would have wished to, or have harboured such a thought. Slay me, ye gods! rob me of name and honour, from home and city cast me forth, a wandering exile o'er the earth! nor sea nor land receive my bones when I am dead, if I am such a miscreant! I cannot say if she through fear destroyed herself, for more than this am I forbid. With her discretion took the place of chastity, while I, though chaste, was not discreet in using this virtue.

LEADER

Thy oath by heaven, strong security, sufficiently refutes the charge.

THESEUS

A wizard or magician must the fellow be, to think he can first flout me, his father, then by coolness master my resolve.

HIPPOLYTUS

Father, thy part in this doth fill me with amaze; wert thou my son and I thy sire, by heaven! I would have slain, not let thee off with banishment, hadst thou presumed to violate my honour.

THESEUS

A just remark! yet shalt thou not die by the sentence thine own lips pronounce upon thyself; for death, that cometh in a moment, is an easy end for wretchedness. Nay, thou shalt be exiled from thy fatherland, and wandering to a foreign shore drag out a life of misery, for such are the wages of sin.

HIPPOLYTUS

Oh! what wilt thou do? Wilt thou banish me, without so much as waiting for Time's evidence on my case?

THESEUS

Ay, beyond the sea, beyond the bounds of Atlas, if I could, so deeply do I hate thee.

HIPPOLYTUS

What! banish me untried, without even testing my oath, the pledge offer, or the voice of seers?

THESEUS

This letter here, though it bears no seers' signs, arraigns thy pledges; as for birds that fly o'er our heads, a long farewell to them. HIPPOLYTUS (aside)

Great gods! why do I not unlock my lips, seeing that I am ruined by you, the objects of my reverence? No, I will not; I should nowise persuade those whom I ought to, and in vain should break the oath I swore.

THESEUS

Fie upon thee! that solemn air of thine is more than I can bear. Begone from thy native land forthwith!

HIPPOLYTUS

Whither shall I turn? Ah me! whose friendly house will take me in, an exile on so grave a charge?

THESEUS

Seek one who loves to entertain as guests and partners in his crimes corrupters of men's wives.

HIPPOLYTUS

Ah me! this wounds my heart and brings me nigh to tears to think that I should appear so vile, and thou

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believe me so.

THESEUS

Thy tears and forethought had been more in season when thou didst presume to outrage thy father's wife.

HIPPOLYTUS

O house, I would thou couldst speak for me and witness if I am so vile!

THESEUS

Dost fly to speechless witnesses? This deed, though it speaketh not, proves thy guilt clearly.

HIPPOLYTUS

Alas! Would I could stand and face myself, so should I weep to see the sorrows I endure.

THESEUS

Ay, 'tis thy character to honour thyself far more than reverence thy parents, as thou shouldst.

HIPPOLYTUS

Unhappy mother! son of sorrow! Heaven keep all friends of mine from bastard birth!

THESEUS

Ho! servants, drag him hence! You heard my proclamation long ago condemning him to exile.

HIPPOLYTUS

Whoso of them doth lay a hand on me shall rue it; thyself expel me, if thy spirit move thee, from the land.

THESEUS

I will, unless my word thou straight obey; no pity for thy exile steals into my heart.
(THESEUS goes in. The central doors of the palace are closed.)

HIPPOLYTUS

The sentence then, it seems, is passed. Ah, misery! How well I know the truth herein, but know no way to tell it! O daughter of Latona, dearest to me of all deities, partner, comrade in the chase, far from glorious Athens must I fly. Farewell, city and land of Erechtheus; farewell, Troezen, most joyous home wherein to pass the spring of life; 'tis my last sight of thee, farewell! Come, my comrades in this land, young like me, greet me kindly and escort me forth, for never will ye behold a purer soul, for all my father's doubts.

(HIPPOLYTUS departs. Many follow him.)

CHORUS (*singing*)

strophe 1

In very deed the thoughts I have about the gods, whenso they come into my mind, do much to soothe its grief, but though I cherish secret hopes of some great guiding will, yet am I at fault when survey the fate and doings of the sons of men; change succeeds to change, and man's life veers and shifts in endless restlessness.

antistrophe 1

Fortune grant me this, I pray, at heaven's hand,—a happy lot in life and a soul from sorrow free; opinions let me hold not too precise nor yet too hollow; but, lightly changing my habits to each morrow as it comes, may I thus attain a life of bliss!

strophe 2

For now no more is my mind free from doubts, unlooked—for sights greet my vision; for lo! I see the

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morning star of Athens, eye of Hellas, driven by his father's fury to another land. Mourn, ye sands of my native shores, ye oak-groves on the hills, where with his fleet hounds he would hunt the quarry to the death, attending on Dictynna, awful queen.

antistrophe 2

No more will he mount his car drawn by Venetian steeds, filling the course round Limna with the prancing of his trained horses. Nevermore in his father's house shall he wake the Muse that never slept beneath his lute-strings; no hand will crown the spots where rests the maiden Latona 'mid the boskage deep; nor evermore shall our virgins vie to win thy love, now thou art banished.

epode

While I with tears at thy unhappy fate shall endure a lot all undeserved. Ah! hapless mother, in vain didst thou bring forth, it seems. I am angered with the gods; out upon them! O ye linked Graces, why are ye sending from his native land this poor youth, guiltless sufferer, far from his home?

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

But lo! I see a servant of Hippolytus hasting with troubled looks towards the palace.

(A MESSENGER enters.)

MESSENGER

Ladies, where may I find Theseus, king of the country? pray, tell me if ye know; is he within the palace here?

LEADER

Lo! himself approaches from the palace.

(THESEUS enters.)

MESSENGER

Theseus, I am the bearer of troublous tidings to thee and all citizens who dwell in Athens or the bounds of Troezen.

THESEUS

How now? hath some strange calamity o'ertaken these two neighbouring cities?

MESSENGER

In one brief word, Hippolytus is dead. 'Tis true one slender thread still links him to the light of life.

THESEUS

Who slew him? Did some husband come to blows with him, one whose wife, like mine, had suffered brutal violence?

MESSENGER

He perished through those steeds that drew his chariot and through the curses thou didst utter, praying to thy sire, the ocean-king, to slay thy son.

THESEUS

Ye gods and king Poseidon, thou hast proved my parentage by hearkening to my prayer! Say how he perished; how fell the uplifted hand of justice to smite the villain who dishonoured me?

MESSENGER

Hard by the wave-beat shore were we combing out his horses' manes, weeping the while, for one had come to say that Hippolytus was harshly exiled by thee and nevermore would return to set foot in this land. Then came he, telling the same doleful tale to us upon the beach, and with him was a countless throng of friends who

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followed after. At length he stayed his lamentation and spake: "Why weakly rave on this wise? My father's commands must be obeyed. Ho! servants, harness my horses to the chariot; this is no longer now city of mine." Thereupon each one of us bestirred himself, and, ere a man could say 'twas done, we had the horses standing ready at our master's side. Then he caught up the reins from the chariot-rail, first fitting his feet exactly in the hollows made for them. But first with outspread palms he called upon the gods, "O Zeus, now strike me dead, if I have sinned, and let my father learn how he is wronging me, in death at least, if not in life." Therewith he seized the whip and lashed each horse in turn; while we, close by his chariot, near the reins, kept up with him along the road that leads direct to Argos and Epidaurus. And just as we were coming to a desert spot, a strip of sand beyond the borders of this country, sloping right to the Saronic gulf, there issued thence a deep rumbling sound, as it were an earthquake, fearsome noise, and the horses reared their heads and pricked their ears, while we were filled with wild alarm to know whence came the sound; when, as we gazed toward the wave-beat shore, a wave tremendous we beheld towering to the skies, so that from our view the cliffs of Sciron vanished, for it hid the isthmus and the rock of Asclepius; then swelling and frothing with a crest of foam, the sea discharged it toward the beach where stood the harnessed car, and in the moment that it broke, that mighty wall of waters, there issued from the wave a monstrous bull, whose bellowing filled the land with fearsome echoes, a sight too awful as it seemed to us who witnessed it. A panic seized the horses there and then, but our master, to horses' ways quite used, gripped in both hands his reins, and tying them to his body pulled them backward as the sailor pulls his oar; but the horses gnashed the forged bits between their teeth and bore him wildly on, regardless of their master's guiding hand or rein or jointed car. And oft as he would take the guiding rein and steer for softer ground, showed that bull in front to turn him back again, maddening his team with terror; but if in their frantic career they ran towards the rocks, he would draw nigh the chariot-rail, keeping up with them, until, suddenly dashing the wheel against a stone, he upset and wrecked the car; then was dire confusion, axle-boxes and linchpins springing into the air. While he, poor youth, entangled in the reins was dragged along, bound by a stubborn knot, his poor head dashed against the rocks, his flesh all torn, the while he cried out piteously, "Stay, stay, my horses whom my own hand hath fed at the manger, destroy me not utterly. O luckless curse of a father! Will no one come and save me for all my virtue?" Now we, though much we longed to help, were left far behind. At last, I know not how, he broke loose from the shapely reins that bound him, a faint breath of life still in him; but the horses disappeared, and that portentous bull, among the rocky ground, I know not where. I am but a slave in thy house, 'tis true, O king, yet will I never believe so monstrous a charge against thy son's character, no! not though the whole race of womankind should hang itself, or one should fill with writing every pine-tree tablet grown on Ida, sure as I am of his uprightness.

LEADER

Alas! new troubles come to plague us, nor is there any escape from fate and necessity.

THESEUS

My hatred for him who hath thus suffered made me glad at thy tidings, yet from regard for the gods and him, because he is my son, I feel neither joy nor sorrow at his sufferings.

MESSENGER

But say, are we to bring the victim hither, or how are we to fulfil thy wishes? Bethink thee; if by me thou wilt be schooled, thou wilt not harshly treat thy son in his sad plight.

THESEUS

Bring him hither, that when I see him face to face, who hath denied having polluted my wife's honour, I may by words and heaven's visitation convict him.

(The MESSENGER departs.)

CHORUS (*singing*)

Ah! Cypris, thine the hand that guides the stubborn hearts of gods and men; thine, and that attendant boy's, who, with painted plumage gay, flutters round his victims on lightning wing. O'er the land and booming deep on golden pinion borne flits the god of Love, maddening the heart and beguiling the senses of all whom he

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attacks, savage whelps on mountains bred, ocean's monsters, creatures of this sun-warmed earth, and man; thine, O Cypris, thine alone the sovereign power to rule them all.

(ARTEMIS appears above.)

ARTEMIS (*chanting*)

Hearken, I bid thee, noble son of Aegeus: lo! 'tis I, Latona's child, that speak, I, Artemis. Why, Theseus, to thy sorrow dost thou rejoice at these tidings, seeing that thou hast slain thy son most impiously, listening to a charge not clearly proved, but falsely sworn to by thy wife? though clearly has the curse therefrom upon thee fallen. Why dost thou not for very shame hide beneath the dark places of the earth, or change thy human life and soar on wings to escape this tribulation? 'Mongst men of honour thou hast now no share in life.

(She now speaks.)

Hearken, Theseus; I will put thy wretched case. Yet will it naught avail thee, if I do, but vex thy heart; still with this intent I came, to show thy son's pure heart,—that he may die with honour,—as well the frenzy and, in a sense, the nobleness of thy wife; for she was cruelly stung with a passion for thy son by that goddess whom all we, that joy in virgin purity, detest. And though she strove to conquer love by resolution, yet by no fault of hers she fell, thanks to her nurse's strategy, who did reveal her malady unto thy son under oath. But he would none of her counsels, as indeed was right, nor yet, when thou didst revile him, would he break the oath he swore, from piety. She meantime, fearful of being found out, wrote a lying letter, destroying by guile thy son, but yet persuading thee.

THESEUS

Woe is me!

ARTEMIS

Doth my story wound thee, Theseus? Be still awhile; hear what follows, so wilt thou have more cause to groan. Dost remember those three prayers thy father granted thee, fraught with certain issue? 'Tis one of these thou hast misused, unnatural wretch, against thy son, instead of aiming it at an enemy. Thy sea-god sire, 'tis true, for all his kind intent, hath granted that boon he was compelled, by reason of his promise, to grant. But thou alike in his eyes and in mine hast shewn thy evil heart, in that thou hast forestalled all proof or voice prophetic, hast made no inquiry, nor taken time for consideration, but with undue haste cursed thy son even to the death.

THESEUS

Perdition seize me! Queen revered!

ARTEMIS

An awful deed was thine, but still even for this thou mayest obtain pardon; for it was Cypris that would have it so, sating the fury of her soul. For this is law amongst us gods; none of us will thwart his neighbour's will, but ever we stand aloof. For be well assured, did I not fear Zeus, never would I have incurred the bitter shame of handing over to death a man of all his kind to me most dear. As for thy sin, first thy ignorance absolves thee from its villainy, next thy wife, who is dead, was lavish in her use of convincing arguments to influence thy mind. On thee in chief this storm of woe hath burst, yet is it some grief to me as well; for when the righteous die, there is no joy in heaven, albeit we try to destroy the wicked, house and home.

CHORUS (*chanting*)

Lo! where he comes, this hapless youth, his fair young flesh and auburn locks most shamefully handled. Unhappy house! what two-fold sorrow doth o'ertake its halls, through heaven's ordinance!

(HIPPOLYTUS enters, assisted by his attendants.) HIPPOLYTUS (*chanting*)

Ah! ah! woe is me! foully undone by an impious father's impious imprecation! Undone, undone! woe is me! Through my head dart fearful pains; my brain throbs convulsively. Stop, let me rest my worn-out frame. Oh, oh! Accursed steeds, that mine own hand did feed, ye have been my ruin and my death. O by the gods, good sirs, beseech ye, softly touch my wounded limbs. Who stands there at my right side? Lift me tenderly; with slow and

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even step conduct a poor wretch cursed by his mistaken sire. Great Zeus, dost thou see this? Me thy reverent worshipper, me who left all men behind in purity, plunged thus into yawning Hades 'neath the earth, reft of life; in vain the toils I have endured through my piety towards mankind. Ah me! ah me! O the thrill of anguish shooting through me! Set me down, poor wretch I am; come Death to set me free! Kill me, end my sufferings. O for a sword two-edged to hack my flesh, and close this mortal life! Ill-fated curse of my father! the crimes of bloody kinsmen, ancestors of old, now pass their boundaries and tarry not, and upon me are they come all guiltless as I am; ah! why? Alas, alas! what can I say? How from my life get rid of this relentless agony? O that the stern Death-god, night's black visitant, would give my sufferings rest!

ARTEMIS

Poor sufferer! cruel the fate that links thee to it! Thy noble soul hath been thy ruin.

HIPPOLYTUS

Ah! the fragrance from my goddess wafted! Even in my agony I feel thee near and find relief; she is here in this very place, my goddess Artemis.

ARTEMIS

She is, poor sufferer! the goddess thou hast loved the best.

HIPPOLYTUS

Dost see me, mistress mine? dost see my present suffering?

ARTEMIS

I see thee, but mine eyes no tear may weep.

HIPPOLYTUS

Thou hast none now to lead the hunt or tend thy fane.

ARTEMIS

None now; yet e'en in death I love thee still.

HIPPOLYTUS

None to groom thy steeds, or guard thy shrines.

ARTEMIS

'Twas Cypris, mistress of iniquity, devised this evil.

HIPPOLYTUS

Ah me! now know I the goddess who destroyed me.

ARTEMIS

She was jealous of her slighted honour, vexed at thy chaste life.

HIPPOLYTUS

Ah! then I see her single hand hath struck down three of us.

ARTEMIS

Thy sire and thee, and last thy father's wife.

HIPPOLYTUS

My sire's ill-luck as well as mine I mourn.

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ARTEMIS

He was deceived by a goddess's design.

HIPPOLYTUS

Woe is thee, my father, in this sad mischance!

THESEUS

My son, I am a ruined man; life has no joys for me.

HIPPOLYTUS

For this mistake I mourn thee rather than myself.

THESEUS

O that I had died for thee, my son!

HIPPOLYTUS

Ah! those fatal gifts thy sire Poseidon gave.

THESEUS

Would God these lips had never uttered that prayer!

HIPPOLYTUS

Why not? thou wouldst in any case have slain me in thy fury then.

THESEUS

Yes; Heaven had perverted my power to think.

HIPPOLYTUS

O that the race of men could bring a curse upon the gods!

ARTEMIS

Enough! for though thou pass to gloom beneath the earth, the wrath of Cypris shall not, at her will, fall on thee unrequited, because thou hadst a noble righteous soul. For I with mine own hand will with these unerring shafts avenge me on another, who is her votary, dearest to her of all the sons of men. And to thee, poor sufferer, for thy anguish now will grant high honours in the city of Troezen; for thee shall maids unwed before their marriage cut off their hair, thy harvest through the long roll of time of countless bitter tears. Yea, and for ever shall the virgin choir hymn thy sad memory, nor shall Phaedra's love for thee fall into oblivion and pass away unnoticed. But thou, O son of old Aegeus, take thy son in thine arms, draw him close to thee, for unwittingly thou slewest him, and men may well commit an error when gods put it in their way. And thee Hippolytus, I admonish; hate not thy sire, for in this death thou dost but meet thy destined fate. And now farewell! 'tis not for me to gaze upon the dead, or pollute my sight with death-scenes, and e'en now I see thee nigh that evil.

(ARTEMIS vanishes.)

HIPPOLYTUS

Farewell, blest virgin queen! leave me now! Easily thou resignest our long friendship! I am reconciled with my father at thy desire, yea, for ever before I would obey thy bidding. Ah me! the darkness is settling even now upon my eyes. Take me, father, in thy arms, lift me up.

THESEUS

Woe is me, my son! what art thou doing to me thy hapless sire!

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HIPPOLYTUS

I am a broken man; yes, I see the gates that close upon the dead.

THESEUS

Canst leave me thus with murder on my soul!

HIPPOLYTUS

No, no; I set thee free from this bloodguiltiness.

THESEUS

What sayest thou? dost absolve me from bloodshed?

HIPPOLYTUS

Artemis, the archer-queen, is my witness that I do.

THESEUS

My own dear child, how generous dost thou show thyself to thy father!

HIPPOLYTUS

Farewell, dear father! a long farewell to thee!

THESEUS

O that holy, noble soul of thine!

HIPPOLYTUS

Pray to have children such as me born in lawful wedlock.

THESEUS

O leave me not, my son; endure awhile.

HIPPOLYTUS

'Tis finished, my endurance; I die, father; quickly veil my face with a mantle.

THESEUS

O glorious Athens, realm of Pallas, what a splendid hero ye have lost! Ah me, ah me! How oft shall I remember thy evil works, P Cypris!

CHORUS (*singing*)

On all our citizens hath come this universal sorrow, unforeseen. Now shall the copious tear gush forth, for sad news about great men takes more than usual hold upon the heart.

—THE END—

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THE TROJAN WOMEN

by Euripides

Characters in the Play

Poseidon

Athena

Hecuba

Chorus of Captive Trojan Women

Talthybius

Cassandra

Andromache

Menelaus

Helen

Before Agamemnon's Tent in the Camp near Troy. HECUBA asleep. Enter POSEIDON.

POSEIDON

Lo! from the depths of salt Aegean floods I, Poseidon, come, where choirs of Nereids trip in the mazes of the graceful dance; for since the day that Phoebus and myself with measurement exact set towers of stone about this land of Troy and ringed it round, never from my heart hath passed away a kindly feeling for my Phrygian town, which now is smouldering and o'erthrown, a prey to Argive prowess. For, from his home beneath Parnassus, Phocian Epeus, aided by the craft of Pallas, framed a horse to bear within its womb an armed host, and sent it within the battlements, fraught with death; whence in days to come men shall tell of "the wooden horse," with its hidden load of warriors. Groves forsaken stand and temples of the gods run down with blood, and at the altar's very base, before the god who watched his home, lies Priam dead. While to Achaean ships great store of gold and Phrygian spoils are being conveyed, and they who came against this town, those sons Of Hellas, only wait a favouring breeze to follow in their wake, that after ten long years they may with joy behold their wives and children. Vanquished by Hera, Argive goddess, and by Athena, who helped to ruin Phrygia, I am leaving Ilium, that famous town, and the altars that I love; for when drear desolation seizes on a town, the worship of the gods decays and tends to lose respect. Scamander's banks re-echo long and loud the screams of captive maids, as they by lot receive their masters. Arcadia taketh some, and some the folk of Thessaly; others are assigned to Theseus' sons, the Athenian chiefs. And such of the Trojan dames as are not portioned out, are in these tents, set apart for the leaders of the host; and with them Spartan Helen, daughter of Tyndarus, justly counted among the captives. And wouldst thou see that queen of misery, Hecuba, thou canst; for there she lies before the gates, weeping many

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a bitter tear for many a tribulation; for at Achilles' tomb—though she knows not this—her daughter Polyxena has died most piteously; likewise is Priam dead, and her children too; Cassandra, whom the king Apollo left to be a virgin, frenzied maid, hath Agamemnon, in contempt of the god's ordinance and of piety, forced to a dishonoured wedlock. Farewell, O city prosperous once! farewell, ye ramparts of hewn stone! had not Pallas, daughter of Zeus, decreed thy ruin, thou wert standing firmly still.

Enter ATHENA.

ATHENA

May I address the mighty god whom Heaven reveres and who to my own sire is very nigh in blood, laying aside our former enmity?

POSEIDON

Thou mayst; for o'er the soul the ties of kin exert no feeble spell, great queen Athena.

ATHENA

For thy forgiving mood my thanks! Somewhat have I to impart affecting both thyself and me, O king.

POSEIDON

Bringst thou fresh tidings from some god, from Zeus, or from some lesser power?

ATHENA

From none of these; but on behalf of Troy, whose soil we tread, am I come to seek thy mighty aid, to make it one with mine.

POSEIDON

What! hast thou laid thy former hate aside to take compassion on the town now that it is burnt to ashes?

ATHENA

First go back to the former point; wilt thou make common cause with me in the scheme I purpose?

POSEIDON

Ay surely; but I would fain learn thy wishes, whether thou art come to help Achaens or Phrygians.

ATHENA

I wish to give my former foes, the Trojans, joy, and on the Achaean host impose a return that they will rue.

POSEIDON

Why leap'st thou thus from mood to mood? Thy love and hate both go too far, on whomsoever centred.

ATHENA

Dost not know the insult done to me and to the shrine I love?

POSEIDON

Surely, in the hour that Aias tore Cassandra thence.

ATHENA

Yea, and the Achaeans did naught, said naught to him.

POSEIDON

And yet 'twas by thy mighty aid they sacked Ilium.

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ATHENA

For which cause I would join with thee to work their bane.

POSEIDON

My powers are ready at thy will. What is thy intent?

ATHENA

A returning fraught with woe will I impose on them.

POSEIDON

While yet they stay on shore, or as they cross the briny deep?

ATHENA

When they have set sail from Ilium for their homes. On them will Zeus also send his rain and fearful hail, and inky tempests from the sky; yea, and he promises to grant me his levin-bolts to hurl on the Achaeans and fire their ships. And do thou, for thy part, make the Aegean strait to roar with mighty billows and whirlpools, and fill Euboea's hollow bay with corpses, that Achaeans may learn henceforth to reverence my temples and regard all other deities.

POSEIDON

So shall it be, for the boon thou cravest needs but few words. I will vex the broad Aegean sea; and the beach of Myconus and the reefs round Delos, Scyros and Lemnos too, and the cliffs of Caphareus shall be strown with many a corpse. Mount thou to Olympus, and taking from thy father's hand his lightning bolts, keep careful watch against the hour when Argos' host lets slip its cables. A fool is he who sacks the towns of men, with shrines and tombs, the dead man's hallowed home, for at the last he makes a desert round himself, and dies. Exeunt.

HECUBA (*Awakening*)

Lift thy head, unhappy lady, from the ground; thy neck upraise; this is Troy no more, no longer am I queen in Ilium. Though fortune change, endure thy lot; sail with the stream, and follow fortune's tack, steer not thy barque of life against the tide, since chance must guide thy course. Ah me! ah me! What else but tears is now my hapless lot, whose country, children, husband, all are lost? Ah! the high-blown pride of ancestors! how cabined now how brought to nothing after all What woe must I suppress, or what declare? What plaintive dirge shall I awake? Ah, woe is me! the anguish I suffer lying here stretched upon this pallet hard! O my head, my temples, my side! Ah! could I but turn over, and he now on this, now on that, to rest my back and spine, while ceaselessly my tearful wail ascends. Fore 'en this is music to the wretched, to chant their cheerless dirge of sorrow.

Ye swift-prowed ships, rowed to sacred Ilium o'er the deep dark sea, past the fair havens of Hellas, to the flute's ill-omened music and the dulcet voice of pipes, even to the bays of Troyland (alack the day!), wherein ye tied your hawsers, twisted handiwork from Egypt, in quest of that hateful wife of Menelaus, who brought disgrace on Castor, and on Eurotas foul reproach; murderess she of Priam, sire of fifty children, the cause why I, the hapless Hecuba, have wrecked my life upon this troublous strand. Oh that I should sit here o'er against the tent of Agamemnon Forth from my home to slavery they hale my aged frame, while from my head in piteous wise the hair is shorn for grief. Ah! hapless wives of those mail-clad sons of Troy! Ah! poor maidens, luckless brides, come weep, for Ilium is now but a ruin; and I, like some mother-bird that o're her fledglings screams, will begin the strain; how different from that song I sang to the gods in days long past, as I leaned on Priam's staff, and beat with my foot in Phrygian time to lead the dance!

Enter CHORUS OF CAPTIVE TROJAN WOMEN.

SEMI-CHORUS I

O Hecuba why these cries, these piercing shrieks? What mean thy words? For I heard thy piteous wail

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echo through the building, and a pang terror shoots through each captive Trojan's breast, as pent within these walls they mourn their slavish lot.

HECUBA

My child, e'en now the hands of Argive rowers are busy at their ships.

SEMI-CHORUS I

Ah, woe is me! what is their intent? Will they really bear me hence in sorrow from my country in their fleet?

HECUBA

I know not, though I guess our doom.

SEMI-CHORUS I

O misery! woe to us Trojan dames, soon to hear the order given, "Come forth from the house; the Argives are preparing to return."

HECUBA

Oh! do not bid the wild Cassandra leave her chamber, the frantic prophetess, for Argives to insult, nor to my griefs add yet another. Woe to thee, ill-fated Troy, thy sun is set; and woe to thy unhappy children, quick and dead alike, who are leaving thee behind!

SEMI-CHORUS II

With trembling step, alas! I leave this tent of Agamemnon to learn of thee, my royal mistress, whether the Argives have resolved to take my wretched life, whether the sailors at the prow are making ready to ply their oars.

HECUBA

My child, a fearful dread seized on my wakeful heart and sent me hither.

SEMI-CHORUS II

Hath a herald from the Danai already come? To whom am I, poor captive, given as a slave?

HECUBA

Thou art not far from being allotted now.

SEMI-CHORUS II

Woe worth the day! What Argive or Phthiotian chief will bear me far from Troy, alas! unto his home, or haply to some island fastness?

HECUBA

Ah me! ah me! Whose slave shall I become in my old age? in what far clime? a poor old drone, the wretched copy of a corpse, set to keep the gate or tend their children, I who once held royal rank in Troy.

CHORUS

Woe, woe is thee! What piteous dirge wilt thou devise to mourn the outrage done thee? No more through Ida's looms shall I-ply the shuttle to and fro. I look my last and latest on my children's bodies; henceforth shall I endure surpassing misery; it may be as the unwilling bride of some Hellene (perish the night and fortune that brings me to this!); it may be as a wretched slave I from Peirene's sacred fount shall draw their store of water.

Oh be it ours to come to Theseus' famous realm, a land of joy! Never, never let me see Eurotas' swirling tide, hateful home of Helen, there to meet and be the slave of Menelaus, whose hand laid Troyland waste! Yon

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holy land by Peneus fed, nestling in all its beauty at Olympus' foot, is said, so have I heard, to be a very granary of wealth and teeming fruitage; next to the sacred soil of Theseus, I could wish to reach that land. They tell me too Hephaestus' home, beneath the shadow of Aetna, fronting Phoenicia, the mother of Sicilian hills, is famous for the crowns it gives to worth. Or may I find a home on that shore which lieth very nigh Ionia's sea, a land by Crathis watered, lovely stream, that dyes the hair an auburn tint, feeding with its holy waves and making glad therewith the home of heroes good and true.

But mark! a herald from the host of Danai, with store of fresh proclamations, comes hasting hither. What is his errand? what saith he? List, for we are slaves to Dorian lords henceforth.

Enter TALTHYBIUS.

TALTHYBIUS

Hecuba, thou knowest me from my many journeys to and fro as herald 'twixt the Achaean host and Troy; no stranger I to thee, lady, even aforetime, I Talthybius, now sent with a fresh message.

HECUBA

Ah, kind friends, 'tis come! what I so long have dreaded.

TALTHYBIUS

The lot has decided your fates already, if that was what you feared.

HECUBA

Ah me! What city didst thou say, Thessalian, Phthian, or Cadmean?

TALTHYBIUS

Each warrior took his prize in turn; ye were not all at once assigned.

HECUBA

To whom hath the lot assigned us severally? Which of us Trojan dames doth a happy fortune await?

TALTHYBIUS

I know, but ask thy questions separately, not all at once.

HECUBA

Then tell me, whose prize is my daughter, hapless Cassandra?

TALTHYBIUS

King Agamemnon hath chosen her out for himself.

HECUBA

To be the slave-girl of his Spartan wife? Ah me!

TALTHYBIUS

Nay, to share with him his stealthy love.

HECUBA

What! Phoebus' virgin-priestess, to whom the god with golden locks granted the boon of maidenhood?

TALTHYBIUS

The dart of love hath pierced his heart, love for the frenzied maid.

HECUBA

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Daughter, cast from thee the sacred keys, and from thy body tear the holy wreaths that drape thee in their folds.

TALTHYBIUS

Why! is it not an honour high that she should win our monarch's love?

HECUBA

What have ye done to her whom late ye took from me—my child?

TALTHYBIUS

Dost mean Polyxena, or whom dost thou inquire about?

HECUBA

To whom hath the lot assigned her?

TALTHYBIUS

To minister at Achilles' tomb hath been appointed her.

HECUBA

Woe is me! I the mother of a dead man's slave! What custom, what ordinance is this amongst Hellenes, good sir?

TALTHYBIUS

Count thy daughter happy: 'tis well with her.

HECUBA

What wild words are these? say, is she still alive?

TALTHYBIUS

Her fate is one that sets her free from trouble.

HECUBA

And what of mail-clad Hector's wife, sad Andromache? declare her fate.

TALTHYBIUS

She too was a chosen prize; Achilles' son did take her.

HECUBA

As for me whose hair is white with age, who need to hold a staff to be to me a third foot, whose servant am I to be?

TALTHYBIUS

Odysseus, king of Ithaca, hath taken thee to be his slave.

HECUBA

O God! Now smite the close-shorn head! tear your cheeks with your nails. God help me! I have fallen as a slave to a treacherous foe I hate, a monster of lawlessness, one that by his double tongue hath turned against us all that once was friendly in his camp, changing this for that and that for this again. Oh weep for me, ye Trojan dames! Undone! undone and lost! ah woe! a victim to a most unhappy lot!

CHORUS

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Thy fate, royal mistress, now thou knowest; but for me, what Hellene or Achaean is master of my destiny?

TALTHYBIUS

Ho, servants! haste and bring Cassandra forth to me here, that I may place her our captain's hands, and then conduct to the rest of the chiefs the captives each hath had assigned. Ha what is the blaze of torches there within? What do these Trojan dames? Are they firing the chambers, because they must leave this land and be carried away to Argos? Are they setting themselves aflame in their longing for death? Of a truth the free bear their troubles in cases like this with a stiff neck. Ho, there! open! lest their deed, which suits them well but finds small favour with the Achaeans, bring blame on me.

HECUBA

'Tis not that they are setting aught ablaze, but my child Cassandra, frenzied maid, comes rushing wildly hither.

Enter CASSANDRA carrying torches

CASSANDRA

Bring the light, uplift and show its flame! I am doing the god's service, see! I making his shrine to glow with tapers bright. O Hymen, king of marriage! blest is the bridegroom; blest am I also, the maiden soon to wed a princely lord in Argos. Hail Hymen, king of marriage! Since thou, my mother, art ever busied with tears and lamentations in thy mourning for my father's death and for our country dear, I at my own nuptials am making this torch to blaze and show its light, in thy honour, O Hymen, king of marriage! Grant thy light too, Hecate, at the maiden's wedding, as the custom is. Nimble lift the foot aloft, lead on the dance, with cries of joy, as if to greet my father's happy fate. To dance I hold a sacred duty; come, Phoebus, lead the way, for 'tis in thy temple mid thy bay-trees that I minister. Hail Hymen, god of marriage! Hymen, hail! Come, mother mine, and join the dance, link thy steps with me, and circle in the gladsome measure, now here, now there. Salute the bride on her wedding-day with hymns and cries of joy. Come, ye maids of Phrygia in raiment fair, sing my marriage with the husband fate ordains that I should wed.

CHORUS

Hold the frantic maiden, royal mistress mine, lest with nimble foot she rush to the Argive army.

HECUBA

Thou god of fire, 'tis thine to light the bridal torch for men, but piteous is the flame thou kindlest here, beyond my blackest bodings. Ah, my child! how little did I ever dream that such would be thy marriage, a captive, and of Argos tool Give up the torch to me; thou dost not bear its blaze aright in thy wild frantic course, nor have thy afflictions left thee in thy sober senses, but still art thou as frantic as before. Take in those torches, Trojan friends, and for her wedding madrigals weep your tears instead.

CASSANDRA

O mother, crown my head with victor's wreaths; rejoice in my royal match; lead me to my lord; nay, if thou find me loth at all, thrust me there by force; for if Loxias be indeed a prophet, Agamemnon, that famous king of the Achaeans, will find in me a bride more fraught with woe to him than Helen. For I will slay him and lay waste his home to avenge my father's and my bretheren's death. But of the deed itself I will not speak; nor will I tell of that axe which shall sever my neck and the necks of others, or of the conflict ending in a mother's death, which my marriage shall cause, nor of the overthrow of Atreus' house; but I, for all my frenzy, will so far rise above my frantic fit, that I will prove this city happier far than those Achaeans, who for the sake of one woman and one man's love of her have lost a countless host in seeking Helen. Their captain too, whom men call wise, hath lost for what he hated most what most he prized, yielding to his brother for a woman's sake—and she a willing prize whom no man forced—the joy he had of his own children in his home. For from the day that they did land upon Scamander's strand, their doom began, not for loss of stolen frontier nor yet for fatherland with frowning

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towers; whomso Ares slew, those never saw their babes again, nor were they shrouded for the tomb by hand of wife, but in a foreign land they lie. At home the case was still the same; wives were dying widows, parents were left childless in their homes, having reared their sons for others, and none is left to make libations of blood upon the ground before their tombs. Truly to such praise as this their host can make an ample claim. Tis better to pass their shame in silence by, nor be mine the Muse to tell that evil tale. But the Trojans were dying, first for their fatherland, fairest fame to win; whomso the sword laid low, all these found friends to bear their bodies home and were laid to rest in the bosom of their native land, their funeral rites all duly paid by duteous hands. And all such Phrygians as escaped the warrior's death lived ever day by day with wife and children by them—joys the Achaeans had left behind. As for Hector and his griefs, prithee hear how stands the case; he is dead and gone, but still his fame remains as bravest of the brave, and this was a result of the Achaeans' coming; for had they remained at home, his worth would have gone unnoticed. So too with Paris, he married the daughter of Zeus, whereas, had he never done so, the alliance he made in his family would have been forgotten. Whoso is wise should fly from making war; but if he be brought to this pass, a noble death will crown his city with glory, a coward's end with shame. Wherefore, mother mine, thou shouldst not pity thy country or my spousal, for this my marriage will destroy those whom thou and I most hate.

CHORUS

How sweetly at thy own sad lot thou smilest, chanting a strain, which, spite of thee, may prove thee wrong!

TALTHYBIUS

Had not Apollo turned thy wits astray, thou shouldst not for nothing have sent my chiefs with such ominous predictions forth on their way. But, after all, these lofty minds, reputed wise, are nothing better than those that are held as naught. For that mighty king of all Hellas, own son of Atreus, has yielded to a passion for this mad maiden of all others; though I am poor enough, yet would I ne'er have chosen such a wife as this. As for thee, since thy senses are not whole, I give thy taunts 'gainst Argos and thy praise of Troy to the winds to carry away. Follow me now to the ships to grace the wedding of our chief. And thou too follow, whensoever the son of Laertes demands thy presence, for thou wilt serve a mistress most discreet, as all declare who came to Ilium.

CASSANDRA

A clever fellow this menial! Why is it heralds hold the name they do? All men unite in hating with one common hate the servants who attend on kings or governments. Thou sayest my mother shall come to the halls of Odysseus; where then be Apollo's words, so clear to me in their interpretation, which declare that here she shall die? What else remains, I will not taunt her with. Little knows he, the luckless wight, the sufferings that await him; or how these ills I and my Phrygians endure shall one day seem to him precious as gold. For beyond the ten long years spent at Troy he shall drag out other ten and then come to his country all alone, by the route where fell Charybdis lurks in a narrow channel 'twixt the rocks; past Cyclops the savage shepherd, and Ligurian Circe that turneth men to swine; shipwrecked oft upon the salt sea—wave; fain to eat the lotus, and the sacred cattle of the sun, whose flesh shall utter in the days to come a human voice, fraught with misery to Odysseus. But to briefly end this history, he shall descend alive to Hades, and, though he 'scape the waters' flood, yet shall he find a thousand troubles in his home when he arrives. Enough why do I recount the troubles of Odysseus? Lead on, that I forthwith may wed my husband for his home in Hades' halls. Base thou art, and basely shalt thou be buried, in the dead of night when day is done, thou captain of that host of Danai, who thinkest so proudly of thy fortune! Yea, and my corpse cast forth in nakedness shall the rocky chasm with its flood of wintry waters give to wild beasts to make their meal upon, hard by my husband's tomb, me the handmaid of Apollo. Farewell, ye garlands of that god most dear to me! farewell, ye mystic symbols! I here resign your feasts, my joy in days gone by. Go, I tear ye from my body, that, while yet mine honour is intact, I may give them to the rushing winds to waft to thee, my prince of prophecy I Where is yon general's ship? Whither must I go to take my place thereon? Lose no further time in watching for a favouring breeze to fill thy sails, doomed as thou art to carry from this land one of the three avenging spirits. Fare thee well, mother mine! dry thy tears, O country dear! yet a little while, my brothers sleeping in the tomb and my own father true, and ye shall welcome me; yet shall victory crown my

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advent 'mongst the dead, when I have overthrown the home of our destroyers, the house of the sons of Atreus.
Exeunt TALTHYBIUS and CASSANDRA

CHORUS

Ye guardians of the grey-haired Hecuba, see how your mistress is sinking speechless to the ground! Take hold of her! will ye let her fall, ye worthless slaves? lift up again, from where it lies, her silvered head.

HECUBA

Leave me lying where I fell, my maidens unwelcome service grows not welcome ever—my sufferings now, my troubles past, afflictions yet to come, all claim this lowly posture. Gods of heaven! small help I find in calling such allies, yet is there something in the form of invoking heaven, whenso we fall on evil days. First will I descant upon my former blessings; so shall I inspire the greater pity for my present woes. Born to royal estate and wedded to a royal lord, I was the mother of a race of gallant sons; no mere ciphers they, but Phrygia's chiefest pride, children such as no Trojan or Hellenic or barbarian mother ever had to boast. All these have I seen slain by the spear of Hellas, and at their tombs have I shorn off my hair; with these my eyes I saw their sire, my Priam, butchered on his own hearth, and my city captured, nor did others bring this bitter news to me. The maidens I brought up to see chosen for some marriage high, for strangers have I reared them, and seen them snatched away. Nevermore can I hope to be seen by them, nor shall my eyes behold them ever in the days to come. And last, to crown my misery, shall I be brought to Hellas, a slave in my old age. And there the tasks that least befit the evening of my life will they impose on me, to watch their gates and keep the keys, me Hector's mother, or bake their bread, and on the ground instead of my royal bed lay down my shrunken limbs, with tattered rags about my wasted frame. a shameful garb for those who once were prosperous. Ah, woe is me! and this is what I bear and am to bear for one weak woman's wooing! O my daughter, O Cassandra! whom gods have summoned to their frenzied train, how cruel the lot that ends thy virgin days! And thou, Polyxena! my child of sorrow, where, oh! where art thou? None of all the many sons and daughters have I born comes to aid a wretched mother. Why then raise me up? What hope is left us? Guide me, who erst trod so daintily the streets of Troy, but now am but a slave, to a bed upon the ground, nigh some rocky ridge, that thence I may cast me down and perish, after I have wasted my body with weeping. Of all the prosperous crowd, count none a happy man before he die.

CHORUS

Sing me, Muse, a tale of Troy, a funeral dirge in strains unheard as yet, with tears the while; for now will I uplift for Troy a piteous chant, telling how I met my doom and fell a wretched captive to the Argives by reason of a four-footed beast that moved on wheels, in the hour that Achaea's sons left at our gates that horse, loud rumbling on its way, with its trappings of gold and its freight of warriors; and our folk cried out as they stood upon the rocky citadel, "Up now ye whose toil is o'er, and drag this sacred image to the shrine of the Zeus-born maiden, goddess of our Ilium!" Forth from his house came every youth and every grey-head too; and with songs of joy they took the fatal snare within. Then hastened all the race of Phrygia to the gates, to make the goddess a present of an Argive band ambushed in the polished mountain-pine, Dardania's ruin, a welcome gift to be to her, the virgin queen of deathless steeds; and with nooses of cord they dragged it, as it had been a ship's dark hull, to the stone-built fane of the goddess Pallas, and set it on that floor so soon to drink our country's blood. But, as they laboured and made merry, came on the pitchy night; loud the Libyan flute was sounding, and Phrygian songs awoke, while maidens beat the ground with airy foot, uplifting their gladsome song; and in the halls a blaze of torchlight shed its flickering shadows on sleeping eyes. In that hour around the house was I singing as I danced to that maiden of the hills, the child of Zeus; when lo! there rang along the town a cry of death which filled the homes of Troy, and little babes in terror clung about their mothers' skirts, as forth from their ambush came the warrior-band, the handiwork of maiden Pallas. Anon the altars ran with Phrygian blood, and desolation reigned o'er every bed where young men lay beheaded, a glorious crown for Hellas won, ay, for her, the nurse of youth, but for our Phrygian fatherland a bitter grief. Look, Hecuba! dost see Andromache advancing hither on a foreign car? and with her, clasped to her throbbing breast, is her dear Astyanax, Hector's child.

Enter ANDROMACHE.

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HECUBA

Whither art thou borne, unhappy wife, mounted on that car, side by side with Hector's brazen arms and Phrygian spoils of war, with which Achilles' son will deck the shrines of Phthia on his return from Troy?

ANDROMACHE

My Achaean masters drag me hence.

HECUBA

Woe is thee!

ANDROMACHE

Why dost thou in note of woe utter the dirge that is mine?

HECUBA

Ah me!

ANDROMACHE

For these sorrows.

HECUBA

O Zeus!

ANDROMACHE

And for this calamity.

HECUBA

O my children!

ANDROMACHE

Our day is past.

HECUBA

Joy is fled, and Troy o'erthrown.

ANDROMACHE

Woe is me!

HECUBA

Dead too all my gallant sons!

ANDROMACHE

Alack and well-a-day!

HECUBA

Ah me for my—

ANDROMACHE

Misery!

HECUBA

Piteous the fate—

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ANDROMACHE

Of our city,

HECUBA

Smouldering in the smoke.

ANDROMACHE

Come, my husband, come to me!

HECUBA

Ah hapless wife! thou callest on my son who lieth in the tomb.

ANDROMACHE

Thy wife's defender, come!

HECUBA

Do thou, who erst didst make the Achaeans grieve, eldest of the sons I bare to Priam in the days gone by, take me to thy rest in Hades' halls!

ANDROMACHE

Bitter are these regrets, unhappy mother, bitter these woes to bear; our city ruined, and sorrow evermore to sorrow added, through the will of angry heaven, since the day that son' of thine escaped his doom, he that for a bride accursed brought destruction on the Trojan citadel. There lie the gory corpses of the slain by the shrine of Pallas for vultures to carry off; and Troy is come to slavery's yoke.

HECUBA

O my country, O unhappy land, I weep for thee now left behind; now dost thou behold thy piteous end; and thee, my house, I weep, wherein I suffered travail. O my children! reft of her city as your mother is, she now is losing you. Oh, what mourning and what sorrow! oh, what endless streams of tears in our houses! The dead alone forget their griefs and never shed a tear.

CHORUS

What sweet relief to sufferers 'tis to weep, to mourn, lament, and chant the dirge that tells of grief!

ANDROMACHE

Dost thou see this, mother of that Hector, who once laid low in battle many a son of Argos?

HECUBA

I see that it is heaven's way to exalt what men accounted naught, and ruin what they most esteemed.

ANDROMACHE

Hence with my child as booty am I borne; the noble are to slavery brought—a bitter, bitter change.

HECUBA

This is necessity's grim law; it was but now Cassandra was torn with brutal violence from my arms.

ANDROMACHE

Alas, alas! it seems a second Aias hath appeared to wrong thy daughter; but there be other ills for thee.

HECUBA

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Ay, beyond all count or measure are my sorrows; evil vies with evil in the struggle to be first.

ANDROMACHE

Thy daughter Polyxena is dead, slain at Achilles' tomb, an offering to his lifeless corpse.

HECUBA

O woe is me! This is that riddle Talthybius long since told me, a truth obscurely uttered.

ANDROMACHE

I saw her with mine eyes; so I alighted from the chariot, and covered her corpse with a mantle, and smote upon my breast.

HECUBA

Alas! my child, for thy unhallowed sacrifice! and yet again, ah me! for this thy shameful death!

ANDROMACHE

Her death was even as it was, and yet that death of hers was after all a happier fate than this my life.

HECUBA

Death and life are not the same, my child; the one is annihilation, the other keeps a place for hope.

ANDROMACHE

Hear, O mother of children give ear to what I urge so well, that I may cheer my drooping spirit. 'Tis all one, I say, ne'er to have been born and to be dead, and better far is death than life with misery. For the dead feel no sorrow any more and know no grief; but he who has known prosperity and has fallen on evil days feels his spirit straying from the scene of former joys. Now that child of thine is dead as though she ne'er had seen the light, and little she recks of her calamity; whereas I, who aimed at a fair repute, though I won a higher lot than most, yet missed my lick in life. For all that stamps the wife a woman chaste, I strove to do in Hector's home. In the first place, whether there is a slur upon a woman, or whether there is not, the very fact of her not staying at home brings in its train an evil name; therefore I gave up any wish to do so, and abode ever within my house, nor would I admit the clever gossip women love, but conscious of a heart that told an honest tale I was content therewith. And ever would I keep a silent tongue and modest eye before my lord; and well I knew where I might rule my lord, and where 'twas best to yield to him; the fame whereof hath reached the Achaean host, and proved my ruin; for when I was taken captive, Achilles' son would have me as his wife, and I must serve in the house of murderers. And if I set aside my love for Hector, and ope my heart to this new lord, I shall appear a traitress to the dead, while, if I hate him, I shall incur my master's displeasure. And yet they say a single night removes a woman's dislike for her husband; nay, I do hate the woman who, when she hath lost her former lord, transfers her love by marrying another. Not e'en the horse, if from his fellow torn, will cheerfully draw the yoke; and yet the brutes have neither speech nor sense to help them, and are by nature man's inferiors. O Hector mine! in thee I found a husband amply dowered with wisdom, noble birth and fortune, a brave man and a mighty; whilst thou didst take me from my father's house a spotless bride, thyself the first to make this maiden wife. But now death hath claimed thee, and I to Hellas am soon to sail, a captive doomed to wear the yoke of slavery. Hath not then the dead Polyxena, for whom thou wailest, less evil to bear than I? I have not so much as hope, the last resource of every human heart, nor do I beguile myself with dreams of future bliss, the very thought whereof is sweet.

CHORUS

Thou art in the self-same plight as I; thy lamentations for thyself remind me of my own sad case.

HECUBA

I never yet have set foot on a ship's deck, though I have seen such things in pictures and know of them from hearsay. Now sailors, if there come a storm of moderate force, are all eagerness to save themselves by toil;

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one at the tiller stands, another sets himself to work the sheets, a third meantime is baling out the ship; but if tempestuous waves arise to overwhelm them, they yield to fortune and commit themselves to the driving billows. Even so I, by reason of my countless troubles, am dumb and forbear to say a word; for Heaven with its surge of misery is too strong for me. Cease, Oh cease, my darling child, to speak of Hector's fate; no tears of thine can save him; honour thy present lord, offering thy sweet nature as the bait to win him. If thou do this, thou wilt cheer thy friends as well as thyself, and thou shalt rear my Hector's child to lend stout aid to Ilium, that so thy children in the after-time may build her up again, and our city yet be stablished. But lo! our talk must take a different turn; who is this Achaean menial I see coming hither, sent to tell us of some new design?

Enter TALTHYBIUS.

TALTHYBIUS

Oh hate me not, thou that erst wert Hector's wife, the bravest of the Phrygians! for my tongue would fain not tell that which the Danai and sons of Pelops both command.

ANDROMACHE

What is it? Thy prelude bodeth evil news.

TALTHYBIUS

'Tis decreed thy son is—how can I tell my news?

ANDROMACHE

Surely not to have a different master from me?

TALTHYBIUS

None of all Achaea's chiefs shall ever lord it over him.

ANDROMACHE

Is it their will to leave him here, a remnant yet of Phrygia's race?

TALTHYBIUS

I know no words to break the sorrow lightly to thee.

ANDROMACHE

I thank thee for thy consideration, unless indeed thou hast good news to tell.

TALTHYBIUS

They mean to slay thy son; there is my hateful message to thee.

ANDROMACHE

O God! this is worse tidings than my forced marriage.

TALTHYBIUS

So spake Odysseus to the assembled Hellenes, and his word prevails.

ANDROMACHE

Oh once again ah me there is no measure in the woes I bear.

TALTHYBIUS

He said they should not rear so brave a father's son.

ANDROMACHE

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May such counsels yet prevail about children of his!

TALTHYBIUS

From Troy's battlements he must be thrown. Let it be even so, and thou wilt show more wisdom; cling not to him, but bear thy sorrows with heroic heart, nor in thy weakness deem that thou art strong. For nowhere hast thou any help; consider this thou must; thy husband and thy city are no more, so thou art in our power, and I alone am match enough for one weak woman; wherefore I would not see thee bent on strife, or any course to bring thee shame or hate, nor would I hear thee rashly curse the Achaeans. For if thou say aught whereat the host grow wroth, this child will find no burial nor pity either. But if thou hold thy peace and with composure take thy fate, thou wilt not leave his corpse unburied, and thyself wilt find more favour with the Achaeans.

ANDROMACHE

My child! my own sweet babe and priceless treasure! thy death the foe demands, and thou must leave thy wretched mother. That which saves the lives of others, proves thy destruction, even thy sire's nobility; to thee thy father's valiancy has proved no boon. O the woeful wedding rites, that brought me erst to Hector's home, hoping to be the mother of a son that should rule o'er Asia's fruitful fields instead of serving as a victim to the sons of Danaus! Dost weep, my babe? dost know thy hapless fate? Why clutch me with thy hands and to my garment cling, nestling like a tender chick beneath my wing? Hector will not rise again and come gripping his famous spear to bring thee salvation; no kinsman of thy sire appears, nor might of Phrygian hosts; one awful headlong leap from the dizzy height and thou wilt dash out thy life with none to pity thee Oh to clasp thy tender limbs, a mother's fondest joy! Oh to breathe thy fragrant breath! In vain it seems these breasts did suckle thee, wrapped in thy swaddling-clothes; all for naught I used to toil and wore myself away! Kiss thy mother now for the last time, nestle to her that bare thee, twine thy arms about my neck and join thy lips to mine! O ye Hellenes, cunning to devise new forms of cruelty, why slay this child who never wronged any? Thou daughter of Tyndarus, thou art no child of Zeus, but sprung, I trow, of many a sire, first of some evil demon, next of Envy, then of Murder and of Death, and every horror that the earth begets. That Zeus was never sire of thine I boldly do assert, bane as thou hast been to many a Hellene and barbarian too. Destruction catch thee! Those fair eyes of thine have brought a shameful ruin on the fields of glorious Troy. Take the babe and bear him hence, hurl him down if so ye list, then feast upon his flesh! 'Tis heaven's high will we perish, and I cannot ward the deadly stroke from my child. Hide me and my misery; cast me into the ship's hold; for 'tis to a fair wedding I am going, now that I have lost my child!

CHORUS

Unhappy Troy! thy thousands thou hast lost for one woman's sake and her accursed wooing.

TALTHYBIUS

Come, child, leave fond embracing of thy woful mother, and mount the high coronal of thy ancestral towers, there to draw thy parting breath, as is ordained. Take him hence. His should the duty be to do such herald's work, whose heart knows no pity and who loveth ruthlessness more than my soul doth.

Exeunt ANDROMACHE and TALTHYBIUS with ASTYANAX.

HECUBA

O child, son of my hapless boy, an unjust fate robs me and thy mother of thy life. How is it with me? What can I do for thee, my luckless babe? for thee I smite upon my head and beat my breast, my only gift; for that alone is in my power. Woe for my city! woe for thee! Is not our cup full? What is wanting now to our utter and immediate ruin?

CHORUS

O Telamon, King of Salamis, the feeding ground of bees, who hast thy home in a sea-girt isle that lieth nigh the holy hills where first Athena made the grey olive-branch to appear, a crown for heavenly heads and a glory unto happy Athens, thou didst come in knightly brotherhood with that great archer, Alcemena's son, to sack

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our city Ilium, in days gone by, on thy advent from Hellas, what time he led the chosen flower of Hellas, vexed for the steeds denied him, and at the fair stream of Simois he stayed his sea-borne ship and fastened cables to the stern, and forth therefrom he took the bow his hand could deftly shoot, to be the doom of Laomedon; and with the ruddy breath of fire he wasted the masonry squared by Phoebus' line and chisel, and sacked the land of Troy; so twice in two attacks hath the bloodstained spear destroyed Dardania's walls.

In vain, it seems, thou Phrygian boy, pacing with dainty step amid thy golden chalices, dost thou fill high the cup of Zeus, a service passing fair; seeing that the land of thy birth is being consumed by fire. The shore re-echoes to our cries; and, as a bird bewails its young, so we bewail our husbands or our children, or our grey-haired mothers. The dew-fed springs where thou didst bathe, the course where thou didst train, are now no more; but thou beside the throne of Zeus art sitting with a calm, sweet smile upon thy fair young face, while the spear of Hellas lays the land of Priam waste. Ah! Love, Love, who once didst seek these Dardan halls, deep-seated in the hearts of heavenly gods, how high didst thou make Troy to tower in those days, allying her with deities! But I will cease to urge reproaches against Zeus; for white-winged dawn, whose light to man is dear, turned a baleful eye upon our land and watched the ruin of our citadel, though she had within her bridal bower a husband from this land, whom on a day a car of gold and spangled stars caught up and carried thither, great source of hope to his native country; but all the love the gods once had for Troy is passed away.

Enter MENELAUS.

MENELAUS

Hail! thou radiant orb by whose fair light I now shall capture her that was my wife, e'en Helen; for I am that Menelaus, who hath toiled so hard, I and Achaea's host. To Troy I came, not so much as men suppose to take this woman, but to punish him who from my house stole my wife, traitor to my hospitality. But he, by heaven's will, hath paid the penalty, ruined, and his country too, by the spear of Hellas. And I am come to bear that Spartan woman hence-wife I have no mind to call her, though she once was mine; for now she is but one among the other Trojan dames who share these tents as captives. For they-the very men who toiled to take her with the spear-have granted her to me to slay, or, if I will, to spare and carry back with me to Argos. Now my purpose is not to put her to death in Troy, but to carry her to Hellas in my seaborne ship, and then surrender her to death, a recompense to all whose friends were slain in Ilium. Ho! my trusty men, enter the tent, and drag her out to me by her hair with many a murder foul; and when a favouring breeze shall blow, to Hellas will we convey her.

HECUBA

O thou that dost support the earth and restest thereupon, whosoe'er thou art, a riddle past our ken! be thou Zeus, or natural necessity, or man's intellect, to thee I pray; for, though thou treadest o'er a noiseless path, all thy dealings with mankind are by justice guided.

MENELAUS

How now? Strange the prayer thou offerest unto heaven!

HECUBA

I thank thee, Menelaus, if thou wilt slay that wife of thine. Yet shun the sight of her, lest she smite thee with regret. For she ensnares the eyes of men, o'erthrows their towns, and burns their houses, so potent are her witcheries! Well I know her; so dost thou and those her victims too.

Enter HELEN.

HELEN

Menelaus! this prelude well may fill me with alarm; for I am haled with violence by thy servants' hands and brought before these tents. Still, though I am well-nigh sure thou hatest me, yet would I fain inquire what thou and Hellas have decided about my life.

MENELAUS

To judge thy case required no great exactness; the host with one consent-that host whom thou didst

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wrong-handed thee over to me to die.

HELEN

May I answer this decision, proving that my death, if to die I am, will be unjust?

MENELAUS

I came not to argue, but to slay thee.

HECUBA

Hear her, Menelaus; let her not die for want of that, and let me answer her again, for thou knowest naught of her villainies in Troy; and the whole case, if thus summed up, will insure her death against all chance of an escape.

MENELAUS

This boon needs leisure; still, if she wishes to speak, the leave is given. Yet will I grant her this because of thy words, that she may hear them, and not for her own sake.

HELEN

Perhaps thou wilt not answer me, from counting me a foe, whether my words seem good or ill. Yet will I put my charges and thine over against each other, and then reply to the accusations I suppose thou wilt advance against me. First, then, she was the author of these troubles by giving birth to Paris; next, old Priam ruined Troy and me, because he did not slay his babe Alexander, baleful semblance of a fire-brand, long ago. Hear what followed. This Paris was to judge the claims of three rival goddesses; so Pallas offered him command of all the Phrygians, and the destruction of Hellas; Hera promised he should spread his dominion over Asia, and the utmost bounds of Europe, if he would decide for her; but Cypris spoke in rapture of my loveliness, and promised him this boon, if she should have the preference o'er those twain for beauty; now mark the inference I deduce from this; Cypris won the day o'er them, and thus far hath my marriage proved of benefit to Hellas, that ye are not subject to barbarian rule, neither vanquished in the strife, nor yet by tyrants crushed. What Hellas gained, was ruin to me, a victim for my beauty sold, and now am I reproached for that which should have set a crown upon my head. But thou wilt say I am silent on the real matter at issue, how it was I started forth and left thy house by stealth. With no mean goddess at his side he came, my evil genius, call him Alexander or Paris, as thou wilt; and him didst thou, thrice guilty wretch, leave behind thee in thy house, and sail away from Sparta to the land of Crete. Enough of this! For all that followed I must question my own heart, not thee; what frantic thought led me to follow the stranger from thy house, traitress to my country and my home? Punish the goddess, show thyself more mighty e'en than Zeus, who, though he lords it o'er the other gods, is yet her slave; wherefore I may well be pardoned. Still, from hence thou mightest draw a specious argument against me; when Paris died, and Earth concealed his corpse, I should have left his house and sought the Argive fleet, since my marriage was no longer in the hands of gods. That was what I fain had done; yea, and the warders on the towers and watchmen on the walls can bear me witness, for oft they found me seeking to let myself down stealthily by cords from the battlements; but there was that new husband, Deiphobus, that carried me off by force to be his wife against the will of Troy. How then, my lord, could I be justly put to death by thee, with any show of right, seeing that he wedded me against my will, and those my other natural gifts have served a bitter slavery, instead of leading on to triumph? If 'tis thy will indeed to master gods, that very wish displays thy folly.

CHORUS

O my royal mistress, defend thy children's and thy country.'s cause, bringing to naught her persuasive arguments, for she pleads well in spite of all her villainy; 'tis monstrous this!

HECUBA

First will I take up the cause of those goddesses, and prove how she perverts the truth. For I can ne'er believe that Hera or the maiden Pallas would have been guilty of such folly, as to sell, the one, her Argos to

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barbarians, or that Pallas e'er would make her Athens subject to the Phrygians, coming as they did in mere wanton sport to Ida to contest the palm of beauty. For why should goddess Hera set her heart so much on such a prize? Was it to win a nobler lord than Zeus? or was Athena bent on finding 'mongst the gods a husband, she who in her dislike of marriage won from her sire the boon of remaining unwed? Seek not to impute folly to the goddesses, in the attempt to gloze o'er thy own sin; never wilt thou persuade the wise. Next thou hast said—what well may make men jeer—that Cypris came with my son to the house of Menelaus. Could she not have stayed quietly in heaven and brought thee and Amyclae to boot to Ilium? Nay! my son was passing fair, and when thou sawest him thy fancy straight became thy Cypris; for every sensual act that men commit, they lay upon this goddess, and rightly does her name of Aphrodite begin the word for "senselessness"; so when thou didst catch sight of him in gorgeous foreign garb, ablaze with gold, thy senses utterly forsook thee. Yea, for in Argos thou hadst moved in simple state, but, once free of Sparta, 'twas thy fond hope to deluge by thy lavish outlay Phrygia's town, that flowed with gold; nor was the palace of Menelaus rich enough for thy luxury to riot in. Ha! my son carried thee off by force, so thou savest; what Spartan saw this? what cry for help didst thou ever raise, though Castor was still alive, a vigorous youth, and his brother also, not yet amid the stars? Then when thou wert come to Troy, and the Argives were on thy track, and the mortal combat was begun, whenever tidings came to thee of Menelaus' prowess, him wouldst thou praise, to grieve my son, because he had so powerful a rival in his love; but if so the Trojans prospered, Menelaus was nothing to thee. Thy eye was fixed on Fortune, and by such practice wert thou careful to follow in her steps, careless of virtue's cause. And then, in spite of all, thou dost assert that thou didst try to let thyself down from the towers by stealth with twisted cords, as if loth to stay? Pray then, wert thou ever found fastening the noose about thy neck, or whetting the knife, as noble wife would have done in regret for her former husband? And yet full oft I advised thee saying, "Get thee gone, daughter, and let my sons take other brides; I will help thee to steal away, and convey thee to the Achaean fleet; oh end the strife 'twixt us and Hellas!" But this was bitter in thy ears. For thou wert wantoning in Alexander's house, fain to have obeisance done thee by barbarians. Yes, 'twas a proud time for thee; and now after all this thou hast bedizened thyself, and come forth and hast dared to appear under the same sky as thy husband, revolting wretch! Better hadst thou come in tattered raiment, cowering humbly in terror, with hair shorn short, if for thy past sins thy feeling were one of shame rather than effrontery. O Menelaus, hear the conclusion of my argument; crown Hellas by slaying her as she deserves, and establish this law for all others of her sex, e'en death to every traitress to her husband.

CHORUS

Avenge thee, Menelaus, on thy wife, as is worthy of thy home and ancestors, clear thyself from the reproach of effeminacy at the lips of Hellas, and let thy foes see thy spirit.

MENELAUS

Thy thoughts with mine do coincide, that she, without constraint, left my palace, and sought a stranger's love, and now Cypris is introduced for mere bluster. Away to those who shall stone thee, and by thy speedy death requite the weary toils of the Achaeans, that thou mayst learn not to bring shame on me!

HELEN

Oh, by thy knees, I implore thee, impute not that heaven-sent affliction to me, nor slay me; pardon, I entreat!

HECUBA

Be not false to thy allies, whose death this woman caused; on their behalf, and for my children's sake, I sue to thee.

MENELAUS

Peace, reverend dame; to her I pay no heed. Lo! I bid my servants take her hence, aboard the ship, wherein she is to sail.

HECUBA

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Oh never let her set foot within the same ship as thee.

MENELAUS

How now? is she heavier than of yore?

HECUBA

Who loveth once, must love alway.

MENELAUS

Why, that depends how those we love are minded. But thy wish shall be granted; she shall not set foot upon the same ship with me; for thy advice is surely sound; and when she comes to Argos she shall die a shameful death as is her due, and impress the need of chastity on all her sex; no easy task; yet shall her fate strike their foolish hearts with terror, e'en though they be more lost to shame than she.

Exit MENELAUS, dragging HELEN with him.

CHORUS

So then thou hast delivered into Achaea's hand, O Zeus, thy shrine in Ilium and thy fragrant altar, the offerings of burnt sacrifice with smoke of myrrh to heaven uprising, and holy Pergamos, and glens of Ida tangled with ivy's growth, where rills of melting snow pour down their flood, a holy sunlit land that bounds the world and takes the god's first rays! Gone are thy sacrifices! gone the dancer's cheerful shout! gone the vigils of the gods as night closed in! Thy images of carven gold are now no more; and Phrygia's holy festivals, twelve times a year, at each full moon, are ended now. 'Tis this that filleth me with anxious thought whether thou, O king, seated on the sky, thy heavenly throne, carest at all that my city is destroyed, a prey to the furious fiery blast. Ah! my husband, fondly loved, thou art a wandering spectre; unwashed, unburied lies thy corpse, while o'er the sea the ship sped by wings will carry me to Argos, land of steeds, where stand Cyclopien walls of stone upreared to heaven. There in the gate the children gather, hanging round their mothers' necks, and weep their piteous lamentation, "O mother, woe is me! torn from thy sight Achaeans bear me away from thee to their dark ship to row me o'er the deep to sacred Salamis or to the hill' on the Isthmus, that o'erlooks two seas, the key to the gates of Pelops." Oh may the blazing thunderbolt, hurled in might from its holy home, smite the barque of Menelaus full amidships as it is crossing the Aegean main, since he is carrying me away in bitter sorrow from the shores of Ilium to be a slave in Hellas, while the daughter of Zeus still keeps her golden mirrors, delight-of maidens' hearts. Never may he reach his home in Laconia or his father's hearth and home, nor come to the town of Pitane or the temple of the goddess' with the gates of bronze, having taken as his captive her whose marriage brought disgrace on Hellas through its length and breadth and woful anguish on the streams of Simois! Ah me! ah me! new troubles on my country fall, to take the place of those that still are fresh! Behold, ye hapless wives of Troy, the corpse of Astyanax! whom the Danai have cruelly slain by hurling him from the battlements.

Enter TALTHYBIUS and attendants, bearing
the corpse of ASTYANAX on HECTOR's shield.

TALTHYBIUS

Hecuba, one ship alone delays its plashing oars, and it is soon to sail to the shores of Phthia freighted with the remnant of the spoils of Achilles' son; for Neoptolemus is already out at sea, having heard that new calamities have befallen Peleus, for Acastus, son of Pelias, hath banished him the realm. Wherefore he is gone, too quick to indulge in any delay, and with him goes Andromache, who drew many a tear from me what time she started hence, wailing her country and crying her farewell to Hector's tomb. And she craved her master leave to bury this poor dead child of Hector who breathed his last when from the turrets hurled, entreating too that he would not carry this shield, the terror of the Achaeans—this shield with plates of brass wherewith his father would gird himself—to the home of Peleus or to the same bridal bower whither she, herself the mother of this corpse, would be led, a bitter sight to her, but let her bury the child therein instead of in a coffin of cedar or a tomb of stone, and to thy hands commit the corpse that thou mayst deck it with robes and garlands as best thou canst with thy present means; for she is far away and her master's haste prevented her from burying the child herself. So we,

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when thou the corpse hast decked, will heap the earth above and set thereon a spear; but do thou with thy best speed perform thy allotted task; one toil however have I already spared thee, for I crossed Scamander's stream and bathed the corpse and cleansed its wounds. But now will I go to dig a grave for him, that our united efforts shortening our task may speed our ship towards home.

Exit TALTHYBIUS.

HECUBA

Place the shield upon the ground, Hector's shield so deftly rounded, a piteous sight, a bitter grief for me to see. O ye Achaeans, more reason have ye to boast of your prowess than your wisdom I Why have ye in terror of this child been guilty of murder never matched before? Did ye fear that some day he would rear again the fallen walls of Troy? it seems then ye were nothing after all, when, though Hector's fortunes in the war were prosperous and he had ten thousand other arms to back him, we still were daily overmatched; and yet, now that our city is taken and every Phrygian slain, ye fear a tender babe like this! Out upon his fear! say I, who fears, but never yet hath reasoned out the cause. Ah! my beloved, thine is a piteous death indeed! Hadst thou died for thy city, when thou hadst tasted of the sweets of manhood, of marriage, and of godlike power o'er others, then wert thou blest, if aught herein is blest. But now after one glimpse, one dream thereof thou knowest them no more, my child, and hast no joy of them, though heir to all. Ah, poor babe! how sadly have thy own father's walls, those towers that Loxias reared, shorn from thy head the locks thy mother fondled, and so oft caressed, from which through fractured bones the face of murder grins—briefly to dismiss my shocking theme. O hands, how sweet the likeness ye retain of his father, and yet ye lie limp in your sockets before me! Dear mouth, so often full of words of pride, death hath closed thee, and thou hast not kept the promise thou didst make, when nestling in my robe, "Ah, mother mine, many a lock of my hair will I cut off for thee, and to thy tomb will lead my troops of friends, taking a fond farewell of thee." But now 'tis not thy hand that buries me, but I, on whom is come old age with loss of home and children, am burying thee, a tender child untimely slain. Ah me! those kisses numberless, the nurture that I gave to thee, those sleepless nights—they all are lost! What shall the bard inscribe—upon thy tomb about thee? "Argives once for fear of him slew this child!" Foul shame should that inscription be to Hellas. O child, though thou hast no part in all thy father's wealth, yet shalt thou have his brazen shield wherein to find a tomb. Ah! shield that didst keep safe the comely arm of Hector, now hast thou lost thy valiant keeper! How fair upon thy handle lies his imprint, and on the rim, that circles round the targe, are marks of sweat, that trickled oft from Hector's brow as he pressed it 'gainst his beard in battle's stress. Come, bring forth, from such store as we have, adornment for the hapless dead, for fortune gives no chance now for offerings fair; yet of such as I possess, shalt thou receive these gifts. Foolish mortal he! who thinks his luck secure and so rejoices; for fortune, like a madman in her moods, springs towards this man, then towards that; and none ever experiences the same unchanging luck.

CHORUS

Lo! all is ready and they are bringing at thy bidding from the spoils of Troy garniture to put upon the dead.

HECUBA

Ah! my child, 'tis not as victor o'er thy comrades with horse or bow—customs Troy esteems, without pursuing them to excess—that Hector's mother decks thee now with ornaments from the store that once was thine, though now hath Helen, whom the gods abhor, reft thee of thine own, yea, and robbed thee of thy life and caused thy house to perish root and branch.

CHORUS

Woe! thrice woe! my heart is touched, and thou the cause, my mighty prince in days now passed!

HECUBA

About thy body now I swathe this Phrygian robe of honour, which should have clad thee on thy marriage—day, wedded to the noblest of Asia's daughters. Thou too, dear shield of Hector, victorious parent of countless triumphs past, accept thy crown, for though thou share the dead child's tomb, death cannot touch thee;

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for thou dost merit honours far beyond those arms' that the crafty knave Odysseus won.

CHORUS

Alas! ah me! thee, O child, shall earth take to her breast, a cause for bitter weeping. Mourn, thou mother!

HECUBA

Ah me!

CHORUS

Wail for the dead.

HECUBA

Woe is me!

CHORUS

Alas! for thy unending sorrow!

HECUBA

Thy wounds in part will I bind up with bandages, a wretched leech in name alone, without reality; but for the rest, thy sire must look to that amongst the dead.

CHORUS

Smite, oh smite upon thy head with frequent blow of hand. Woe is me!

HECUBA

My kind, good friends!

CHORUS

Speak out, good the word that was on thy lips.

HECUBA

It seems the only things that heaven concerns itself about are my troubles and Troy hateful in their eyes above all other cities. In vain did we sacrifice to them. Had not the god caught us in his grip and plunged us headlong 'neath the earth, we should have been unheard of, nor ever sung in Muses' songs, furnishing to bards of after-days a subject for their minstrelsy. Go, bury now in his poor tomb the dead, wreathed all duly as befits a corpse. And yet I deem it makes but little difference to the dead, although they get a gorgeous funeral; for this is but a cause of idle pride to the living.

The corpse is carried off to burial

CHORUS

Alas! for thy unhappy mother, who o'er thy corpse hath closed the high hopes of her life! Born of a noble stock, counted most happy in thy lot, ah! what a tragic death is thine! Ha! who are those I see on yonder pinnacles darting to and fro with flaming torches in their hands? Some new calamity will soon on Troy alight.

Enter TALTHYBIUS above. Soldiers are seen on the battlements of Troy, torch in hand.

TALTHYBIUS

Ye captains, whose allotted task it is to fire this town of Priam, to you I speak. No longer keep the firebrand idle in your hands, but launch the flame, that when we have destroyed the city of Ilium we may set forth in gladness on our homeward voyage from Troy. And you, ye sons of Troy—to let my orders take at once a double

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form—start for the Achaean ships for your departure hence, soon as ever the leaders of the host blow loud and clear upon the trumpet. And thou, unhappy grey haired dame, follow; for yonder come servants from Odysseus to fetch thee, for to him thou art assigned by lot to be a slave far from thy country.

HECUBA

Ah, woe is me! This surely is the last, the utmost limit this, of all my sorrows; forth from my land I go; my city is ablaze with flame. Yet, thou aged foot, make one painful struggle to hasten, that I may say a farewell to this wretched town. O Troy, that erst hadst such a grand career amongst barbarian towns, soon wilt thou be reft of that splendid name. Lo! they are burning thee, and leading us e'en now from our land to slavery. Great gods! Yet why call on the gods? They did not hearken e'en aforesaid to our call. Come, let us rush into the flames, for to die with my country in its blazing ruin were a noble death for me.

TALTHYBIUS

Thy sorrows drive thee frantic, poor lady. Go, lead her hence, make no delay, for ye must deliver her into the hand of Odysseus, conveying to him his prize.

HECUBA

O son of Cronos, prince of Phrygia, father of our race, dost thou behold our sufferings now, unworthy of the stock of Dardanus?

CHORUS

He sees them, but our mighty city is a city no more, and Troy's day is done.

HECUBA

Woe! thrice woe upon me! Ilium is ablaze; the homes of Pergamos and its towering walls are now one sheet of flame.

CHORUS

As the smoke soars on wings to heaven, so sinks our city to the 'ground before the spear. With furious haste both fire and foeman's spear devour each house.

HECUBA

Hearken, my children, hear your mother's voice.

CHORUS

Thou art calling on the dead with voice of lamentation.

HECUBA

Yea, as I stretch my aged limbs upon the ground, and beat upon the earth with both my hands.

CHORUS

I follow thee and kneel, invoking from the nether world my hapless husband.

HECUBA

I am being dragged and hurried away.

CHORUS

O the sorrow of that cry!

HECUBA

From my own dear country, to dwell beneath a master's roof. Woe is me! O Priam, Priam, unburied, left

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without a friend, naught dost thou know of my cruel fate.

CHORUS

No, for o'er his eyes black death hath drawn his pall—a holy man by sinners slain!

HECUBA

Woe for the temples of the gods! Woe for our dear city!

CHORUS

Woe!

HECUBA

Murderous flame and foeman's spear are now your lot.

CHORUS

Soon will ye tumble to your own loved soil, and be forgotten.

HECUBA

And the dust, mounting to heaven on wings like smoke, will rob me of the sight of my home.

CHORUS

The name of my country will pass into obscurity; all is scattered far and wide, and hapless Troy has ceased to be.

HECUBA

Did ye hear that and know its purport?

CHORUS

Aye, 'twas the crash of the citadel.

HECUBA

The shock will whelm our city utterly. O woe is me! trembling, quaking limbs, support my footsteps! away! to face the day that begins thy slavery.

CHORUS

Woe for our unhappy town! And yet to the Achaean fleet advance.

HECUBA

Woe for thee, O land that nursed my little babes!

CHORUS

Ah! woe!

Exeunt OMNES.

—THE END—

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THE BACCHANTES

by Euripides

Characters in the Play

Dionysus

Cadmus

Pentheus

Agave

Teiresias

First Messenger

Second Messenger

Servant

Chorus of Bacchantes

Before the Palace of Pentheus at Thebes. Enter DIONYSUS.

DIONYSUS

Lo! I am come to this land of Thebes, Dionysus' the son of Zeus, of whom on a day Semele, the daughter of Cadmus, was delivered by a flash of lightning. I have put off the god and taken human shape, and so present myself at Dirce's springs and the waters of Ismenus. Yonder I see my mother's monument where the bolt slew her nigh her house, and there are the ruins of her home smouldering with the heavenly flame that blazeth still—Hera's deathless outrage on my mother. To Cadmus all praise I offer, because he keeps this spot hallowed, his daughter's precinct, which my own hands have shaded round about with the vine's clustering foliage.

Lydia's glebes, where gold abounds, and Phrygia have I left behind; o'er Persia's sun-baked plains, by Bactria's walled towns and Media's wintry clime have I advanced through Arabia, land of promise; and Asia's length and breadth, outstretched along the brackish sea, with many a fair walled town, peopled with mingled race of Hellenes and barbarians; and this is the first city in Hellas I have reached. There too have I ordained dances and established my rites, that I might manifest my godhead to men; but Thebes is the first city in the land of Hellas that I have made ring with shouts of joy, girt in a fawn-skin, with a thyrsus, my ivy-bound spear, in my hand; since my mother's sisters, who least of all should have done it, denied that Dionysus was the son of Zeus, saying that Semele, when she became a mother by some mortal lover, tried to foist her sin on Zeus—a clever ruse of Cadmus, which, they boldly asserted, caused Zeus to slay her for the falsehood about the marriage. Wherefore these are they whom I have driven frenzied from their homes, and they are dwelling on the hills with mind distraught; and I have forced them to assume the dress worn in my orgies, and all the women-folk of Cadmus' stock have I driven raving from their homes, one and all alike; and there they sit upon the roofless rocks beneath the green pine-trees, mingling amongst the sons of Thebes. For this city must learn, however loth, seeing that it is

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not initiated in my Bacchic rites, and I must take up my mother's defence, by showing to mortals that the child she bore to Zeus is a deity. Now Cadmus gave his sceptre and its privileges to Pentheus, his daughter's child, who wages war 'gainst my divinity, thrusting me away from his drink-offerings, and making no mention of me in his prayers. Therefore will I prove to him and all the race of Cadmus that I am a god. And when I have set all in order here, I will pass hence to a fresh country, manifesting myself; but if the city of Thebes in fury takes up arms and seeks to drive my votaries from the mountain, I will meet them at the head of my frantic rout. This is why I have assumed a mortal form, and put off my godhead to take man's nature.

O ye who left Tmolus, the bulwark of Lydia, ye women, my revel rout! whom I brought from your foreign homes to be ever by my side and bear me company, uplift the cymbals native to your Phrygian home, that were by me and the great mother Rhea first devised, and march around the royal halls of Pentheus smiting them, that the city of Cadmus may see you; while I will seek Cithaeron's glens, there with my Bacchanals to join the dance.

Exit DIONYSUS.

Enter CHORUS.

CHORUS

From Asia o'er the holy ridge of Tmolus hasten to a pleasant task, a toil that brings no weariness, for Bromius' sake, in honour of the Bacchic god. Who loiters in the road? who lingers 'neath the roof? Avaunt! I say, and let every lip be hushed in solemn silence; for I will raise a hymn to Dionysus, as custom aye ordains. O happy he! who to his joy is initiated in heavenly mysteries and leads a holy life, joining heart and soul in Bacchic revelry upon the hills, purified from every sin; observing the rites of Cybele, the mighty mother, and brandishing the thyrsus, with ivy-wreathed head, he worships Dionysus. Go forth, go forth, ye Bacchanals, bring home the Bromian god Dionysus, child of a god, from the mountains of Phrygia to the spacious streets of Hellas, bring home the Bromian god! whom on a day his mother in her sore travail brought forth untimely, yielding up her life beneath the lightning stroke of Zeus' winged bolt; but forthwith Zeus, the son of Cronos, found for him another womb wherein to rest, for he hid him in his thigh and fastened it with golden pins to conceal him from Hera. And when the Fates had fully formed the horned god, he brought him forth and crowned him with a coronal of snakes, whence it is the thyrsus-bearing Maenads hunt the snake to twine about their hair. O Thebes, nurse of Semele! crown thyself with ivy; burst forth, burst forth with blossoms fair of green convolvulus, and with the boughs of oak and pine join in the Bacchic revelry; dor;-thy coat of dappled fawn-skin, decking it with tufts of silvered hair; with reverent hand the sportive wand now wield. Anon shall the whole land be dancing, when Bromius leads his revellers to the hills, to the hills away! where wait him groups of maidens from loom and shuttle roused in frantic haste by Dionysus. O hidden cave of the Curetes! O hallowed haunts in Crete, that saw Zeus born, where Corybantes with crested helms devised for me in their grotto the rounded timbrel of ox-hide, mingling Bacchic minstrelsy with the shrill sweet accents of the Phrygian flute, a gift bestowed by them on mother Rhea, to add its crash of music to the Bacchantes' shouts of joy; but frantic satyrs won it from the mother-goddess for their own, and added it to their dances in festivals, which gladden the heart of Dionysus, each third recurrent year. Oh! happy that votary, when from the hurrying revel-rout he sinks to earth, in his holy robe of fawnskin, chasing the goat to drink its blood, a banquet sweet of flesh uncooked, as he hastes to Phrygia's or to Libya's hills; while in the van the Bromian god exults with cries of Evoe. With milk and wine and streams of luscious honey flows the earth, and Syrian incense smokes. While the Bacchante holding in his hand a blazing torch of pine uplifted on his wand waves it, as he speeds along, rousing wandering votaries, and as he waves it cries aloud with wanton tresses tossing in the breeze; and thus to crown the revelry, he raises loud his voice, "On, on, ye Bacchanals, pride of Tmolus with its rills of gold I to the sound of the booming drum, chanting in joyous strains the praises of your joyous god with Phrygian accents lifted high, what time the holy lute with sweet complaining note invites you to your hallowed sport, according well with feet that hurry wildly to the hills; like a colt that gambols at its mother's side in the pasture, with gladsome heart each Bacchante bounds along."

Enter TEIRESIAS.

TEIRESIAS

What loiterer at the gates will call Cadmus from the house, Agenor's son, who left the city of Sidon and

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founded here the town of Thebes? Go one of you, announce to him that Teiresias is seeking him; he knows himself the reason of my coming and the compact I and he have made in our old age to bind the thyrsus with leaves and don the fawnskin, crowning our heads the while with ivy-sprays.

Enter CADMUS.

CADMUS Best of friends! I was in the house when I heard thy voice, wise as its owner. I come prepared, dressed in the livery of the god. For 'tis but right I should magnify with all my might my own daughter's son, Dionysus, who hath shown his godhead unto men. Where are we to join the dance? where plant the foot and shake the hoary head? Do thou, Teiresias, be my guide, age leading age, for thou art wise. Never shall I weary, night or day, of beating the earth with my thyrsus. What joy to forget our years?

TEIRESIAS

Why, then thou art as I am. For I too am young again, and will essay the dance.

CADMUS

We will drive then in our chariot to the hill.

TEIRESIAS

Nay, thus would the god not have an equal honour paid.

CADMUS

Well, I will lead thee, age leading age.

TEIRESIAS

The god will guide us both thither without toil.

CADMUS

Shall we alone of all the city dance in Bacchus' honour?

TEIRESIAS

Yea, for we alone are wise, the rest are mad.

CADMUS

We stay too long; come, take my hand.

TEIRESIAS

There link thy hand in my firm grip.

CADMUS

Mortal that I am, I scorn not the gods.

TEIRESIAS

No subtleties do I indulge about the powers of heaven. The faith we inherited from our fathers, old as time itself, no reasoning shall cast down; no! though it were the subtlest invention of wits refined. Maybe some one will say, I have no respect for my grey hair in going to dance with ivy round my head; not so, for the god did not define whether old or young should dance, but from all alike he claims a universal homage, and scorns nice calculations in his worship.

CADMUS

Teiresias, since thou art blind, I must prompt thee what to say. Pentheus is coming hither to the house in haste, Echion's son, to whom I resign the government. How scared he looks I what strange tidings will he tell?

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Enter PENTHEUS.

PENTHEUS

I had left my kingdom for awhile, when tidings of strange mischief in this city reached me; I hear that our women—folk have left their homes on pretence of Bacchic rites, and on the wooded hills rush wildly to and fro, honouring in the dance this new god Dionysus, whoe'er he is; and in the midst of each revel—rout the brimming wine—bowl stands, and one by one they steal away to lonely spots to gratify their lust, pretending forsooth that they are Maenads bent on sacrifice, though it is Aphrodite they are placing before the Bacchic god. As many as I caught, my gaolers are keeping safe in the public prison fast bound; and all who are gone forth, will I chase from the hills, Ino and Agave too who bore me to Echion, and Actaeon's mother Autonoe. In fetters of iron will I bind them and soon put an end to these outrageous Bacchic rites. They say there came a stranger hither, a trickster and a sorcerer, from Lydia's land, with golden hair and perfumed locks, the flush of wine upon his face, and in his eyes each grace that Aphrodite gives; by day and night he lingers in our maidens' company on the plea of teaching Bacchic mysteries. Once let me catch him within these walls, and I will put an end to his thyrsus—beating and his waving of his tresses, for I will cut his head from his body. This is the fellow who says that Dionysus is a god, says that he was once stitched up in the thigh of Zeus—that child who with his mother was blasted by the lightning flash, because the woman falsely said her marriage was with Zeus. Is not this enough to deserve the awful penalty of hanging, this stranger's wanton insolence, whoe'er he be?

But lo! another marvel. I see Teiresias, our diviner, dressed in dappled fawn—skins, and my mother's father too, wildly waving the Bacchic wand; droll sight enough! Father, it grieves me to see you two old men so void of sense. Oh! shake that ivy from thee! Let fall the thyrsus from thy hand, my mother's sire! Was it thou, Teiresias, urged him on to this? Art bent on introducing this fellow as another new deity amongst men, that thou mayst then observe the fowls of the air and make a gain from fiery divination? Were it not that thy grey hairs protected thee, thou shouldst sit in chains amid the Bacchanals, for introducing knavish mysteries; for where the gladsome grape is found at women's feasts, I deny that their rites have any longer good results.

CHORUS

What impiety! Hast thou no reverence, sir stranger, for the gods or for Cadmus who sowed the crop of earth—born warriors? Son of Echion as thou art, thou dost shame thy birth.

TEIRESIAS

Whenso a man of wisdom finds a good topic for argument, it is no difficult matter to speak well; but thou, though possessing a glib tongue as if endowed with sense, art yet devoid thereof in all thou sayest. A headstrong man, if he have influence and a capacity for speaking, makes a bad citizen because he lacks sense. This new deity, whom thou deridest, will rise to power I cannot say how great, throughout Hellas. Two things there are, young prince, that hold first rank among men, the goddess Demeter, that is, the earth, calf her which name thou please; she it is that feedeth men with solid food; and as her counterpart came this god, the son of Semele, who discovered the juice of the grape and introduced it to mankind, stilling thereby each grief that mortals suffer from, soon as e'er they are filled with the juice of the vine; and sleep also he giveth, sleep that brings forgetfulness of daily ills, the sovereign charm for all our woe. God though he is, he serves all other gods for libations, so that through him mankind is blest. He it is whom thou dost mock, because he was sewn up in the thigh of Zeus. But I will show thee this fair mystery. When Zeus had snatched him from the lightning's blaze, and to Olympus borne the tender babe, Hera would have cast him forth from heaven, but Zeus, as such a god well might, devised a counterplot. He broke off a fragment of the ether which surrounds the world, and made thereof a hostage against Hera's bitterness, while he gave out Dionysus into other hands; hence, in time, men said that he was reared in the thigh of Zeus, having changed the word and invented a legend, because the god was once a hostage to the goddess Hera. This god too hath prophetic power, for there is no small prophecy inspired by Bacchic frenzy; for whenever the god in his full might enters the human frame, he makes his frantic votaries foretell the future. Likewise he hath some share in Ares' rights; for oft, or ever a weapon is touched, a panic seizes an army when it is marshalled in array; and this too is a frenzy sent by Dionysus. Yet shalt thou behold him e'en on Delphi's rocks leaping o'er the cloven height, torch in hand, waving and brandishing the branch by Bacchus

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loved, yea, and through the length and breadth of Hellas. Harken to me, Pentheus; never boast that might alone doth sway the world, nor if thou think so, unsound as thy opinion is, credit thyself with any wisdom; but receive the god into thy realm, pour out libations, join the revel rout, and crown thy head. It is not Dionysus that will force chastity on women in their love; but this is what we should consider, whether chastity is part of their nature for good and all; for if it is, no really modest maid will ever fall 'mid Bacchic mysteries. Mark this: thou thyself art glad when thousands throng thy gates, and citizens extol the name of Pentheus; he too, I trow, delights in being honoured. Wherefore I and Cadmus, whom thou jeerest so, will wreath our brows with ivy and join the dance; pair of grey beards though we be, still must we take part therein; never will I for any words of thine fight against heaven. Most grievous is thy madness, nor canst thou find a charm to cure thee, albeit charms have caused thy malady.

CHORUS

Old sir, thy words do not discredit Phoebus, and thou art wise in honouring Bromius, potent deity.

CADMUS

My son, Teiresias hath given thee sound advice; dwell with us, but o'erstep not the threshold of custom; for now thou art soaring aloft, and thy wisdom is no wisdom. E'en though he be no god, as thou assertest, still say he is; be guilty of a splendid fraud, declaring him the son of Semele, that she may be thought the mother of a god, and we and all our race gain honour. Dost thou mark the awful fate of Actaeon? whom savage hounds of his own rearing rent in pieces in the meadows, because he boasted himself a better hunter than Artemis. Lest thy fate be the same, come let me crown thy head with ivy; join us in rendering homage to the god.

PENTHEUS

Touch me not away to thy Bacchic rites thyself! never try to infect me with thy foolery! Vengeance will I have on the fellow who teaches thee such senselessness. Away one of you without delay! seek yonder seat where he observes his birds, wrench it from its base with levers, turn it upside down, o'erthrowing it in utter confusion, and toss his garlands to the tempest's blast. For by so doing shall I wound him most deeply. Others of you range the city and hunt down this girl-faced stranger, who is introducing a new complaint amongst our women, and doing outrage to the marriage tie. And if haply ye catch him, bring him hither to me in chains, to be stoned to death, a bitter ending to his revelry in Thebes.

Exit PENTHEUS.

TEIRESIAS

Unhappy wretch! thou little knowest what thou art saying. Now art thou become a raving madman, even before unsound in mind. Let us away, Cadmus, and pray earnestly for him, spite of his savage temper, and likewise for the city, that the god inflict not a signal vengeance. Come, follow me with thy ivy-wreathed staff; try to support my tottering frame as I do thine, for it is unseemly that two old men should fall; but let that-pass. For we must serve the Bacchic god, the son of Zeus. Only, Cadmus, beware lest Pentheus' bring sorrow to thy house; it is not my prophetic art, but circumstances that lead me to say this; for the words of a fool are folly.

Exeunt CADMUS and TEIRESIAS.

CHORUS

O holiness, queen amongst the gods, sweeping on golden pinion o'er the earth! dost hear the words of Pentheus, dost hear his proud blaspheming Bromius, the son of Semele; first of all the blessed gods at every merry festival? His it is to rouse the revellers to dance, to laugh away dull care, and wake the flute, whene'er at banquets of the gods the luscious grape appears, or when the winecup in the feast sheds sleep on men who wear the ivy-spray. The end of all unbridled speech and lawless senselessness is misery; but the life of calm repose and the rule of reason abide unshaken and support the home; for far away in heaven though they dwell, the powers divine behold man's state. Sophistry is not wisdom, and to indulge in thoughts beyond man's ken is to shorten life; and if a man on such poor terms should aim too high, he may miss the pleasures in his reach. These, to my mind, are the ways of madmen and idiots. Oh! to make my way to Cyprus, isle of Aphrodite, where dwell the love-gods strong

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to soothe man's soul, or to Paphos, which that foreign river, never fed by rain, enriches with its hundred mouths! Oh! lead me, Bromian god, celestial guide of Bacchic pilgrims, to the hallowed slopes of Olympus, where Pierian Muses have their haunt most fair. There dwell the Graces; there is soft desire; there thy votaries may hold their revels freely. The joy of our god, the son of Zeus, is in banquets, his delight is in peace, that giver of riches and nurse divine of youth. Both to rich and poor alike hath he granted the delight of wine, that makes all pain to cease; hateful to him is every one who careth not to live the life of bliss, that lasts through days and nights of joy. True wisdom is to keep the heart and soul aloof from over-subtle wits. That which the less enlightened crowd approves and practises, will I accept.

Re-enter PENTHEUS. Enter SERVANT bringing DIONYSUS bound.

SERVANT

We are come, Pentheus, having hunted down this prey, for which thou didst send us forth; not in vain hath been our quest. We found our quarry tame; he did not fly from us, but yielded himself without a struggle; his cheek ne'er blanched, nor did his ruddy colour change, but with a smile he bade me bind and lead him away, and he waited, making my task an easy one. For very shame I said to him, "Against my will, sir stranger, do I lead thee hence, but Pentheus ordered it, who sent me hither." As for his votaries whom thou thyself didst check, seizing and binding them hand and foot in the public gaol, all these have loosed their bonds and fled into the meadows where they now are sporting, calling aloud on the Bromian god. Their chains fell off their feet of their own accord, and doors flew open without man's hand to help. Many a marvel hath this stranger brought with him to our city of Thebes; what yet remains must be thy care.

PENTHEUS

Loose his hands; for now that I have him in the net he is scarce swift enough to elude me. So, sir stranger, thou art not ill-favoured from a woman's point of view, which was thy real object in coming to Thebes; thy hair is long because thou hast never been a wrestler, flowing right down thy cheeks most wantonly; thy skin is white to help thee gain thy end, not tanned by ray of sun, but kept within the shade, as thou goest in quest of love with beauty's bait. Come, tell me first of thy race.

DIONYSUS

That needs no braggart's tongue, 'tis easily told; maybe thou knowest Tmolus by hearsay.

PENTHEUS

I know it, the range that rings the city of Sardis round.

DIONYSUS

Thence I come, Lydia is my native home.

PENTHEUS

What makes thee bring these mysteries to Hellas?

DIONYSUS

Dionysus, the son of Zeus, initiated me.

PENTHEUS

Is there a Zeus in Lydia, who begets new gods?

DIONYSUS

No, but Zeus who married Semele in Hellas.

PENTHEUS

Was it by night or in the face of day that he constrained thee?

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DIONYSUS

'Twas face to face he intrusted his mysteries to me.

PENTHEUS

Pray, what special feature stamps thy rites?

DIONYSUS

That is a secret to be hidden from the uninitiated.

PENTHEUS

What profit bring they to their votaries?

DIONYSUS

Thou must not be told, though 'tis well worth knowing.

PENTHEUS

A pretty piece of trickery, to excite my curiosity!

DIONYSUS

A man of godless life is an abomination to the rites of the god.

PENTHEUS

Thou sayest thou didst see the god clearly; what was he like?

DIONYSUS

What his fancy chose; I was not there to order this.

PENTHEUS

Another clever twist and turn of thine, without a word of answer.

DIONYSUS

He were a fool, methinks, who would utter wisdom to a fool.

PENTHEUS

Hast thou come hither first with this deity?

DIONYSUS

All foreigners already celebrate these mysteries with dances.

PENTHEUS

The reason being, they are far behind Hellenes in wisdom.

DIONYSUS

In this at least far in advance, though their customs differ.

PENTHEUS

Is it by night or day thou performest these devotions?

DIONYSUS

By night mostly; darkness lends solemnity.

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PENTHEUS

Calculated to entrap and corrupt women.

DIONYSUS

Day too for that matter may discover shame.

PENTHEUS

This vile quibbling settles thy punishment.

DIONYSUS

Brutish ignorance and godlessness will settle thine.

PENTHEUS

How bold our Bacchanal is growing! a very master in this wordy strife!

DIONYSUS

Tell me what I am to suffer; what is the grievous doom thou wilt inflict upon me?

PENTHEUS

First will I shear off thy dainty tresses.

DIONYSUS

My locks are sacred; for the god I let them grow.

PENTHEUS

Next surrender that thyrsus.

DIONYSUS

Take it from me thyself; 'tis the wand of Dionysus I am bearing.

PENTHEUS

In dungeon deep thy body will I guard.

DIONYSUS

The god himself will set me free, whene'er I list.

PENTHEUS

Perhaps he may, when thou standest amid thy Bacchanals and callest on his name.

DIONYSUS

Even now he is near me and witnesses my treatment.

PENTHEUS

Why, where is he? To my eyes he is invisible.

DIONYSUS

He is by my side; thou art a godless man and therefore dost not see him.

PENTHEUS

Seize him! the fellow scorns me and Thebes too.

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DIONYSUS

I bid you bind me not, reason addressing madness.

PENTHEUS

But I say "bind!" with better right than thou.

DIONYSUS

Thou hast no knowledge of the life thou art leading; thy very existence is now a mystery to thee.

PENTHEUS

I am Pentheus, son of Agave and Echion.

DIONYSUS

Well-named to be misfortune's mate!

PENTHEUS

Avaunt! Ho! shut him up within the horses' stalls hard by, that for light he may have pitchy gloom. Do thy dancing there, and these women whom thou bringest with thee to share thy villainies I will either sell as slaves or make their hands cease from this noisy beating of drums, and set them to work at the loom as servants of my own.

DIONYSUS

I will go; for that which fate forbids, can never befall me. For this thy mockery be sure Dionysus will exact a recompense of thee—even the god whose existence thou deniest; for thou art injuring him by haling me to prison.

Exit DIONYSUS, guarded, and PENTHEUS.

CHORUS

Hail to thee, Dirce, happy maid, daughter revered of Achelous! within thy founts thou didst receive in days gone by the babe of Zeus, what time his father caught him up into his thigh from out the deathless flame, while thus he cried: "Go rest, my Dithyrambus, there within thy father's womb; by this name, O Bacchic god, I now proclaim thee to Thebes." But thou, blest Dirce, thrustest me aside, when in thy midst I strive to hold my revels graced with crowns. Why dost thou scorn me? Why avoid me? By the clustered charm that Dionysus sheds o'er the vintage I vow there yet shall come a time when thou wilt turn thy thoughts to Bromius. What furious rage the earth-born race displays, even Pentheus sprung of a dragon of old, himself the son of earth-born Echion, a savage monster in his very mien, not made in human mould, but like some murderous giant pitted against heaven; for he means to bind me, the handmaid of Bromius, in cords forthwith, and e'en now he keeps my fellow-reveller pent within his palace, plunged in a gloomy dungeon. Dost thou mark this, O Dionysus, son of Zeus, thy prophets struggling 'gainst resistless might? Come, O king, brandishing thy golden thyrsus along the slopes of Olympus; restrain the pride of this bloodthirsty wretch! Oh! where in Nysa, haunt of beasts, or on the peaks of Corycus art thou, Dionysus, marshalling with thy wand the revellers? or haply in the thick forest depths of Olympus, where erst Orpheus with his lute gathered trees to his minstrelsy, and beasts that range the fields. Ah blest Pieria! Evius honours thee, to thee will he come with his Bacchic rites to lead the dance, and thither will he lead the circling Maenads, crossing the swift current of Axius and the Lydias, that giveth wealth and happiness to man, yea, and the father of rivers, which, as I have heard, enriches with his waters fair a land of steeds.

DIONYSUS (*Within*)

What ho! my Bacchantes, ho! hear my call, oh! hear.

CHORUS I

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Who art thou? what Evian cry is this that calls me? whence comes it?

DIONYSUS

What ho! once more I call, I the son of Semele, the child of Zeus.

CHORUS II

My master, O my master, hail!

CHORUS III

Come to our revel-band, O Bromian god.

CHORUS IV

Thou solid earth!

CHORUS V

Most awful shock!

CHORUS VI

O horror! soon will the palace of Pentheus totter and fall.

CHORUS VII

Dionysus is within this house.

CHORUS VIII

Do homage to him.

CHORUS IX

We do! I do!

CHORUS X

Did ye mark yon architrave of stone upon the columns start asunder?

CHORUS XI

Within these walls the triumph-shout of Bromius himself will rise.

DIONYSUS

Kindle the blazing torch with lightning's fire, abandon to the flames the halls of Pentheus. CHORUS XII

Ha! dost not see the flame, dost not clearly mark it at the sacred tomb of Semele, the lightning flame which long ago the hurler of the bolt left there? CHORUS XIII

Your trembling limbs prostrate, ye Maenads, low upon the ground. CHORUS XIV

Yea, for our king, the son of Zeus, is assailing and utterly confounding this house.

Enter DIONYSUS.

DIONYSUS

Are ye so stricken with terror that ye have fallen to the earth, O foreign dames? Ye saw then, it would seem, how the Bacchic god made Pentheus' halls to quake; but arise, be of good heart, compose your trembling limbs.

CHORUS

O chiefest splendour of our gladsome Bacchic sport, with what joy I see thee in my loneliness!

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DIONYSUS

Were ye cast down when I was led into the house, to be plunged into the gloomy dungeons of Pentheus?

CHORUS

Indeed I was. Who was to protect me, if thou shouldst meet with mishap? But how wert thou set free from the clutches of this godless wretch?

DIONYSUS

My own hands worked out my own salvation, easily and without trouble.

CHORUS

But did he not lash fast thy hands with cords?

DIONYSUS

There too I mocked him; he thinks he bound me, whereas he never touched or caught hold of me, but fed himself on fancy. For at the stall, to which he brought me for a gaol, he found a bull, whose legs and hoofs he straightly tied, breathing out fury the while, the sweat trickling from his body, and he biting his lips; but I from near at hand sat calmly looking on. Meantime came the Bacchic god and made the house quake, and at his mother's tomb relit the fire; but Pentheus, seeing this, thought his palace was ablaze, and hither and thither he rushed, bidding his servants bring water; but all in vain was every servant's busy toil. Thereon he let this labour be awhile, and, thinking maybe that I had escaped, rushed into the palace with his murderous sword unsheathed. Then did Bromius—so at least it seemed to me; I only tell you what I thought—made a phantom in the hall, and he rushed after it in headlong haste, and stabbed the lustrous air, thinking he wounded me. Further the Bacchic god did other outrage to him; he dashed the building to the ground, and there it lies a mass of ruin, a sight to make him rue most bitterly my bonds. At last from sheer fatigue he dropped his sword and fell fainting; for he a mortal frail, dared to wage war upon a god; but I meantime quietly left the house and am come to you, with never a thought of Pentheus. But methinks he will soon appear before the house; at least there is a sound of steps within. What will he say, I wonder, after this? Well, be his fury never so great, I will lightly bear it; for 'tis a wise man's way to school his temper into due control.

Enter PENTHEUS.

PENTHEUS

Shamefully have I been treated; that stranger, whom but now I made so fast in prison, hath escaped me. Ha! there is the man! What means this? How didst thou come forth, to appear thus in front of my palace?

DIONYSUS

Stay where thou art; and moderate thy fury.

PENTHEUS

How is it thou hast escaped thy fetters and art at large?

DIONYSUS

Did I not say, or didst thou not hear me, "There is one will loose me."

PENTHEUS

Who was it? there is always something strange in what thou sayest.

DIONYSUS

He who makes the clustering vine to grow for man.

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PENTHEUS

[I scorn him and his vines!]

DIONYSUS

A fine taunt indeed thou hurlest here at Dionysus!

PENTHEUS (*To his servants*)

Bar every tower that hems us in, I order you.

DIONYSUS

What use? Cannot gods pass even over walls?

PENTHEUS

How wise thou art, except where thy wisdom is needed!

DIONYSUS

Where most 'tis needed, there am I most wise. But first listen to yonder messenger and hear what he says; he comes from the hills with tidings for thee; and I will await thy pleasure, nor seek to fly.

Enter MESSENGER.

MESSENGER

Pentheus, ruler of this realm of Thebes! I am come from Cithaeron, where the dazzling flakes of pure white snow ne'er cease to fall.

PENTHEUS

What urgent news dost bring me?

MESSENGER

I have seen, O king, those frantic Bacchanals, who darted in frenzy from this land with bare white feet, and I am come to tell thee and the city the wondrous deeds they do, deeds passing strange. But I fain would hear, whether I am freely to tell all I saw there, or shorten my story; for I fear thy hasty temper, sire, thy sudden bursts of wrath and more than princely rage.

PENTHEUS

Say on, for thou shalt go unpunished by me in all respects; for to be angered with the upright is wrong. The direr thy tale about the Bacchantes, the heavier punishment will I inflict on this fellow who brought his secret arts amongst our women.

MESSENGER

I was just driving the herds of kine to a ridge of the hill as I fed them, as the sun shot forth his rays and made the earth grow warm; when lo! I see three revel-bands of women; Autonoe was chief of one, thy mother Agave of the second, while Ino's was the third. There they lay asleep, all tired out; some were resting on branches of the pine, others had laid their heads in careless ease on oak-leaves piled upon the ground, observing all modesty; not, as thou sayest, seeking to gratify their lusts alone amid the woods, by wine and soft flute-music maddened.

Anon in their midst thy mother uprose and cried aloud to wake them from their sleep, when she heard the lowing of my horned kine. And up they started to their feet, brushing from their eyes sleep's quickening dew, a wondrous sight of grace and modesty, young and old and maidens yet unwed. First o'er their shoulders they let stream their hair; then all did gird their fawn-skins up, who hitherto had left the fastenings loose, girdling the dappled hides with snakes that licked their cheeks. Others fondled in their arms gazelles or savage whelps of

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wolves, and suckled them—young mothers these with babes at home, whose breasts were still full of milk; crowns they wore of ivy or of oak or blossoming convolvulus. And one took her thyrsus and struck it into the earth, and forth there gushed a limpid spring; and another plunged her wand into the lap of earth and there the god sent up a fount of wine; and all who wished for draughts of milk had but to scratch the soil with their finger—tips and there they had it in abundance, while from every ivy—wreathed staff sweet rills of honey trickled.

Hadst thou been there and seen this, thou wouldst have turned to pray to the god, whom now thou dost disparage. Anon we herdsmen and shepherds met to discuss their strange and wondrous doings; then one, who wandereth oft to town and hath a trick of speech, made harangue in the midst, "O ye who dwell upon the hallowed mountain—terraces! shall we chase Agave, mother of Pentheus, from her Bacchic rites, and thereby do our prince a service?" We liked his speech, and placed ourselves in hidden ambush among the leafy thickets; they at the appointed time began to wave the thyrsus for their Bacchic rites, calling on Iacchus, the Bromian god, the son of Zeus, in united chorus, and the whole mount and the wild creatures re—echoed their cry; all nature stirred as they rushed on. Now Agave chanced to come springing near me, so up I leapt from out my ambush where I lay concealed, meaning to seize her. But she cried out, "What ho! my nimble hounds, here are men upon our track; but follow me, ay, follow, with the thyrsus in your hand for weapon." Thereat we fled, to escape being torn in pieces by the Bacchantes; but they, with hands that bore no weapon of steel, attacked our cattle as they browsed. Then wouldst thou have seen Agave mastering some sleek lowing calf, while others rent the heifers limb from limb. Before thy eyes there would have been hurling of ribs and hoofs this way and that; and strips of flesh, all blood—bedabbled, dripped as they hung from the pine—branches. Wild bulls, that glared but now with rage along their horns, found themselves tripped up, dragged down to earth by countless maidens' hands. The flesh upon their limbs was stripped therefrom quicker than thou couldst have closed thy royal eye—lids. Then off they sped, like birds that skim the air, to the plains beneath the hills, which bear a fruitful harvest for Thebes beside the waters of Asopus; to Hysiae and Erythrae, hamlets 'neath Cithaeron's peak, with fell intent, swooping on everything and scattering all pellmell; and they would snatch children from their homes; but all that they placed upon their shoulders, abode there firmly without being tied, and fell not to the dusky earth, not even brass or iron; and on their hair they carried fire and it burnt them not; but the country—folk rushed to arms, furious at being pillaged by Bacchanals; whereon ensued, O king, this wondrous spectacle. For though the ironshod dart would draw no blood from them, they with the thyrsus, which they hurled, caused many a wound and put their foes to utter rout, women chasing men, by some god's intervention. Then they returned to the place whence they had started, even to the springs the god had made to spout for them; and there washed off the blood, while serpents with their tongues were licking clean each gout from their cheeks. Wherefore, my lord and master, receive this deity, whoe'er he be, within the city; for, great as he is in all else, I have likewise heard men say, 'twas he that gave the vine to man, sorrow's antidote. Take wine away and Cypris flies, and every other human joy is dead.

CHORUS

Though I fear to speak my mind with freedom in the presence of my king, still must I utter this; Dionysus yields to no deity in might.

PENTHEUS

Already, look you! the presumption of these Bacchantes is upon us, swift as fire, a sad disgrace in the eyes of all Hellas. No time for hesitation now! away to the Electra gate! order a muster of all my men—at—arms, of those that mount fleet steeds, of all who brandish light bucklers, of archers too that make the bowstring twang; for I will march against the Bacchanals. By Heaven I this passes all, if we are to be thus treated by women.

Exit MESSENGER.

DIONYSUS

Still obdurate, O Pentheus, after hearing my words! In spite of all the evil treatment I am enduring from thee, still I warn thee of the sin of bearing arms against a god, and bid thee cease; for Bromius will not endure thy driving his votaries from the mountains where they revel.

PENTHEUS

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A truce to thy preaching to me! thou hast escaped thy bonds, preserve thy liberty; else will I renew thy punishment.

DIONYSUS

I would rather do him sacrifice than in a fury kick against the pricks; thou a mortal, he a god.

PENTHEUS

Sacrifice! that will I, by setting afoot a wholesale slaughter of women 'mid Cithaeron's glens, as they deserve.

DIONYSUS

Ye will all be put to flight—a shameful thing that they with the Bacchic thyrsus should rout your mail-clad warriors.

PENTHEUS

I find this stranger a troublesome foe to encounter; doing or suffering he is alike irrepressible.

DIONYSUS

Friend, there is still a way to compose this bitterness.

PENTHEUS

Say how; am I to serve my own servants?

DIONYSUS

I will bring the women hither without weapons.

PENTHEUS

Ha! ha! this is some crafty scheme of thine against me.

DIONYSUS

What kind of scheme, if by my craft I purpose to save thee?

PENTHEUS

You have combined with them to form this plot, that your revels may on for ever.

DIONYSUS

Nay, but this is the compact I made with the god; be sure of that.

PENTHEUS (*Preparing to start forth*)

Bring forth my arms. Not another word from thee!

DIONYSUS

Ha! wouldst thou see them seated on the hills?

PENTHEUS

Of all things, yes! I would give untold sums for that.

DIONYSUS

Why this sudden, strong desire?

PENTHEUS

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'Twill be a bitter sight, if I find them drunk with wine.

DIONYSUS

And would that be a pleasant sight which will prove bitter to thee?

PENTHEUS

Believe me, yes! beneath the fir-trees as I sit in silence.

DIONYSUS

Nay, they will track thee, though thou come secretly.

PENTHEUS

Well, I will go openly; thou wert right to say so.

DIONYSUS

Am I to be thy guide? wilt thou essay the road?

PENTHEUS

Lead on with all speed, I grudge thee all delay.

DIONYSUS

Array thee then in robes of fine linen.

PENTHEUS

Why so? Am I to enlist among women after being a man?

DIONYSUS

They may kill thee, if thou show thy manhood there.

PENTHEUS

Well said! Thou hast given me a taste of thy wit already.

DIONYSUS

Dionysus schooled me in this lore.

PENTHEUS

How am I to carry out thy wholesome advice?

DIONYSUS

Myself will enter thy palace and robe thee.

PENTHEUS

What is the robe to be? a woman's? Nay, I am ashamed.

DIONYSUS

Thy eagerness to see the Maenads goes no further.

PENTHEUS

But what dress dost say thou wilt robe me in?

DIONYSUS

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Upon thy head will I make thy hair grow long.

PENTHEUS

Describe my costume further.

DIONYSUS

Thou wilt wear a robe reaching to thy feet; and on thy head shall be a snood.

PENTHEUS

Wilt add aught else to my attire?

DIONYSUS

A thyrsus in thy hand, and a dappled fawnskin.

PENTHEUS

I can never put on woman's dress.

DIONYSUS

Then wilt thou cause bloodshed by coming to blows with the Bacchanals.

PENTHEUS

Thou art right. Best go spy upon them first.

DIONYSUS

Well, e'en that is wiser than by evil means to follow evil ends.

PENTHEUS

But how shall I pass through the city of the Cadmeans unseen?

DIONYSUS

We will go by unfrequented paths. I will lead the way.

PENTHEUS

Anything rather than that the Bacchantes should laugh at me.

DIONYSUS

We will enter the palace and consider the proper steps.

PENTHEUS

Thou hast my leave. I am all readiness. I will enter, prepared to set out either sword in hand or following thy advice.

Exit PENTHEUS.

DIONYSUS

Women! our prize is nearly in the net. Soon shall he reach the Bacchanals, and there pay forfeit with his life. O Dionysus! now 'tis thine to act, for thou art not far away; let us take vengeance on him. First drive him mad by fixing in his soul a wayward frenzy; for never, whilst his senses are his own, will he consent to don a woman's dress; but when his mind is gone astray he will put it on. And fain would I make him a laughing-stock to Thebes as he is led in woman's dress through the city, after those threats with which he menaced me before. But I will go to array Pentheus in those robes which he shall wear when he sets out for Hades' halls, a victim to his own mother's fury; so shall he recognize Dionysus, the son of Zeus, who proves himself at last a god most

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terrible, for all his gentleness to man.
Exit DIONYSUS.

CHORUS

Will this white foot e'er join the night-long dance? what time in Bacchic ecstasy I toss my neck to heaven's dewy breath, like a fawn, that gambols 'mid the meadow's green delights, when she hath escaped the fearful chase, clear of the watchers, o'er the woven nets; while the huntsman, with loud halloo, harks on his hounds' full cry, and she with laboured breath at lightning speed bounds o'er the level water-meadows, glad to be far from man amid the foliage of the bosky grove. What is true wisdom, or what fairer boon has heaven placed in mortals' reach, than to gain the mastery o'er a fallen foe? What is fair is dear for aye. Though slow be its advance, yet surely moves the power of the gods, correcting those mortal wights, that court a senseless pride, or, in the madness of their fancy, disregard the gods. Subtly they lie in wait, through the long march of time, and so hunt down the godless man. For it is never right in theory or in practice to o'erride the law of custom. This is a maxim cheaply bought: whatever comes of God, or in time's long annals, has grown into a law upon a natural basis, this is sovereign. What is true wisdom, or what fairer boon has heaven placed in mortals' reach, than to gain the mastery o'er a fallen foe? What is fair is dear for aye. Happy is he who hath escaped the wave from out the sea, and reached the haven; and happy he who hath triumphed o'er his troubles; though one surpasses another in wealth and power; yet there be myriad hopes for all the myriad minds; some end in happiness for man, and others come to naught; but him, whose life from day to day is blest, I deem a happy man.

Enter DIONYSUS.

DIONYSUS

Ho! Pentheus, thou that art so cager to see what is forbidden, and to show thy zeal in an unworthy cause, come forth before the palace, let me see thee clad as a woman in frenzied Bacchante's dress, to spy upon thy own mother and her company.

Enter PENTHEUS.

Yes, thou resemblest closely a daughter of Cadmus.

PENTHEUS

Of a truth I seem to see two suns, and two towns of Thebes, our seven-gated city; and thou, methinks, art a bull going before to guide me, and on thy head a pair of horns have grown. Wert thou really once a brute beast? Thon hast at any rate the appearance of a bull.

DIONYSUS

The god attends us, ungracious heretofore, but now our sworn friend; and now thine eyes behold the things they should.

PENTHEUS

Pray, what do I resemble? Is not mine the carriage of Ino, or Agave my own mother?

DIONYSUS

In seeing thee, I seem to see them in person. But this tress is straying from its place, no longer as I bound it 'neath the snood.

PENTHEUS

I disarranged it from its place as I tossed it to and fro within my chamber, in Bacchic ecstasy.

DIONYSUS

Well, I will rearrange it, since to tend thee is my care; hold up thy head.

PENTHEUS

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Come, put it straight; for on thee do I depend.

DIONYSUS

Thy girdle is loose, and the folds of thy dress do not hang evenly below thy ankles.

PENTHEUS

I agree to that as regards the right side, but on the other my dress hangs straight with my foot.

DIONYSUS

Surely thou wilt rank me first among thy friends, when contrary to thy expectation thou findest the Bacchantes virtuous.

PENTHEUS

Shall I hold the thyrsus in the right or left hand to look most like a Bacchanal?

DIONYSUS

Hold it in thy right hand, and step out with thy right foot; thy change of mind compels thy praise.

PENTHEUS

Shall I be able to carry on my shoulders Cithaeron's glens, the Bacchanals and all?

DIONYSUS

Yes, if so thou wilt; for though thy mind was erst diseased, 'tis now just as it should be.

PENTHEUS

Shall we take levers, or with my hands can I uproot it, thrusting arm or shoulder 'neath its peaks?

DIONYSUS

No, no! destroy not the seats of the Nymphs and the haunts of Pan, the place of his piping.

PENTHEUS

Well said! Women must not be mastered by brute force; amid the pines will I conceal myself.

DIONYSUS

Thou shalt hide thee in the place that fate appoints, coming by stealth to spy upon the Bacchanals.

PENTHEUS

Why, methinks they are already caught in the pleasant snares of dalliance, like birds amid the brakes.

DIONYSUS

Set out with watchful heed then for this very purpose; maybe thou wilt catch them, if thou be not first caught thyself.

PENTHEUS

Conduct me through the very heart of Thebes, for I am the only man among them bold enough to do this deed.

DIONYSUS

Thou alone bearest thy country's burden, thou and none other; wherefore there await thee such struggles as needs must. Follow me, for I will guide thee safely thither; another shall bring thee thence.

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PENTHEUS

My mother maybe.

DIONYSUS

For every eye to see.

PENTHEUS

My very purpose in going.

DIONYSUS

Thou shalt be carried back,

PENTHEUS

What luxury

DIONYSUS

In thy mother's arms.

PENTHEUS

Thou wilt e'en force me into luxury.

DIONYSUS

Yes, to luxury such as this.

PENTHEUS

Truly, the task I am undertaking deserves it.
Exit PENTHEUS.

DIONYSUS

Strange, ah! strange is thy career, leading to scenes of woe so strange, that thou shalt achieve a fame that towers to heaven. Stretch forth thy hands, Agave, and ye her sisters, daughters of Cadmus; mighty is the strife to which I am bringing the youthful king, and the victory shall rest with me and Bromius; all else the event will show.

Exit DIONYSUS.

CHORUS

To the hills! to the hills! fleet hounds of madness, where the daughters of Cadmus hold their revels, goad them into wild fury against the man disguised in woman's dress, a frenzied spy upon the Maenads. First shall his mother mark him as he peers from some smooth rock or riven tree, and thus to the Maenads she will call, "Who is this of Cadmus' sons comes hasting to the mount, to the mountain away, to spy on us, my Bacchanals? Whose child can he be? For he was never born of woman's blood; but from some lioness maybe or Libyan Gorgon is he sprung." Let justice appear and show herself, sword in hand, to plunge it through and through the throat of the godless, lawless, impious son of Echion, earth's monstrous child! who with wicked heart and lawless rage, with mad intent and frantic purpose, sets out to meddle with thy holy rites, and with thy mother's, Bacchic god, thinking with his weak arm to master might as masterless as thine. This is the life that saves all pain, if a man confine his thoughts to human themes, as is his mortal nature, making no pretence where heaven is concerned. I envy not deep subtleties; far other joys have I, in tracking out great truths writ clear from all eternity, that a man should live his life by day and night in purity and holiness, striving toward a noble goal, and should honour the gods by casting from him each ordinance that lies outside the pale of right. Let justice show herself, advancing sword in hand to plunge it through and through the throat of Echion's son, that godless, lawless, and abandoned child of earth! Appear, O Bacchus, to our eyes as a bull or serpent with a hundred heads, or take the shape of a

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lion breathing flame! Oh! come, and with a mocking smile cast the deadly noose about the hunter of thy Bacchanals, e'en as he swoops upon the Maenads gathered yonder.

Enter SECOND MESSENGER.

SECOND MESSENGER

O house, so prosperous once through Hellas long ago, home of the old Sidonian prince, who sowed the serpent's crop of earth-born men, how do I mourn thee! slave though I be, yet still the sorrows of his master touch a good slave's heart.

CHORUS

How now? Hast thou fresh tidings of the Bacchantes?

SECOND MESSENGER

Pentheus, Echion's son is dead.

CHORUS

Bromius, my king! now art thou appearing in thy might divine.

SECOND MESSENGER

Ha! what is it thou sayest? art thou glad, woman, at my master's misfortunes?

CHORUS

A stranger I, and in foreign tongue I express my joy, for now no more do I cower in terror of the chain.

SECOND MESSENGER

Dost think Thebes so poor in men?[*] [* Probably the whole of one iambic line with part of another is here lost.]

CHORUS

'Tis Dionysus, Dionysus, not Thebes that lords it over me.

SECOND MESSENGER

All can I pardon thee save this; to exult o'er hopeless suffering is sorry conduct, dames.

CHORUS

Tell me, oh! tell me how he died, that villain scheming villainy!

SECOND MESSENGER

Soon as we had left the homesteads of this Theban land and had crossed the streams of Asopus, we began to breast Cithaeron's heights, Pentheus and I, for I went with my master, and the stranger too, who was to guide us to the scene. First then we sat us down in a grassy glen, carefully silencing each footfall and whispered breath, to see without being seen. Now there was a dell walled in by rocks, with rills to water it, and shady pines o'erhead; there were the Maenads seated, busied with joyous toils. Some were wreathing afresh the drooping thyrsus with curling ivy-sprays; others, like colts let loose from the carved chariot-yoke, were answering each other in hymns of Bacchic rapture. But Pentheus, son of sorrow, seeing not the women gathered there, exclaimed, "Sir stranger, from where I stand, I cannot clearly see the mock Bacchantes; but I will climb a hillock or a soaring pine whence to see clearly the shameful doings of the Bacchanals." Then and there I saw the stranger work a miracle; for catching a lofty fir-branch by the very end he drew it downward to the dusky earth, lower yet and ever lower; and like a bow it bent, or rounded wheel, whose curving circle grows complete, as chalk and line describe it; e'en so the stranger drew down the mountain-branch between his hands, bending it to earth, by more than human agency. And when he had seated Pentheus aloft on the pine branches, he let them slip through his

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hands gently, careful not to shake him from his seat. Up soared the branch straight into the air above, with my master perched thereon, seen by the Maenads better far than he saw them; for scarce was he beheld upon his lofty throne, when the stranger disappeared, while from the sky there came a voice, 'twould seem, by Dionysus uttered—

"Maidens, I bring the man who tried to mock you and me and my mystic rites; take vengeance on him." And as he spake he raised 'twixt heaven and earth a dazzling column of awful flame. Hushed grew the sky, and still hung each leaf throughout the grassy glen, nor couldst thou have heard one creature cry. But they, not sure of the voice they heard, sprang up and peered all round; then once again his bidding came; and when the daughters of Cadmus knew it was the Bacchic god in very truth that called, swift as doves they dirted off in cager haste, his mother Agave and her sisters dear and all the Bacchanals; through torrent glen, o'er boulders huge they bounded on, inspired with madness by the god. Soon as they saw my master perched upon the fir, they set to hurling stones at him with all their might, mounting a commanding eminence, and with pine-branches he was pelted as with darts; and others shot their wands through the air at Pentheus, their hapless target, but all to no purpose. For there he sat beyond the reach of their hot endeavours, a helpless, hopeless victim. At last they rent off limbs from oaks and were for prising up the roots with levers not of iron. But when they still could make no end to all their toil, Agave cried: "Come stand around, and grip the sapling trunk, my Bacchanals! that we may catch the beast that sits thereon, lest he divulge the secrets of our god's religion."

Then were a thousand hands laid on the fir, and from the ground they tore it up, while he from his seat aloft came tumbling to the ground with lamentations long and loud, e'en Pentheus; for well he knew his hour was come. His mother first, a priestess for the nonce, began the bloody deed and fell upon him; whereon he tore the snood from off his hair, that hapless Agave might recognize and spare him, crying as he touched her cheek, "O mother! it is I, thy own son Pentheus, the child thou didst bear in Echion's halls; have pity on me, mother dear! oh! do not for any sin of mine slay thy own son."

But she, the while, with foaming mouth and wildly rolling eyes, bereft of reason as she was, heeded him not; for the god possessed her. And she caught his left hand in her grip, and planting her foot upon her victim's trunk she tore the shoulder from its socket, not of her own strength, but the god made it an easy task to her hands; and Ino set to work upon the other side, rending the flesh with Autonoe and all the eager host of Bacchanals; and one united cry arose, the victim's groans while yet he breathed, and their triumphant shouts. One would make an arm her prey, another a foot with the sandal on it; and his ribs were stripped of flesh by their rending nails; and each one with blood-dabbled hands was tossing Pentheus' limbs about. Scattered lies his corpse, part beneath the rugged rocks, and part amid the deep dark woods, no easy task to find; but his poor head hath his mother made her own, and fixing it upon the point of a thyrsus, as it had been a mountain lion's, she bears it through the midst of Cithaeron, having left her sisters with the Maenads at their rites. And she is entering these walls exulting in her hunting fraught with woe, calling on the Bacchic god her fellow-hunter who had helped her to triumph in a chase, where her only prize was tears.

But I will get me hence, away from this piteous scene, before Agave reach the palace. To my mind self-restraint and reverence for the things of God point alike the best and wisest course for all mortals who pursue them.

Exit SECOND MESSENGER.

CHORUS

Come, let us exalt our Bacchic god in choral strain, let us loudly chant the fall of Pentheus from the serpent sprung, who assumed a woman's dress and took the fair Bacchic wand, sure pledge of death, with a bull to guide him to his doom. O ye Bacchanals of Thebes! glorious is the triumph ye have achieved, ending in sorrow and tears. 'Tis a noble enterprise to dabble the hand in the blood of a son till it drips. But hist! I see Agave, the mother of Pentheus, with wild rolling eye hastening to the house; welcome the revellers of the Bacchic god.

Enter AGAVE.

AGAVE

Ye Bacchanals from Asia

CHORUS

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Why dost thou rouse me? why?

AGAVE

From the hills I am bringing to my home a tendril freshly-culled, glad guerdon-of the chase.

CHORUS

I see it, and I will welcome thee unto our revels. All hail!

AGAVE

I caught him with never a snare, this lion's whelp, as ye may see.

CHORUS

From what desert lair?

AGAVE

Cithaeron-

CHORUS

Yes, Cithaeron?

AGAVE

Was his death.

CHORUS

Who was it gave the first blow?

AGAVE

Mine that privilege; "Happy Agave!" they call me 'mid our revellers.

CHORUS

Who did the rest?

AGAVE

Cadmus-

CHORUS

What of him?

AGAVE

His daughters struck the monster after me; yes, after me.

CHORUS

Fortune smiled upon thy hunting here.

AGAVE

Come, share the banquet.

CHORUS

Share? ah I what?

AGAVE

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'Tis but a tender whelp, the down just sprouting on its cheek beneath a crest of failing hair.

CHORUS

The hair is like some wild creature's.

AGAVE

The Bacchic god, a hunter skilled, roused his Maenads to pursue this quarry skilfully.

CHORUS

Yea, our king is a hunter indeed.

AGAVE

Dost approve?

CHORUS

Of course I do.

AGAVE

Soon shall the race of Cadmus—

CHORUS

And Pentheus, her own son, shall to his mother—

AGAVE

Offer praise for this her quarry of the lion's brood.

CHORUS

Quarry strange!

AGAVE

And strangely caught.

CHORUS

Dost thou exult?

AGAVE

Right glad am I to have achieved a great and glorious triumph for my land that all can see.

CHORUS

Alas for thee! show to the folk the booty thou hast won and art bringing hither.

AGAVE

All ye who dwell in fair fenced Thebes, draw near that ye may see the fierce wild beast that we daughters of Cadmus made our prey, not with the thong—thrown darts of Thessaly, nor yet with snares, but with our fingers fair. Ought men idly to boast and get them armourers' weapons? when we with these our hands have caught this prey and torn the monster limb from limb? Where is my aged sire? let him approach. And where is Pentheus, my son? Let him bring a ladder and raise it against the house to nail up on the gables this lion's head, my booty from the chase.

Enter CADMUS.

CADMUS

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Follow me, servants to the palace—front, with your sad burden in your arms, ay, follow, with the corpse of Pentheus, which after long weary search I found, as ye see it, torn to pieces amid Cithaeron's glens, and am bringing hither; no two pieces did I find together, as they lay scattered through the trackless wood. For I heard what awful deeds one of my daughters had done, just as I entered the city—walls with old Teiresias returning from the Bacchanals; so I turned again unto the and bring from thence my son who was slain by Maenads. There I saw Autonoe, that bare Actaeon on a day to Aristaeus, and Ino with her, still ranging the oak—groves in their unhappy frenzy; but one told me that that Agave, was rushing wildly hither, nor was it idly said, for there I see her, sight of woe!

AGAVE

Father, loudly mayst thou boast, that the daughters thou hast begotten are far the best of mortal race; of one and all I speak, though chiefly of myself, who left my shuttle at the loom for nobler enterprise, even to hunt savage beasts with my hands; and in my arms I bring my prize, as thou seest, that it may be nailed up on thy palace—wall; take it, father, in thy had and proud of my hunting, call thy friends to a banquet; for blest art thou, ah! doubly blest in these our gallant exploits.

CADMUS

O grief that has no bounds, too cruel for mortal eye! 'tis murder ye have done with your hapless hands. Fair is the victim thou hast offered to the gods, inviting me and my Thebans to the feast Ah, woe is me first for thy sorrows, then for mine. What ruin the god, the Bromian king, hath brought on us, just maybe, but too severe, seeing he is our kinsman!

AGAVE

How peevish old age makes men! what sullen looks! Oh, may my son follow in his mother's footsteps and be as lucky in his hunting, when he goes quest of game in company with Theban youths! But he can do naught but wage war with gods. Father, 'tis thy duty to warn him. Who will summon him hither to my sight to witness my happiness?

CADMUS

Alas for you! alas! Terrible will be your grief when ye are conscious of your deeds; could ye re. for ever till life's close in your present state, ye would not, spite of ruined bliss, appear so cursed with woe.

AGAVE

Why? what is faulty bere? what here for sorrow?

CADMUS

First let thine eye look up to heaven.

AGAVE See! I do so. Why dost thou suggest my looking thereupon?

CADMUS

Is it still the same, or dost think there's any change?

AGAVE

'Tis brighter than it was, and dearer too.

CADMUS

Is there still that wild unrest within thy soul?

AGAVE

I know not what thou sayest now; yet methinks my brain is clearing, and my former frenzy passed

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away.

CADMUS

Canst understand, and give distinct replies?

AGAVE

Father, how completely I forget all we said before!

CADMUS

To what house wert thou brought with marriage-hymns?

AGAVE

Thou didst give me to earthborn Echion, as men call him.

CADMUS

What child was born thy husband in his halls?

AGAVE

Pentheus, of my union with his father.

CADMUS

What head is that thou barest in thy arms?

AGAVE

A lion's; at least they said so, who hunted it.

CADMUS

Consider it aright; 'tis no great task to look at it.

AGAVE

Ah! what do I see? what is this I am carrying in my hands?

CADMUS

Look closely at it; make thy knowledge more certain.

AGAVE

Ah, 'woe is me! O sight of awful sorrow!

CADMUS

Dost think it like a lion's head?

AGAVE

Ah no! 'tis Pentheus' head which I his unhappy mother hold.

CADMUS

Bemoaned by me, or ever thou didst recognize him.

AGAVE

Who slew him? How came he into my hands?

CADMUS

MEDEA, HECUBA, HIPPOLYTUS, THE TROJAN WOMEN, THE BACCHANTES

O piteous truth! how ill-timed thy presence here!

AGAVE

Speak; my bosom throbs at this suspense.

CADMUS

'Twas thou didst slay him, thou and thy sisters.

AGAVE

Where died he? in the house or where?

CADMUS

On the very spot where hounds of yore rent Actaeon in pieces.

AGAVE

Why went he, wretched youth! to Cithaeron?

CADMUS

He would go and mock the god and thy Bacchic rites.

AGAVE

But how was it we had journeyed thither?

CADMUS

Ye were distraught; the whole city had the Bacchic frenzy.

AGAVE

'Twas Dionysus proved our ruin; now I see it all.

CADMUS

Yes, for the slight he suffered; ye would not believe in his godhead.

AGAVE

Father, where is my dear child's corpse?

CADMUS

With toil I searched it out and am bringing it myself.

AGAVE

Is it all fitted limb to limb in seemly wise? CADMUS [*] [* One line, or maybe more, is missing]

AGAVE

But what had Pentheus to do with folly of mine?

CADMUS

He was like you in refusing homage to the god, who, therefore, hath involved you all in one common ruin, you and him alike, to destroy this house and me, forasmuch as I, that had no sons, behold this youth, the fruit of thy womb, unhappy mother! foully and most shamefully slain. To thee, my child, our house looked up, to thee my daughter's son, the stay of my palace, inspiring the city with awe; none caring to flout the old king when he saw thee by, for he would get his deserts. But now shall I be cast out dishonoured from my halls, Cadmus the great, who sowed the crop of Theban seed and reaped that goodly harvest. O beloved child! dead though thou art,

MEDEA, HECUBA, HIPPOLYTUS, THE TROJAN WOMEN, THE BACCHANTES

thou still shalt be counted by me amongst my own dear children; no more wilt thou lay thy hand upon my chin in fond embrace, my child, and calling on thy mother's sire demand, "Who wrongs thee or dishonours thee, old sire? who vexes thy heart, a thorn within thy side? Speak, that I may punish thy oppressor, father mine!"

But now am I in sorrow plunged, and woe is thee, and woe thy mother and her suffering sisters too! Ah! if there be any man that scorns the gods, let him well mark this prince's death and then believe in them.

CHORUS

Cadmus, I am sorry for thy fate; for though thy daughter's child hath met but his deserts, 'tis bitter grief to thee.

AGAVE

O father, thou seest how sadly my fortune is changed.[*] [* After this a very large lacuna occurs in the MS.]

DIONYSUS Thou shalt be changed into a serpent; and thy wife Harmonia, Ares' child, whom thou in thy human life didst wed, shall change her nature for a snake's, and take its form. With her shalt thou, as leader of barbarian tribes, drive thy team of steers, so saith an oracle of Zeus; and many a city shalt thou sack with an army numberless; but in the day they plunder the oracle of Loxias, shall they rue their homeward march; but thee and Harmonia will Ares rescue, and set thee to live henceforth in the land of the blessed. This do I declare, I Dionysus, son of no mortal father but of Zeus. Had ye learnt wisdom when ye would not, ye would now be happy with the son of Zeus for your ally.

AGAVE

O Dionysus! we have sinned; thy pardon we implore.

DIONYSUS

Too late have ye learnt to know me; ye knew me not at the proper time.

AGAVE

We recognize our error; but thou art too revengeful.

DIONYSUS

Yea, for I, though a god, was slighted by you.

AGAVE

Gods should not let their passion sink to man's level.

DIONYSUS

Long ago my father Zeus ordained it thus.

AGAVE

Alas! my aged sire, our doom is fixed; 'tis woful exile.

DIONYSUS

Why then delay the inevitable? Exit.

CADMUS

Daughter, to what an awful pass are we now come, thou too, poor child, and thy sisters, while I alas! in my old age must seek barbarian shores, to sojourn there; but the oracle declares that I shall yet lead an army, half-barbarian, half-Hellene, to Hellas; and in serpent's shape shall I carry my wife Harmonia, the daughter of Ares, transformed like me to a savage snake, against the altars and tombs of Hellas at the head of my troops; nor

MEDEA, HECUBA, HIPPOLYTUS, THE TROJAN WOMEN, THE BACCHANTES

shall I ever cease from my woes, ah me! nor ever cross the downward stream of Acheron and be at rest.

AGAVE

Father, I shall be parted from thee and exiled.

CADMUS

Alas! my child, why fling thy arms around me, as a snowy cygnet folds its wings about the frail old swan?

AGAVE

Whither can I turn, an exile from my country?

CADMUS

I know not, my daughter; small help is thy father now.

AGAVE

Farewell, my home! farewell, my native city! with sorrow I am leaving thee, an exile from my bridal bower.

CADMUS

Go, daughter, to the house of Aristaeus, [*] [* Another large lacuna follows.]

AGAVE

Father, I mourn for thee.

CADMUS

And I for thee, my child; for thy sisters too I shed a tear.

AGAVE

Ah! terribly was king Dionysus bringing this outrage on thy house.

CADMUS

Yea, for he suffered insults dire from you, his name receiving no meed of honour in Thebes.

AGAVE

Farewell, father mine!

CADMUS

Farewell, my hapless daughter and yet thou scarce canst reach that bourn.

AGAVE

Oh! lead me, guide me to the place where I shall find my sisters, sharers in my exile to their sorrow! Oh! to reach a spot where cursed Cithaeron ne'er shall see me more nor I Cithaeron with mine eyes; where no memorial of the thyrsus is set up! Be they to other Bacchantes dear!

CHORUS

Many are the forms the heavenly will assumes, and many a thing the gods fulfil contrary to all hope; that which was expected is not brought to pass, while for the unlooked-for Heaven finds out a way. E'en such hath been the issue here.

Exeunt OMNES.

THE END