

MEDEA

by Seneca (4 B.C. – 65 A.D.)

(459) **Jason:** How cruel a fate

[...] faithful to my wife, I die. Alive,

For the children's sake, I must betray the mother.

It's dreadful either way, but I choose the lesser evil

[...] One does those things one hates. But how to explain?

What words will serve to beg her pardon?

(542) **Medea:** Let us flee...

Jason: And if they unite, what can we do against both?

Medea: (laughing) Those two, and Cholchis, and Aeetes also.

And the Scythians, too. The Pelasgians as well.

Together we will destroy them all.

Jason: You jest.

Medea: You think so? [...] You are not desperate, as I am.

(559) **Medea:** I ask

For my children. Give me my children. You can have new
Sons and daughters. I cannot.

Jason: I wish I could do that,

For your sake. But as a father, I have to think
What's best for them.

Remember, I love them.

Sooner would I part with life itself
Than with my sons.

Medea: (aside) Thus, he loves his sons?

How good to know, for this is the tender place

Where I shall wound him, the perfect spot to strike.

I'll beg him for this one, quite modest favor.

(581) **Medea:** Gone like that? He's forgotten who I am

And what I've done! But I shall remind him.

(to herself) Remember what you were and what you've done,

How bloody your hands already, that cannot be further

Stained. There is a gift of shamelessness

That few enjoy, but I am shameless, fearless

And, if I have to be, absolutely heartless.

(599) **Chorus:** Nothing in nature [...] terrifies as a woman's hatred.

(611) You cannot reason with Nature's rages.

You cannot argue with women either,

When the fit is upon them. They seem to enjoy

Destroying themselves.

(691-758) The nurse narrates Medea's magic.

Fire, bubbles, serpents, she shrieks, darkness causes her eyes to glitter,
she prays to horror, smoke, sulphur, curses, she blossoms,
looks much younger, and shines with a beauty that terrifies more
than pleases, lizards, poisons, deadly flowers, powders, alive birds,
You don't believe in these things? Civilized, Greeks, you dismiss these
Primitive practices, superstitions from far away.
Agony has its own laws. Ice can burn,
As horses dying of thirst can try to drink fire.

(759-859) **Medea:** I invoke the dead, demand they rouse themselves

[...] Gods of the underworld [...] hear me

As I call from my abyss to yours.

[...] Hecate, hear me!

[...] I offer blood for blood, cutting myself.

(868) **First Chorister:** What was that all about?

Some odd and primitive rite,

But nothing for us to fear

Who don't share her superstitions.

(896) **Messenger:** Disaster! Catastrophe! Ruin!

(902) What is there to tell of such absolute ruin?

The fire rages, the house is fallen, the city

Burns and quakes with terror.

First Chorister: Let water be brought!

Messenger: But that is the trouble! Water feeds these flames,

And they only burn the brighter Nature's undone.

(916) **Medea:** That love I felt

For Jason is not yet spent. It has turned to hatred

And seethes like lava.

(928) I am Medea. My apprentice term completed,

I shall address myself to a masterwork.

Anyone can cut a brother's head off-

That happens every day. And people steal

Their father's treasure and run away. That's common.

[...] To arrange that an old man's daughters
Should inflict on their father a horrible death shows promise,
But in relative terms is nothing, for I shall do now
Such dreadful, such astonishing things.

(The two sons enter)

(986) Yes, my children, come here!

(to the elder son)

You will go to your uncle,

Who asks for you, a solution to all our problems

(kills him)

Accept this victim, ghost, and be appeased.

What is that sound? Armed men coming to kill me?

It won't be so easy.

(1024) **Jason:** No! By the gods, you cannot! I beg you, don't.
Guilt is mine and I should die, but spare the boy.

Medea: The guilt is yours, yes. And I will strike you,
Where you will feel it. Here!
The sword goes here.

Jason: You're mad. You're altogether mad, utterly crazy!
Do what you will, but get over with it.

Medea: I'll take my time.

Creon gave me a whole day. What's the hurry?

Jason: Have pity Medea, kill me instead.

Medea: Die! (she slays the second son)

It's done. You see? You see? You recognize

The wife you loved, ungrateful man? Remember

Who I was and who I am. I go now.

Jason: What in the name of hell? A winged car?

But there are no gods. No gods! There are no gods.