

Euripides: *Medea*

NURSE:

I wish the Argo never had set sail,
had never flown to Colchis through the dark
Clashing Rocks; I wish the pines had never
been felled along the hollows on the slopes
of Pelion, to fit their hands with oarsthose
heroes who went off to seek the golden
pelt for Pelias. My mistress then,
Medea, never would have sailed away
to reach the towers of Iolcus' land;
the sight of Jason never would have stunned
her spirit with desire. She would have never
persuaded Pelias' daughters to kill their father,
never had to come to this land-Corinth.
Here she's lived in exile with her husband
and children, and Medea's presence pleased
the citizens. For her part, she complied
with Jason in all things. There is no greater
security than this in all the world:
when a wife does not oppose her husband.
But now, there's only hatred. What should be
most loved has been contaminated, stricken
since Jason has betrayed them-his own children,
and my lady, for a royal bed.
He's married into power: Creon's daughter.
Poor Medea, mournful and dishonored,
shrieks at his broken oaths, the promise sealed
with his right hand (the greatest pledge there is)—
she calls the gods to witness just how well
Jason has repaid her. She won't touch food;
surrendering to pain, she melts away
her days in tears, ever since she learned
of this injustice. She won't raise her face;
her eyes are glued to the ground. Friends talk to her,
try to give her good advice; she listens
the way a rock does, or an ocean wave.
At most, she'll turn her pale neck aside,
sobbing to herself for her dear father,
her land, her home, and all that she betrayed
for Jason, who now holds her in dishonor.
This disaster made her realize:
a fatherland is no small thing to lose.
She hates her children, feels no joy in seeing them.
I'm afraid she might be plotting something.

Her mind is fierce, and she will not endure
ill treatment. I know her. I'm petrified
to think what thoughts she might be having now:
a sharpened knife-blade thrust right through the liver—
she could even strike the royal family, murder
the bridegroom too, make this disaster worse.
She's a terror. There's no way to be
her enemy and come out as the victor.

Here come the children, resting from their games,
with no idea of their mother's troubles.
A child's mind is seldom filled with pain.