

HIPPOLYTUS

by Euripides

translated by E. P. Coleridge

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

HIPPOLYTUS

HIPPOLYTUS

(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.
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.

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

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!

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

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.

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.

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 aw 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.

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 thee 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 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.

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 Alcmene'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

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?

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 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 cam'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

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 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?

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

O horror! woe on woe! and still they come, too deep for words, to 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 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 villians. 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. 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 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 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 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 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 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.

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!

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-