

**STORIES FROM  
THE GREEK TRAGEDIANS**



# **STORIES FROM THE GREEK TRAGEDIANS**

**BY**

**Alfred J. Church**



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*To my Sons,*  
ALFRED, MAURICE, HERBERT,  
RICHARD, EDWARD, HARALD,  
*This Book*  
IS DEDICATED.



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## PREFACE

I HAVE added to the “Story of the Seven Chiefs against Thebes” the description of the single combat between Eteocles and Polynices, which occurs in the *Phœnissæ* of Euripides. Some changes have been made in the “Story of Ion” to make it more suitable for the purpose of this book. Throughout the Stories compression and omission have been freely used. I can only ask the indulgence of such of my readers as may be familiar with the great originals of which I have given these pale and ineffectual copies.

Retford,

*October 11, 1879.*



## THE STORY OF THE LOVE OF ALCESTIS

ASCLEPIUS, the son of Apollo, being a mighty physician, raised men from the dead. But Zeus was wroth that a man should have such power, and so make of no effect the ordinance of the Gods. Wherefore he smote Asclepius with a thunderbolt and slew him. And when Apollo knew this, he slew the Cyclopés that had made the thunderbolts for his father Zeus, for men say that they make them on their forges that are in the mountain of Etna. But Zeus suffered not this deed to go unpunished, but passed this sentence on his son Apollo, that he should serve a mortal man for the space of a whole year. Wherefore, for all that he was a god, he kept the sheep of Admetus, who was the Prince of Pheræ in Thessaly. And Admetus knew not that he was a god; but, nevertheless, being a just man, dealt truly with him. And it came to pass after this that Admetus was sick unto death. But Apollo gained this grace for him of the Fates (which order life and death for men), that he should live, if only he could find some one who should be willing to die in his stead. And he went to all his kinsmen and friends and asked this thing of

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them, but found no one that was willing so to die; only Alcestis his wife was willing.

And when the day was come on the which it was appointed for her to die, Death came that he might fetch her. And when he was come, he found Apollo walking to and fro before the palace of King Admetus, having his bow in his hand. And when Death saw him, he said—

“What doest thou here, Apollo? Is it not enough for thee to have kept Admetus from his doom? Dost thou keep watch and ward over this woman with thine arrows and thy bow?”

“Fear not,” the god made answer, “I have justice on my side.”

“If thou hast justice, what need of thy bow?”

“ ’Tis my wont to carry it.”

“Ay, and it is thy wont to help this house beyond all right and law.”

“Nay, but I was troubled at the sorrows of one that I loved, and helped him.”

“I know thy cunning speech and fair ways; but this woman thou shalt not take from me.”

“But consider; thou canst but have one life. Wilt thou not take another in her stead?”

“Her and no other will I have, for my honour is the greater when I take the young.”

“I know thy temper, hated both of Gods and of

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men. But there cometh a guest to this house, whom Eurystheus sendeth to the snowy plains of Thrace, to fetch the horses of Lycurgus. Haply he shall persuade thee against thy will.”

“Say what thou wilt; it shall avail nothing. And now I go to cut off a lock of her hair, for I take these firstfruits of them that die.”

In the meantime, within the palace, Alcestis prepared herself for death. And first she washed her body with pure water from the river, and then she took from her coffer of cedar her fairest apparel, and adorned herself therewith. Then, being so arrayed, she stood before the hearth and prayed, saying, “O Queen Heré, behold! I depart this day. Do thou therefore keep my children, giving to this one a noble husband and to that a loving wife.” And all the altars that were in the house she visited in like manner, crowning them with myrtle leaves and praying at them. Nor did she weep at all, or groan, or grow pale. But at the last, when she came to her chamber, she cast herself upon the bed and kissed it, crying, “I hate thee not, though I die for thee, giving myself for my husband. And thee another wife shall possess, not more true than I am, but, maybe, more fortunate!” And after she had left the chamber, she turned to it again and again with many tears. And all the while her children clung to her garments, and she took them up in her arms, the one first and then the other, and kissed them. And all the servants that were in the house bewailed their mistress, nor did she fail to reach her hand to each of them, greeting him.

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There was not one of them so vile but she spake to him and was spoken to again.

After this, when the hour was now come when she must die, she cried to her husband (for he held her in his arms, as if he would have stayed her that she should not depart), "I see the boat of the dead, and Charon standing with his hand upon the pole, who calleth me, saying. 'Hasten; thou delayest us;' and then again, 'A winged messenger of the dead looketh at me from under his dark eyebrows, and would lead me away. Dost thou not see him?' " Then after this she seemed now ready to die, yet again she gathered strength, and said to the King, "Listen, and I will tell thee before I die what I would have thee do. Thou knowest how I have given my life for thy life. For when I might have lived, and had for my husband any prince of Thessaly that I would, and dwelt here in wealth and royal state, yet could I not endure to be widowed of thee and that thy children should be fatherless. Therefore I spared not myself, though thy father and she that bare thee betrayed thee. But the Gods have ordered all this after their own pleasure. So be it. Do thou therefore make this recompense, which indeed thou owest to me, for what will not a man give for his life? Thou lovest these children even as I love them. Suffer them then to be rulers in this house, and bring not a step-mother over them who shall hate them and deal with them unkindly. A son, indeed, hath a tower of strength in his father. But, O my daughter, how shall it fare with thee, for thy mother will not give thee in marriage, nor be with thee, comforting thee in thy travail of children, when

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a mother most showeth kindness and love. And now farewell, for I die this day. And thou, too, farewell, my husband. Thou lovest a true wife, and ye, too, my children, a true mother.”

Then Admetus made answer, “Fear not, it shall be as thou wilt. I could not find other wife fair and well born and true as thou. Never more shall I gather revellers in my palace, or crown my head with garlands, or hearken to the voice of music. Never shall I touch the harp or sing to the Libyan flute. And some cunning craftsman shall make an image fashioned like unto thee, and this I will hold in my arms and think of thee. Cold comfort indeed, yet that shall ease somewhat of the burden of my soul. But oh! that I had the voice and melody of Orpheus, for then had I gone down to Hell and persuaded the Queen thereof or her husband with my song to let thee go; nor would the watch-dog of Pluto, nor Charon that ferrieth the dead, have hindered me but that I had brought thee to the light. But do thou wait for me there, for there will I dwell with thee; and when I die they shall lay me by thy side, for never was wife so true as thou.”

Then said Alcestis, “Take these children as a gift from me, and be as a mother to them.”

“O me!” he cried, “what shall I do, being bereaved of thee?”

And she said, “Time will comfort thee; the dead are as nothing.”

But he said, “Nay, but let me depart with thee.”

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But the Queen made answer, “ ’Tis enough that I die in thy stead.”

And when she had thus spoken she gave up the ghost.

Then the King said to the old men that were gathered together to comfort him, “I will see to this burial. And do ye sing a hymn as is meet to the god of the dead. And to all my people I make this decree: that they mourn for this woman, and clothe themselves in black, and shave their heads, and that such as have horses cut off their manes, and that there be not heard in the city the voice of the flute or the sound of the harp for the space of twelve months.”

Then the old men sang the hymn as they had been bidden. And when they had finished, it befell that Hercules, who was on a journey, came to the palace and asked whether King Admetus was sojourning there.

And the old men answered, “ ’Tis even so, Hercules. But what, I pray thee, bringeth thee to this land?”

“I am bound on an errand for King Eurystheus; even to bring back to him horses of King Diomed.”

“How wilt thou do this? Dost thou not know this Diomed?”

“I know nought of him, nor of his land.”

“Thou wilt not master him or his horses without blows.”



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“Even so, yet I may not refuse the tasks that are set to me.”

“Thou art resolved then to do this thing or to die?”

“Ay; and this is not the first race that I have run.”

“Thou wilt not easily bridle these horses.”

“Why not? They breathe not fire from their nostrils.”

“No, but they devour the flesh of men.”

“What sayest thou? This is the food of wild beasts, not of horses.”

“Yet ’tis true. Thou wilt see their mangers foul with blood.”

“And the master of these steeds, whose son is he?”

“He is son of Ares, lord of the land of Thrace.”

“Now this is a strange fate and a hard that maketh me fight ever with the sons of Ares, with Lycaon first, and with Cycnus next, and now with this King Diomed. But none shall ever see the son of Alcmena trembling before an enemy.”

And now King Admetus came forth from the palace. And when the two had greeted one another, Hercules would fain know why the King had shaven his hair as one that mourned for the dead. And the King

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answered that he was about to bury that day one that was dear to him.

And when Hercules inquired yet further who this might be, the King said that his children were well, and his father also, and his mother. But of his wife he answered so that Hercules understood not that he spake of her. For he said that she was a stranger by blood, yet near in friendship, and that she had dwelt in his house, having been left an orphan of her father. Nevertheless Hercules would have departed and found entertainment elsewhere, for he would not be troublesome to his host. But the King suffered him not. And to the servant that stood by he said, "Take thou this guest to the guest-chamber; and see that they that have charge of these matters set abundance of food before him. And take care that ye shut the doors between the chambers and the palace; for it is not meet that the guest at his meal should hear the cry of them that mourn."

And when the old men would know why the King, having so great a trouble upon him, yet entertained a guest, he made answer, "Would ye have commended me the more if I had caused him to depart from this house and this city? For my sorrow had not been one whit the less, and I had lost the praise of hospitality. And a right worthy host is he to me if ever I chance to visit the land of Argos."

And now they had finished all things for the burying of Alcestis, when the old man Pheres, the father of the King, approached, and servants came with him bearing robes and crowns and other adornments

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wherewith to do honour to the dead. And when he was come over against the bier whereon they had laid the dead woman, he spake to the King, saying, "I am come to mourn with thee, my son, for thou hast lost a noble wife. Only thou must endure, though this indeed is a hard thing. But take these adornments, for it is meet that she should be honoured who died for thee, and for me also, that I should not go down to the grave childless." And to the dead he said, "Fare thou well, noble wife, that hast kept this house from falling. May it be well with thee in the dwellings of the dead!"

But the King answered him in great wrath, "I did not bid thee to this burial, nor shall this dead woman be adorned with gifts of thine. Who art thou that thou shouldest bewail her? Surely thou art not father of mine. For being come to extreme old age, yet thou wouldst not die for thy son, but sufferedst this woman, being a stranger in blood, to die for me. Her therefore I count father and mother also. Yet this had been a noble deed for thee, seeing that the span of life that was left to thee was short. And I too had not been left to live out my days thus miserably, being bereaved of her whom I loved. Hast thou not had all happiness, thus having lived in kingly power from youth to age? And thou wouldst have left a son to come after thee, that thy house should not be spoiled by thine enemies. Have I not always done due reverence to thee and to my mother? And, lo! this is the recompense that ye make me. Wherefore I say to thee, make haste and raise other sons who may nourish thee in thy old age, and pay thee due honour when thou art dead, for I will not bury thee. To thee I am dead."

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Then the old man spake, "Thinkest thou that thou art driving some Lydian and Phrygian slave that hath been bought with money, and forgettest that I am a freeborn man of Thessaly, as my father was freeborn before me? I reared thee to rule this house after me; but to die for thee, that I owed thee not. This is no custom among the Greeks that a father should die for his son. To thyself thou livest or diest. All that was thy due thou hast received of me; the kingdom over many people, and, in due time, broad lands which I also received of my father. How have I wronged thee? Of what have I defrauded thee? I ask thee not to die for me; and I die not for thee. Thou lovest to behold this light. Thinkest thou that thy father loveth it not? For the years of the dead are very long; but the days of the living are short yet sweet withal. But I say to thee that thou hast fled from thy fate in shameless fashion, and hast slain this woman. Yea, a woman hath vanquished thee, and yet thou chargest cowardice against me. In truth, 'tis a wise device of thine that thou mayest live for ever, if marrying many times, thou canst still persuade thy wife to die for thee. Be silent then, for shame's sake; and if thou lovest life, remember that others love it also."

So King Admetus and his father reproached each other with many unseemly words. And when the old man had departed, they carried forth Alcestis to her burial.

But when they that bare the body had departed, there came in the old man that had the charge of the guest-chambers, and spake, saying, "I have seen many guests that have come from all the lands under

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the sun to this palace of Admetus, but never have I given entertainment to such evil guest as this. For first, knowing that my lord was in sore trouble and sorrow, he forebore not to enter these gates. And then he took his entertainment in most unseemly fashion; for if he lacked aught he would call loudly for it; and then, taking a great cup wreathed with leaves of ivy in his hands, he drank great draughts of red wine untempered with water. And when the fire of the wine had warmed him, he crowned his head with myrtle boughs, and sang in the vilest fashion. Then might one hear two melodies, this fellow's songs, which he sang without thought for the troubles of my lord and the lamentation wherewith we servants lamented our mistress. But we suffered not this stranger to see our tears, for so my lord had commanded. Surely this is a grievous thing that I must entertain this stranger, who surely is some thief or robber. And meanwhile they have taken my mistress to her grave, and I followed not after her, nor reached my hand to her, that was as a mother to all that dwell in this place."

When the man had so spoken, Hercules came forth from the guest-chamber, crowned with myrtle, having his face flushed with wine. And he cried to the servant, saying, "Ho, there! why lookest thou so solemn and full of care? Thou shouldst not scowl on thy guest after this fashion, being full of some sorrow that concerns thee not nearly. Come hither, and I will teach thee to be wiser. Knowest thou what manner of thing the life of a man is? I trow not. Hearken therefore. There is not a man who knoweth what a day may bring

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forth. Therefore I say to thee: Make glad thy heart; eat, drink, count the day that now is to be thine own, but all else to be doubtful. As for all other things, let them be, and hearken to my words. Put away this great grief that lieth upon thee and enter into this chamber, and drink with me. Right soon shall the tinkling of the wine as it falleth into the cup ease thee of these gloomy thoughts. As thou art a man, be wise after the fashion of a man; for to them that are of a gloomy countenance, life, if only I judge rightly, is not life but trouble only.”

Then the servant answered, “All this I know; but we have fared so ill in this house that mirth and laughter ill beseem us.”

“But they tell me that this dead woman was a stranger. Why shouldst thou be so troubled, seeing that they who rule this house yet live.”

“How sayest thou that they live? Thou knowest not what trouble we endure.”

“I know it, unless thy lord strangely deceived me.”

“My lord is given to hospitality.”

“And should it hinder him that there is some stranger dead in the house?”

“A stranger, sayest thou? ’Tis passing strange to call her thus.”

“Hath thy lord then suffered some sorrow that he told me not?”

“Even so, or I had not loathed to see thee at thy

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revels. Thou seest this shaven hair and these black robes.”

“What then? who is dead? One of thy lord’s children, or the old man his father?”

“Stranger, ’tis the wife of Admetus that is dead.”

“What sayest thou? And yet he gave me entertainment?”

“Yea, for he would not, for shame, turn thee from his house.”

“O miserable man, what a helpmeet thou hast lost!”

“Ay, and we are all lost with her.”

“Well I knew it; for I saw the tears in his eyes, and his head shaven, and his sorrowful regard; but he deceived me, saying that the dead woman was a stranger. Therefore did I enter the doors and make merry, and crown myself with garlands, not knowing what had befallen my host. But come, tell me; where doth he bury her? Where shall I find her?”

“Follow straight along the road that leadeth to Larissa, and thou wilt see her tomb in the outskirts of the city.”

Then said Hercules to himself, “O my heart, thou hast dared many great deeds before this day; and now most of all must I show myself a true son of Zeus. Now will I save this dead woman Alcestis, and give her back to her husband, and make due recompense to Admetus. I will go, therefore, and watch for this black-robed king,

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even Death. Methinks I shall find him nigh unto the tomb, drinking the blood of the sacrifices. There will I lie in wait for him, and run upon him, and throw my arms about him, nor shall any one deliver him out of my hands, till he have given up to me this woman. But if it chance that I find him not there, and he come not to the feast of blood, I will go down to the Queen of Hell, to the land where the sun shineth not, and beg her of the Queen; and doubtless she will give her to me, that I may give her to her husband. For right nobly did he entertain me, and drave me not from his house, for all that he had been stricken by such sorrow. Is there a man in Thessaly, nay in the whole land of Greece, that is such a lover of hospitality? I trow not. Noble is he, and he shall know that he is no ill friend to whom he hath done this thing.”

So he went his way. And when he was gone, Admetus came back from the burying of his wife, a great company following him, of whom the elders sought to comfort him in his sorrow. And when he was come to the gates of his palace he cried, “How shall I enter thee? how shall I dwell in thee? Once I came within thy gates with many pine-torches from Pelion, and the merry noise of the marriage song, holding in my hand the hand of her that is dead; and after us followed a troop that magnified her and me, so noble a pair we were. And now with wailing instead of marriage songs, and garments of black for white wedding robes, I go to my desolate couch.”

But while he yet lingered before the palace Hercules came back, leading with him a woman that



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was covered with a veil. And when he saw the King he said, "I hold it well to speak freely to one that is a friend, and that a man should not hide a grudge in his heart. Hear me, therefore. Though I was worthy to be counted thy friend, yet thou saidst not that thy wife lay dead in thy house, but suffered me to feast and make merry. For this, therefore, I blame thee. And now I will tell thee why I am returned. I pray thee, keep this woman against the day when I shall come back from the land of Thrace, bringing the horses of King Diomed. And if it should fare ill with me, let her abide here and serve thee. Not without toil came she into my hands. I found as I went upon my way that certain men had ordered contests for wrestlers and runners, and the like. Now for them that had the preeminence in lesser things there were horses for prizes; and for the greater, as wrestling and boxing, a reward of oxen, to which was added this woman. And now I would have thee keep her, for which thing, haply, thou wilt one day thank me."

To this the King answered, "I thought no slight when I hid this truth from thee. Only it would have been for me sorrow upon sorrow if thou hadst gone to the house of another. But as for this woman, I would have thee ask this thing of some prince of Thessaly that hath not suffered such grief as I. In Pheræ here thou hast many friends; but I could not look upon her without tears. Add not then this new trouble. And also how could she, being young, abide in my house, for young I judge her to be? And of a truth, lady, thou art very like in shape and stature to my Alcestis that is dead.

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I pray you, take her from my sight, for she troubleth my heart, and my tears run over with beholding her.”

Then said Hercules, “Would I had such strength that I could bring back thy wife from the dwellings of the dead, and put her in thy hands.”

“I know thy good will, but what profiteth it? No man may bring back the dead.”

“Well, time will soften thy grief, which yet is new.”

“Yea, if by time thou meanest death.”

“But a new wife will comfort thee.”

“Hold thy peace; such a thing cometh not into my thoughts.”

“What? wilt thou always keep this widowed state?”

“Never shall woman more be wife of mine.”

“What will this profit her that is dead?”

“I know not, yet had I sooner die than be false to her.”

“Yet I would have thee take this woman into thy house.”

“Ask it not of me, I entreat thee, by thy father Zeus.”

“Thou wilt lose much if thou wilt not do it.”

“And if I do it I shall break my heart.”

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“Haply some day thou wilt thank me; only be persuaded.”

“Be it so: they shall take the woman into the house.”

“I would not have thee entrust her to thy servants.”

“If thou so thinkest, lead her in thyself.”

“Nay, but I would give her into thy hands.”

“I touch her not, but my house she may enter.”

“’Tis only to thy hand I entrust her.”

“O King, thou compellest me to this against my will.”

“Stretch forth thy hand and touch her.”

“I touch her as I would touch the Gorgon’s head.”

“Hast thou hold of her?”

“I have hold.”

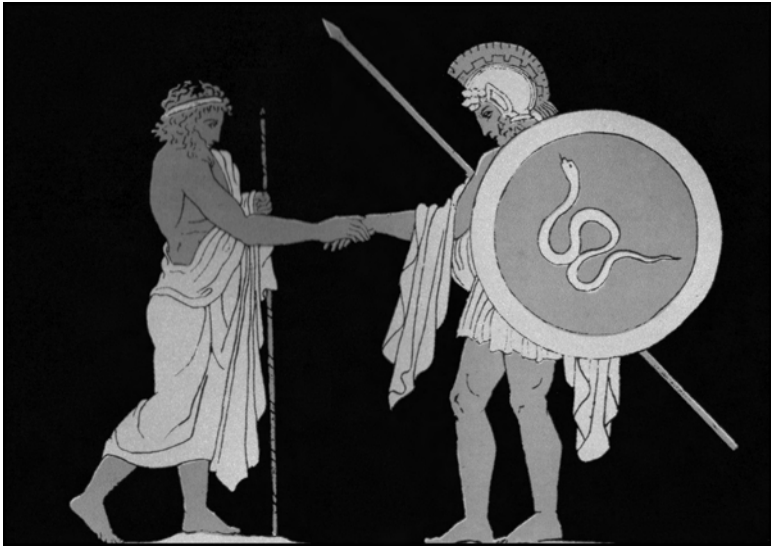
“Then keep her safe, and say that the son of Zeus is a noble friend. See if she be like thy wife; and change thy sorrow for joy.”

And when the King looked, lo! the veiled woman was Alcestis his wife.

## THE STORY OF THE VENGEANCE OF MEDEA

JASON, being of right the prince of Iolcos in the land of Thessaly, came back to his kingdom. But Pelias, who had now for many years taken it for himself, spake him fair, and persuaded him that he should go on some adventure, and find glory and renown for himself, and so return; and he sware that afterwards he would peaceably give up the kingdom. Now in the land of Colchis, which lieth to the east of the sea which men call the Hospitable Sea, there was kept a great treasure, even the fleece of a great ram, which had been sacrificed there in time past. A marvellous beast was this ram, for it had flown through the air to Colchis from the land of Greece; and its fleece was of pure gold. So Jason gathered together many valiant men, sons of gods and heroes, such as were Hercules the son of Zeus, and Castor and Pollux, the twin brethren, and Calais and Zethus, that were sons to the North Wind, and Orpheus, that was the sweetest singer of all the dwellers upon earth. And they built for themselves a ship, and called its name the Argo, and so set sail, that they might bring back the fleece of gold to the land of Greece, to which, indeed, it rightfully belonged. Now when Jason and

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PELIAS SENDING FORTH JASON

his fellows were come to Colchis, they asked the fleece of the King of the country. And he said that he would give it to them; only Jason must first yoke certain bulls that breathed fire from their nostrils, and slay a great dragon. But the Princess Medea saw Jason, and loved him, and purposed in her heart that she would help him. And being a great witch, and knowing all manner of drugs and enchantments, she gave him an ointment which kept all that anointed themselves with it so that they took no harm in battle with man or beast. But first Jason had promised, swearing to her a great oath, that she should be his wife, and that he would take her with him to the land of Greece, and that he would be faithful unto her to his life's end. So when he and his companions had yoked the bulls, and slain the dragon, and carried away the fleece, they took Medea with them



THE FIRE-BREATHING BULLS

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in the ship, and so departed. But when Jason was come to the land of Iolcos, Pelias was not willing to keep his promise that he would give the kingdom to him. Whereupon Medea devised this thing against him. She took a ram, and cut him in pieces, and boiled his flesh in water, putting herbs into the caldron, and saying divers enchantments over it; and, lo! the beast came forth young, though it had been very old. Then she said to the daughters of Pelias, "Ye see this ram, how he was old, and I have made him young by boiling him in water. Do ye so likewise to your father, and I will help you with drugs and enchantments, as I did with the ram." But she lied unto them, and helped them not. So King Pelias died, being slain by his daughters, when they thought to make him young. But the people of the land were very wroth with Medea and with Jason her husband, and suffered them not to dwell there any more. So they came and dwelt in the land of Corinth. Now when they had abode there many days, the heart of Jason was turned away from his wife, and he was minded to put her away from him, and to take to himself another wife, even Glaucé, who was daughter to Creon, the King of the city.

Now, when this thing was told to Medea, at first she went through the house raging like a lioness that is bereaved of her whelps, and crying out to the Gods that they should smite this false husband that had sworn to her and had broken his oath, and affirming that she herself would take vengeance on him. And they that had the charge of her children kept them from her, lest she should do some mischief. But when her first fury

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was spent, she came forth from her house, and spake to certain women of Corinth of her acquaintance, that were gathered together to comfort her, and said, "I am come, my friends, to excuse myself to you. Ye know this sudden trouble that hath undone me, and the exceeding great wickedness of my husband. Surely we women are of all creatures that breathe the most miserable. For we must take husbands to rule over us, and how shall we know whether they be good or bad? Of a truth, a woman should have the gift of divination, that she may know what manner of man he is to whom she joineth herself, seeing that he is a stranger to her and unknown. If indeed she find one that is worthy, it is well with her; but if not, then had she better die. For a man, if he be troubled at home, goeth abroad, and holdeth converse with his friends and equals of age, and is comforted. But with a woman it is not so; for she hath only the life that is at home. But why do I compare myself with you? for ye dwell in your own land, and have parents and kinsfolk and friends; but I am desolate and without a country, and am wronged by this man that hath stolen me from a strange land; nor have I mother, or brother, or kinsman, who may help me in my need. This thing, therefore, I would ask of you; that if I can contrive any device by which I may have vengeance on my husband, and on him that giveth his daughter to him, and on the girl, ye keep silence. And vengeance I will have; for though a woman have not courage, nor dare to look upon the sword, yet if she be wronged in her love, there is nothing fiercer than she."

Then the women said, "We will keep silence as



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thou biddest us, for 'tis right that thou shouldest have vengeance on thy husband. But see! here cometh King Creon, doubtless with some new purpose.”

And the King said, “Hear this, Medea. I bid thee depart out of this land, and thy children with thee. And I am come myself to execute this word, for I depart not again to my own house till I have cast thee forth from my borders.”

Then Medea made answer, “Now am I altogether undone. But tell me, my lord, why dost thou drive me out of thy land?”

“Because I fear thee, lest thou should do some harm beyond all remedy to me and to my house. For I know that thou art wise, and hast knowledge of many curious arts; and besides, I hear that thou hast threatened grievous hurt against all that are concerned with this new marriage.”

But Medea answered, “O my lord, this report of craft and wisdom hath wrought me harm not this day only, but many times! Truly it is not well that a man should teach his children to be wise, for they gain thereby no profit, but hatred only. But as for me, my lord, my wisdom is but a small thing; nor is there cause why thou shouldest fear me. For who am I that I should transgress against a king? Nor indeed hast thou done me wrong. My husband, indeed, I hate; but thou hast given thy daughter as it pleased thee. The Gods grant that it may be well with thee and thine! Only suffer me to dwell in this land.”

But the King would not, though she entreated

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him with many words. Only at the last he yielded this to her, that she might abide for one day and contrive some refuge for her children; “but,” he said, “if thou tarry after this, thou and thy children, thou shalt surely die.”

Then he went his way, and Medea said to the women that stood by, “That at least is well; be ye sure that there is evil to come for the bridegroom and the bride in this new marriage, and for their kin. Think ye that I had flattered this man but that I thought to gain somewhat thereby? Surely I had not touched his hand, no, nor spoken to him. And now—fool that he is—he hath given me this day, and when he might have driven me from the land, he suffereth me to tarry. Verily he shall die for it, he and his daughter and this new bridegroom. But how shall I contrive it? Shall I put fire to the dwelling of the bride, or make my way by stealth into her chamber and slay her? Yet if I be found so doing, I shall perish, and my enemies will laugh me to scorn. Nay, let me work by poison, as is my wont. Well, and if they die, what then? What city will receive me? what friend shall give me protection? I know not. I will tarry awhile, and if some help appear, I will work my end with guile; but if not, I will take my sword and slay them that I hate, though I die. For by Hecaté, whom I reverence most of all the Gods, no man shall vex my heart and prosper. Therefore, Medea, fear not; use all thy counsel and craft. Shall the race of Sisyphus, shall Jason, laugh thee to scorn that art of the race of the Sun?”

When she had ended these words, there came Jason telling her that she did not well to be thus angry,

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and that she had brought upon herself this trouble of banishment by idle words against the rulers of the land; but that nevertheless he would have a care for her, and see that she wanted nothing needful. But when Medea heard him so speak, she burst out upon him in great fury, calling to mind how she had saved him once again from the bulls that breathed fire from their nostrils and from the great dragon that guarded the fleece of gold, and how she had done the old man Pelias to death for his sake; “and now,” she said, “whither shall I go? who will receive me? for I have made enemies of my kinsfolk on account of thee, and now thou forsakest me. O Zeus! why can we discern false money from the true, but as for men, when we would know which is the good and which the bad, there is no mark by which we may know them?”

But to this Jason answered that if she had saved him in time past, she had done it of necessity, being compelled by love; and that he had made her a full recompense, taking her from a barbarous land to the land of Greece, where men lived by law and not by the will of the stronger and causing her to be highly reputed of for wisdom among the people of the land. “And as to this marriage,” he said, “for which thou blamest me, I have made it in prudence and in care for thee and for thy children. For being an exile in this city, what could I do better than marry the daughter of the King? Nor is my heart turned from thee or from thy children. Only I have made provision against poverty, and that I might rear my sons in such fashion as befitted their birth. And now if thou needest aught in thy banishment, speak;

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for I would give thee provision without grudging, and also commend thee to such friends as I have.”

“Keep thy gifts and thy friends,” she said, “to thyself. There is no profit in that which cometh from such hands as thine.”

So Jason went his way; and when he was departed there came Ægeus, King of Athens, who had been on a journey to inquire of the god at Delphi, for he was childless, and would fain have a son born to him. But he understood not what the god had answered, and was now on his way to King Pittheus of Trœzen, a man learned in such matters, that he might interpret the thing to him. And when he saw that Medea had been weeping, he would know what ailed her. Then she told him how her husband was false to her, marrying a new wife, even the daughter of the king of the land, and how she was on the point to be banished, and her children with her. And when she saw that these things displeased King Ægeus, she said—

“Now, my lord, I beseech thee to have pity on me, nor suffer me to wander homeless and friendless, but receive me into thy house. So may the Gods grant thee thy desire that thou mayest have a son to reign after thee. And indeed I have such knowledge in these matters that I can help thee myself.”

Then said King Ægeus, “I am willing to do thee this service both for right’s sake and because of the hope of children which thou promisest to me. Only I may not take thee with me from this land. But if thou

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comest to me thou shalt be safe, nor will I give thee up to any man.”

Then said Medea, “It is well, and I trust thee. And yet, for I am weak and my enemies are strong, I would fain bind thee by an oath.”

To this the King answered, “Lady, thou art prudent, and I refuse not the oath; for being so bound, I shall have wherewith to answer thine enemies, if they seek thee from me. By what Gods shall I swear?”

“Swear by the Earth and by the Sun, who was the father of my father, and by all the Gods, that thou wilt not banish me from thy land, nor give me up to my enemies seeking me.”

And King Ægeus sware a great oath, by the Earth and by the Sun, and by all the Gods, that he would not banish her, nor give her up; and so departed.

Then said Medea, “Now shall my counsels prosper; for this man hath given me that which I needed, even a refuge in the city of Athens. Now, therefore, hear what I will do. I will send one of my servants to Jason, and bid him come to me, and will speak softly to him, confessing that he hath done wisely in making this marriage with the daughter of King Creon. And I will ask of him that my children may remain in the land. And I will send them with a gift to this King’s daughter, even a robe and a crown. But when she shall deck herself with them, she shall perish, so deadly are the poisons with which I shall anoint them. But very grievous is the deed that I must do when this shall have been accomplished. For after this I must slay my children. Nor shall any man

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deliver them out of my hand. Thus will I destroy the whole house of Jason, and so depart from the land. A very evil deed it is; but I cannot endure to be laughed to scorn by my enemies. And yet what profiteth me to live? For I have no country or home or refuge from trouble. I did evil leaving my father's house to follow this Greek. But verily he shall pay me to the very uttermost. For his children he shall see no more, and his bride shall perish miserably. Wherefore let no man henceforth think me to be weak or feeble."

And when the women would have turned her from her purpose, saying that so doing she would be the most miserable of women, she would not hearken, thinking only how she might best wound the heart of her husband.

Meanwhile a servant had carried the message to Jason. And when he was come, she said that she had repented of her anger against him, and that now he seemed to her to have done wisely, strengthening himself and his house by this marriage; and she prayed him that he would pardon her, being a woman and weak. And then she called to her children that they should come forth from the house, and take their father by his hand, for that her anger had ceased, and there was peace between them.

And Jason praised her that she had so changed her thoughts; and to his children he said, "Be sure, my sons, that your father hath counselled wisely for you. Live, you shall yet be the first in this land of Corinth."

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And as he spake these words, he perceived that Medea wept, and said, "Why weepest thou?"

And she answered, "Women are always ready with tears for their children. I bare them; and when thou saidst to them 'Live,' I doubted whether this might be. But listen. Doubtless it is well that I depart from this land, both for me and for you. But as for these children, wilt thou not persuade the King that he suffer them to dwell here?"

"I know not whether I shall persuade him; but I will endeavour."

"Ask thy wife to intercede for these children, that they be not banished from this land."

"Even so. With her doubtless I shall prevail, if she be like to other women."

"I will help thee in this, sending her gifts so fair that there could be found nothing more beautiful on the earth—a robe exceeding fine and a crown of gold. These shall my children bear to her. So shall she be the happiest of women, having such a husband as thou art, and this adornment which the Sun, my grandsire, gave to his descendants after him that they should possess it."

Then she turned herself to her children, and said, "Take these caskets in your hands, my sons, and take them to the new bride, the King's daughter."

"But why wilt thou empty thy hands? Are there not, thinkest thou, robes enough and gold enough in

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the treasure of the King? Keep them for thyself. She will make more account of me than of thy gifts.”

“Nay, not so. Is it not said that even the Gods are persuaded by gifts, and that gold is mightier than ten thousand speeches? Go, then, my children, to the King’s palace. Seek your father’s new wife, and fall down before her, and beseech her, giving her these adornments, that ye be not banished from the land.”

So the two boys went to the palace bearing the gifts. And all the servants of Jason that were therein rejoiced to see them, thinking that Medea had put away her anger against her husband. And they kissed their hands and their heads; and one led them into the chambers of the women, to the King’s daughter. And she, who before sat looking with much love upon Jason, when she saw the boys, turned her head from them in anger.

But Jason soothed her, saying, “Be not angry with thy friends, but love them whom thy husband loveth, and take the gifts which they bring, and persuade thy father for my sake that he banish them not.”

And when she saw the gifts, she changed her thoughts, and consented to his words. And in a very brief space she took the robe and clothed herself with it, and put the crown upon her head, and ordered her hair, looking in the glass and smiling at the image of herself. And then she rose from her seat, and walked through the house, stepping daintily, and often regarding herself.

But then befell a dreadful thing; for she grew



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pale, and trembled, and had well-nigh fallen upon the ground, scarce struggling to her chair.

And an old woman that was of her attendants set up a great cry, thinking that Pan or some other god had smitten her. But when she saw that she foamed at her mouth, and that her eyes rolled, and that there was no blood left in her, she ran to tell Jason of the matter, and another hastened to the King's chamber.

And then there came upon the maiden a greater woe than at the first, for there came forth a marvellous stream of fire from the crown of gold that was about her head, and all the while the robe devoured her flesh. Then she rose from her seat, and ran through the house, tossing her hair, and seeking to cast away the crown. But this she could not, for it clung to her very closely. And at the last she fell dead upon the ground, sorely disfigured so that none but her father only had known her. And all feared to touch her, lest they should be devoured also of the fire.

But when the King was come, he cast himself upon the dead body, saying, "O my child! what God hath so smitten thee? Why hast thou left me in my old age?"

And when he would have lifted himself, the robe held him fast, and he could not, though he struggled sorely. So he also died; and the two, father and daughter, lay together dead upon the ground.

Now in the meanwhile the old man that had the charge of the boys led them back to the house of the mother, and bade her rejoice, for that they were released

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from the sentence of banishment, and that some day she should also return by their means.

But the woman wept and answered doubtfully. Then she bade him go into the house and prepare for the lads what they might need for the day. And when he was departed she said, "O my sons, I go to a strange land and shall not see you come to fair estate and fortune; nor shall I make preparations for your marriage when you have grown to manhood. Vainly did I bear you with pangs of travail; vainly did I rear you; vainly did I hope that ye should cherish me in my old age, and lay me out for my burial. O my children, why do ye so regard me? Why do ye laugh at me that shall never laugh again? Nay, I cannot do the deed. When I see the eyes of my children how bright they are, I cannot do it. And yet shall my enemies triumph over me and laugh me to scorn? Not so; I will dare it all." And she bade her children go into the house. But after a space she spake again, "O my heart, do not this deed. Spare my children! They will gladden thee in the land of thy banishment." And then again, after a space, "But no, it is otherwise ordained, and there is no escape. And I know that by this time the King's daughter hath the robe upon her and the crown about her head, and what I do I must do quickly."

Then she called to the boys again and said, "O my children! give me your right hands. O hands and mouths that I love, and faces fair exceedingly. Be ye happy—but not here. All that is here your father hath taken from you. O dear regard, O soft, soft flesh, O

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sweet, sweet breath of my children! Go, my children, go; I cannot look upon your faces any more.”

And now there came a messenger from the King’s palace and told her all that had there befallen. But when she heard it she knew that the time was come, and went into the house.

And the women that stood without heard a terrible cry from the children as they sought to flee from their mother and could not. And while they doubted whether they should not hasten within and, it might be, deliver them from their mother, came Jason to the gate and said to them, “Tell me, ladies, is Medea in this place, or hath she fled? Verily she must hide herself in the earth, or mount into the air, if she would not suffer due punishment for that which she hath done to the King and to his daughter. But of her I think not so much as of her children. For I would save them, lest the kinsmen of the dead do them some harm, seeking vengeance for the bloody deed of their mother.”

Then the women answered, “O Jason, thou knowest not the truth, or thou wouldst not speak such words.”

“How so? Would she kill me also?”

“Thy children are dead, slain by the hand of their mother.”

“Dead are they? When did she slay them?”

“If thou wilt open the gates thou wilt see the dead corpses of thy children.”

But when he battered at the gates, and cried out

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that they should open to him, he heard a voice from above, and saw Medea borne in a chariot, with winged dragons for horses, who cried to him, "Why seekest thou the dead and me that slew them? Trouble not thyself. If thou wantest aught of me, say on, but thou shalt never touch me with thy hand. For this chariot, which my father the Sun hath given me, shalt deliver me out of thy hands."

Then Jason cried, "Thou art an accursed woman, that hast slain thy own children with the sword, and yet darest to look upon the earth and the sun. What madness was it that I brought thee from thy own country to this land of Greece, for thou didst betray thy father and slay thy brother with the sword, and now thou hast killed thine own children, to avenge what thou deemest thine own wrong. No woman art thou, but a lioness or monster of the sea."

And to these things she answered, "Call me what thou wilt, lioness or monster of the sea; but this I know, that I have pierced thy heart. And as for thy children, thou shalt not touch them or see them any more; for I will bear them to the grove of Heré and bury them there, lest some enemy should break up their tomb and do them some dishonour. And I myself go to the land of Attica, where I shall dwell with King Ægeus, the son of Pandion. And as for thee, thou shalt perish miserably, for a beam from the ship Argo shall smite thee on the head. So shalt thou die.

Thus was the vengeance of Medea accomplished.