

*The Phoenissae*

*Euripides 485/4-406 B.C.*

*CHORUS singing*

*strophe 1*

*From the Tyrian main I come, an offering choice for Loxias from Phoenician isle, to minister to Phoebus in his halls, where his fane lies nestling 'neath the snow-swept peaks of Parnassus; over the Ionian sea I rowed my course, for above the plains unharvested, that fringe the coast of Sicily, the boisterous west-wind coursed, piping sweetest music in the sky.*

*antistrophe 1*

*Chosen from my city as beauty's gift for Loxias, to the land of Cadmus I came, sent thither to the towers of Laius, the home of my kin, the famous sons of Agenor; and there I became the handmaid of Phoebus, dedicated like his offerings of wrought gold. But as yet the water of Castaly is waiting for me to bedew the maiden glory of my tresses for the service of Phoebus.*

*epode*

*Hail! thou rock that kindlest bright fire above the twin-peaked heights of Dionysus. Hail! thou vine, that, day by day, makest the lush bunches of thy grapes to drip. Hail! awful cavern of the serpent, and the god's outlook on the hills, and sacred mount by snow-storms lashed! would I were now circling in the dance of the deathless god, free from wild alarms, having left Dirce ere this for the vales of Phoebus at the centre of the world*

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*JOCASTA enters from the palace.*

*JOCASTA chanting*

*Maidens, I hear you call in your Phoenician tongue, and my old feet drag their tottering steps to meet my son. O my son, my son, at last after many a long day I see thee face to face; throw thy arms about thy mother's bosom; reach hither thy cheek to me and thy dark locks of clustering hair, o'ershadowing my neck therewith. Hail to thee! all hail! scarce now restored to thy mother's arms, when hope and expectation both were dead. What can I say to thee? how recall in every way, by word, by deed, the bliss of days long past, expressing my joy in the mazy measures of the dance? Ah! my son, thou didst leave thy father's halls desolate, when thy*

*brother's despite drove thee thence in exile. Truly thou wert missed alike by thy friends and Thebes. This was why I cut off my silvered locks and let them fall for grief with many a tear, not clad in robes of white, my son, but instead thereof taking for my wear these sorry sable tatters; while within the palace that aged one with sightless orbs, ever nursing the sorrow of a double regret for the pair of brethren estranged from their home, rushed to lay hands upon himself with the sword or by the noose suspended o'er his chamber-roof, moaning his curses on his sons; and now he buries himself in darkness, weeping ever and lamenting. And thou, my child,-I hear thou hast taken an alien to wife and art begetting children to thy joy in thy home; they tell me thou art courting a foreign alliance, a ceaseless woe to me thy mother and to Laius thy ancestor, to have this woeful marriage foisted on us. 'Twas no hand of mine that lit for thee the marriage-torch, as custom ordains and as a happy mother ought; no part had Ismenus at thy wedding in supplying the luxurious bath; and there was silence through the streets of Thebes, what time thy young bride entered her home. Curses on them! whether it be the sword or strife or thy sire that is to blame, or heaven's visitation that hath burst so riotously upon the house of Oedipus; for on me is come all the anguish of these troubles.*

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**CHORUS** singing  
strophe

*O Ares, god of toil and trouble! why, why art thou possessed by love of blood and death, out of harmony with the festivals of Bromius? 'Tis for no crowns of dancers fair that thou dost toss thy youthful curls to the breeze, singing the while to the lute's soft breath a strain to charm the dancers' feet; but with warriors clad in mail thou dost lead thy sombre revelry, breathing into Argive breasts lust for Theban blood; with no wild waving of the thyrsus, clad in fawnskin thou dancest, but with chariots and bitted steeds wheelest thy charger strong of hoof. O'er the waters of Ismenus in wild career thou art urging thy horses, inspiring Argive breasts with hate of the earth-born race, arraying in brazen harness against these stone-built walls a host of warriors armed with shields. Truly Strife is a goddess to fear, who devised these troubles for the princes of this land, for the much-enduring sons of Labdacus.*

*Translated by E. P. Coleridge*