

EURIPIDES

and sat and thought by the light of the sun
would we ever understand it?
Mother, to have found you is more
than I know how to feel.
And my father Apollo . . .
Come to me. How you answer
I swear I'll never tell anyone.
But I have to know.
What if a young girl fell in love
and then fell in
with whatever her lover wanted and then
to save herself and him from shame
she accused Apollo of seducing her?
That's what happened, isn't it?

ATHENE

CREUSA.

By great Athene who in her chariot
side by side with her father Zeus -

ION.

Just tell me!

CREUSA.

- fought and conquered the earth-born giants,
I swear Apollo's your father.

ION.

But then what I can't make sense of is . . .
He gave me to someone else. He did.
He told me Xuthus is my father . . .

CREUSA.

It happens sometimes if a man has sons
he might give one to a friend who's childless
so he has an heir. That's what the god did.

ION.

But he lied! How can a god lie?

ION

~~CREUSA.~~

~~I'll tell you why I think he did it.~~
If he claimed you, what would you inherit?
No more than you have now. This way
you'll have a fine name and power in Athens.
It's for your own good he gave you away.

ION.

No. Don't you see? If the gods lie
how can we ever know the truth?
I have to hear from his own mouth
whose son I am.

CREUSA.

Where are you going?

ION.

To make Apollo answer my question.

Enter ATHENE.

Who's this rising over the temple?
Skin streaming light, eyes like suns
facing the East. Run, mother!
No mortal may look into a god's face . . .
~~Unless my time to do so has come.~~

ATHENE.

Don't be afraid. Am I against you?
No. I wish you nothing but good
here in Delphi and in Athens my city.
For I am Athene. Apollo sent me.
He thought it best not to come himself
in case it sparked an angry scene
relating to events that occurred long ago.
But Ion, hear what Apollo tells you:
He is your father. You *are* his son.
He gave you to Xuthus as a sign of his love

START



11

EURIPIDES

to make you heir to a noble house.
 He planned to wait till you'd made your home
 in Athens and then reveal the truth.
 But they, unable to hold their tongues,
 broke the oath they'd made to Xuthus
 and told your mother he'd found his son.
 At once poison and knives were out,
 the two of you at each others' throats.
 Apollo had no other option
 but to send me here to set things straight.
 And so I shall. Hear his orders.
 Creusa, take with you to Athens
 this child of earth-born Erechtheus. He
 in time will rule my holy city.
 Four sons he'll have. Each will found
 a separate tribe: Geleontes, nobles,
 Hopletes, soldiers, Aegicores, farmers,
 Argedes, craftsmen. They'll make their homes
 on the slopes of my hills but their offspring will settle
 the fertile islands we call Cyclades
 building harbours, roads and towns
 each a powerful ally of Athens.
 Spreading north and south on both sides of the strait
 they'll conquer Europe and Asia. In his name
 the Ionians will achieve undying fame.
 So much for Ion. Now for you.
 With Xuthus you'll have two sons:
 Dorius, who'll found the Dorian state,
 Achaeus who'll rule the coast near Rhium,
 his people known as Achaeans. So
 everything's turned out well in the end.
 It always does if you trust Apollo.
 Your labour when Ion was born he made light
 so even your father didn't know the truth.
 To protect the child he ordered Hermes

ION

to fly him to Delphi. His priestess he ordered
 to care for him. Now here's his final instruction:
 Don't tell Xuthus Ion's not his son.
 Allow him to cherish his good luck as you do.
 My task is over, your sufferings too.

ION.

Athene, daughter of world-winged Zeus,
 I hear and believe each word you say.
 This is my mother, my father's Apollo.

CHORUS.

I always felt it would work out that way.

CREUSA.

Athene, I want to confess something.
 When I came to this city, Apollo I loathed.
 The walls of his temple crushed me. Now
 every stone smiles. I praise him.

ATHENE.

Good.

It's always better to praise than curse.
 The gods are often slow to act.
 In the end they do what is right.

~~CREUSA.~~

~~My son, it's time we started our journey.~~

ATHENE.

I'll go first and show the way.

ION.

Protect my family and my city.

CREUSA.

Take the throne that you were born to.

ATHENE.

~~Always uphold its power and honour.~~

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 1/2