

PYTHIA

ION.

What's my father's is mine.

CREUSA.

All that is his
are his spear and his shield.

ION.

Get away from the altar!

CREUSA.

So you can scream? Save it for your mother
if you ever find her.

ION.

Oh, you'll be tortured!

CREUSA.

Do it! Cut my throat. Here on this altar!

ION.

You want your blood to pollute the temple?

CREUSA.

Yes, I'll hurt Apollo the way he hurt me!

ION.

I see now that the laws of this temple are wrong.
It gives refuge to murderers and to their victims
as though there's no difference between them. There is.
She ought to be hauled out and hurled to the soldiers.
I'm forbidden to do it. Can that be fair?
A god must take sides, he must praise, he must blame
or nothing makes sense. The whole world's confused
~~if Apollo treats the good and the bad the same.~~

Enter the PYTHIA.

THE PYTHIA.

My son!

ION

From the cave of the temple I cross this threshold.
Do you know who I am? I'm the Pythia,
priestess chosen from the women of Delphi
to ensure the god's cared for correctly.

ION.

Mother!

THE PYTHIA.

He calls me mother. I like it when you do.

ION.

This woman! She tried to poison me!

THE PYTHIA.

I heard. But you're as sinful as she is.

ION.

I am? Why? Revenge isn't evil.

THE PYTHIA.

Stepmothers always dislike stepchildren.

ION.

Dislike is one thing. But to try to kill them?

THE PYTHIA.

Don't say any more. You're leaving us —

ION.

I won't go!

THE PYTHIA.

You will. You'll return to Athens, your homeland.

ION.

Must I? Should I? What shall I do?

THE PYTHIA.

Go to your home with clean hands, a pure heart,
a blessing to the holy land of your fathers.

EURIPIDES

ION.

I can clean my heart by spilling her blood.

THE PYTHIA.

Don't do it! My boy! I've something to tell you.

ION.

I don't want to hear! But I know what you say's
always for my own good. Go on. I'll listen.

THE PYTHIA.

What's this?

ION.

A basket.

THE PYTHIA.

Can you say no more?

ION.

Old. Wrapped in wool. Is it used for some ritual?

THE PYTHIA.

Don't you know it? Where my hand is
you were, less than a day old.

ION.

Let me see it. Why have I never been shown this?

THE PYTHIA.

I was told to stay silent.

ION.

By who?

THE PYTHIA.

Apollo.

ION.

But why?

THE PYTHIA.

So you'd stay here and serve him.

ION

ION.

And now?

Does he want to get rid of me? Does he want me to leave him?

THE PYTHIA.

He sent you your father, so you may go.

ION.

Is that it? But what's going to happen to me?
Will I be happy? Or am I going to suffer?

THE PYTHIA.

Don't talk so much. Guess what's inside the basket.

ION.

How can I know that?

THE PYTHIA.

Guess!

ION.

Tell me.

THE PYTHIA.

Baby clothes.

ION.

Whose?

THE PYTHIA.

Whose could they be?

ION.

Mine? Are they? They could help find my mother!

THE PYTHIA.

They will. Apollo wants you to meet her.

ION.

He never told me that.

EURIPIDES

THE PYTHIA.

I'm telling you. So
take this. Look for her. Find her. Go.

ION.

I will, if I have to cross Asia and Europe,
the oceans, the plains . . . I'll find her.

THE PYTHIA.

Apollo wanted your history concealed.
Why, I don't know. He didn't tell me.
Now he wants it out in the open.
Come here. There, I've kissed you farewell
as though you were my son.
Should I offer advice? No. But I will.
Search where you feel you will find what you seek.
Start where you stand. Was the woman who left this
here at the temple herself of the temple?
Was she from Delphi? If the answer is no,
from where else in Greece? And so you continue.
I can tell you no more, nor can Apollo,
nor anyone, excepting you. Now go.

// STOP

3/3

~~ION?~~

~~Oh, mother. I think how you must have felt
when you left me here and I can't stop crying.
Apollo was kind but Fate? No.
Not once did I suck your breast, not once
did you feel my gentle breath on your skin.
Life would have been so sweet.
Years I'd have spent in the arc of your arms.
We're equals in one thing, our suffering. But perhaps
nothing more. If I look for you what will I find out?
That you're some slave or a 'handmaid' . . . ? No.
I'd rather know nothing. Apollo, to you
I return this basket. I can't do it. Apollo~~

ION

~~I kept these for me and me for these.~~
He wants me to know. I want to. I will.
I'll untie this knot. I'll risk everything.
Look! I'm amazed. The inside could have been
varnished a week ago. No mould. Not one strand
has splintered. And how long since anyone opened it?

CREUSA.

Eyes burn . . . Mouth moistens . . .
Brain can't believe . . .

ION.

Quiet!

If I hear one more word from you -

CREUSA.

One? A whirlwind of words.
That basket . . . I bought it. I. It's mine.
You were inside? I'm leaving the altar.
Kill me. I don't care. You're my child.

ION.

The god's driven her mad. She's left his protection.
Take her! Tie her hands!

CREUSA.

My hands are tied
to my basket and what it held inside

ION.

It's yours? Who says so?

CREUSA.

Your mother, who loves you.

ION.

~~Who tried to destroy me!~~