

**EURIPIDES’
“MEDEA”**

First produced in 431 BCE
At City Dionysia
3rd Prize

Translated
By
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©2005

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DRAMATIS PERSONAE:

MEDEA
JASON
CREON
AIGEAS
NURSE
TUTOR
MESSENGER
CHILDREN OF MEDEA
CHORUS OF CORINTHIAN WOMEN
TWO FEMALE ATTENDANTS TO MEDEA
TWO MALE ATTENDANTS TO CREON
(Silent)

Night. Dull sound of thunder. Flashes of lightning. In the background, in heavy shadows, the house of Jason and Medea, in Corinth.

From within we hear Medea’s scream

Medea:

Gods! Gods, be my witness!

Sharper clashes of thunder. More frequent flashes of lightning.

Again we hear Medea screaming:

Medea:

What is the use of living? Come thunder, come lightning of the sky, come and crash upon my head! I cannot stand the pain! Hades, come! Come Hades and cut down this miserable life of mine!

Crescendo of thunder and lightning. Hold for a moment or two

Fade out and cut all FX

Slowly, as if agonisingly, fade in day.

Jason and Medea’s house is clearly seen in the background. Two doors, one near the centre, the other, a smaller, to Stage Left. Medea uses the centre door, Nurse and Tutor the smaller one.

Enter the Nurse. Tired. Spent a sleepless night. Shakes her head in despair.

Nurse:

How I wish!

How I wish!

That the fast ship, Argo had not made it past those cursed clashing rocks on its way to Colchis!

How I wish!

That forest of Pelium, clogged full of hardy pines, should not have supplied the sturdy sailors with oars! They wouldn’t have sailed on, then, all the way to Colchis, to get the golden fleece, as they were ordered by Pelias, nor would my mistress Medea, be here now!

Her heart, torn apart by her love for Jason, she had left her own home and the two had sailed off

together to the great castles of Iolcos.

Then they left that place and came here, to Corinth, where they now live with their children.

Oh, but first, she had managed to convince Pelias' daughters to murder him! Murder their own father! When she first arrived here, the local folk loved her. They saw in her a perfect wife for Jason. Perfect in every way. She never argued with Jason. Always compromising, always accommodating –and that, you see, is how a woman earns her security: never argue with your husband!

But that was then.

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Now, well, now there's nothing but arguing, nothing but hatred, nothing but poison, nothing but – Jason betrayed his children and his wife, married the Princess, King Creon's daughter, Glauce and now sleeps in a royal bed. Meanwhile, my mistress, Medea, the Fates fully against her and feeling totally dejected, screams and cries out at him, asking him to remember his promises to her. Asks him to remember the mighty oaths he had sworn for her. She calls upon the Gods to bear witness to the awful way Jason rewards her for her obedience and for her compromises and for all the accommodating she did for him and for all the love she lavished upon him.

She lies there, in her bed all day. From the moment she found out about her husband's adultery, she lies there, the poor creature, unable to put a bite in her mouth.

She has completely abandoned her body to her pain.

Her tears are wearing away her days and her eyes and her face are pinned hard to the ground.

The kind voices of her friends, friends who, one by one visit her and try to advise her, to comfort her, all those friendly voices, sound to her like ocean storms, clashing madly upon rocks.

Now and then the poor woman turns away her pale face and all alone, mourns heavily about her beloved father, about the land and the house she has abandoned just so as to be with a man who has now betrayed her.

It is only now that the poor woman has realised how horrible it is to leave one's homeland. Her awful fortune has taught her that bitter lesson.

She hardly looks up at her children any more. No, she gets no joy in that.

In fact, I'm terribly afraid that she hates them!

I am so afraid!

I'm afraid that some evil thoughts might be taking over her mind. There's something wild about her face!

Oh, I am so afraid!

I'm afraid that she might do something dreadful. I don't think she's able to cope well with this injustice.

Believe me, I know my mistress well and I fear her.

I am afraid that her mind might concoct some awful violence! Plunge a sharp sword into her heart.

And I'm afraid she's capable of working her way into the palace, enter the king's chambers and murder the princess and Jason, her groom!

Plunge a sharp knife deep into their body. Her reward for that deed would be horrible.

I am so afraid!

I'm afraid of her violence.

I'm afraid because those who cross angry words with her never win.

Enter Tutor with Medea's two boys.

Ah! And here are her little boys!

Playtime over, darlings?

What few cares enter the minds of children! How little they know of their mother's fears! Children don't like to think ugly thoughts.

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Tutor:

Old woman, you are the servant of my mistress, why are you standing out here, in front of the gates, all alone, wailing the pains of your soul?

How is Medea managing without you?

Nurse:

Old man, you are the tutor of Jason's children and you should know that what worries a mistress worries her servants –if they are good servants!

Their souls ache just as much as that of their mistress.

I'm out here, old man, because my heart urged me to reveal to both, the Earth and the Sky, all of my Lady's problems.

Tutor:

So the poor woman hasn't stopped crying yet?

Nurse:

If only!

How I envy your ignorance, old man!

This pain of hers has only just started. Its' barely at its halfway mark.

Tutor:

She's such a foolish woman -if I may be allowed to use such words about my mistress- and she still knows nothing of her new troubles yet!

Nurse:

New troubles? What new troubles? What is it old man? Don't keep it from me!

Tutor:

Nothing... No... Nevermind. I've changed my mind about telling you. I shouldn't.

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Nurse:

Come, old man! By your grey beard, I beg you! We are both servants in the same household. Don't keep anything from me. And don't worry about me: I can keep my mouth sealed, if I have to.

Tutor: *reluctantly and away from the children's ears*

All right! Well, then, here it is!

I heard that king Creon will be sending Medea and these here children into exile. I heard that when I happened to be near the holy springs of Peirini, where the old folk go and play drafts. It was some old man who had said it. No one saw me when I was there.

Creon will be sending them to Corinth, the old man said. I've no idea if this rumour is true or not. I sure hope it isn't.

Nurse:

But what about Jason? Would he let this happen to his children? Let them go into exile just because he has a quarrel going on with his wife?

Tutor:

New loves erase the old ones, old woman.

Jason no longer loves Medea and nor does he love this household any more.

Nurse:

Well then, we are finished, old man!

We are destroyed! New troubles arrive even before the old ones have gone!

Tutor:

But you, woman, since it's not yet time for our mistress to know, you say nothing to her. Keep your mouth shut!

Nurse: *To the boys*

My little boys! My darlings! If only you knew what your father is really like! Ah, but he's my master so I won't curse him but the man has shown himself to be cruel to his own family!

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Tutor:

Oh? And who is a better father in this world? They're all the same, old woman.

They have more love for themselves than they have for others.

For bed or for profit, justly or wrongly their father hates these children.

Nurse: *To the children*

Off you go now kids! It will all end well! Inside, quickly!

To the Tutor

And you, old man, keep them away from Medea for as long as she is in such deep melancholy because... because just a short while ago I saw her throwing a strange and dreadful look at them, as if she wanted to do them some awful harm. Her anger will not subside until she lets it clash full and hard upon someone, anyone – an enemy, I hope, not someone we love.

Medea: *From within:*

Gods! Death! Why do you not come for me? I cannot take this grief any more! Let me die! Death, come now!

Nurse: *To the children*

Hear that, my darlings? Her heart is shaken. Her anger is growing wild. Quickly! Run inside. Don't let her see you and don't go near her, my darlings. Watch her carefully darlings. She has a heart of steel and her mind weaves evil thoughts.

Hurry! Inside with you!

Exit boys and tutor into the house

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I could see this a long time ago. The cloud of grief raising the heat of anger high, ever higher as this

cloud broadens its cover.

I wish I knew!

If only I knew what hides behind all this grief, what evil deed is hiding inside this angry heart. This heart of hers will never find peace.

Medea: *Within*

Oh! How can I deal with this suffering!

Gods, how it hurts! These cursed, hateful sons of a hateful mother have caused me so much pain.

Curse you! Curse you and your deceitful father! Curse your wretched, abominable house! Let it all turn to dust!

Nurse:

Oh, Gods! Gods help us all!

In the direction of Medea's voice

But why the children, mistress?

What have the children done to you? Are they to blame for their father's faults? Why hate them?

Oh, my poor, poor boys!

Gods, protect them from their mother. How I fear for them!

How afraid I am of these royal rages! It's so hard for such rages to subside.

Kings and queens have always been spoiled by power. They're not used to taking orders. No, they'd much rather give them!

Kings and Queens only do what they want and forget about everyone else!

Oh, how much better it is to live a balanced life: to be an equal among equals.

Me? My wish is to have a quiet, a soft, old age –rather than one full of greatness and wealth. The wisest words are these: Let moderation hold the pride of place.

Moderation is the most useful thing to man and if man holds something else dearer to moderation, he will most certainly lose out in the end. Add to that the wrath of the gods, which will fall most heavily upon such a man's house and which will destroy him.

Enter the chorus of women, anxiously.

They first scatter in distress and then gather round the nurse.

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Chorus:

I've heard her wails! The heavy groans of grief coming from the heart of this unfortunate daughter of Colchis.

Chorus:

I see her pain still hasn't eased. I've heard her agony from my room at the court.

I don't like this heavy pain she's suffering, old nurse.

Chorus:

I don't like the pain that now wrecks this house. Only my own heart knows how dearly I love this house.

Nurse: *Indicating the house behind her*

House? What house? The house is gone, my dear. There is no house here. Here, there is nothing!

Jason was lured by the royal bed and here my mistress cries all day and she's wasting away!

There's not a drop of solace from any friends for her and she's completely shut off from the world.

Not a single friend around, nor a drop of sympathy anywhere!

Medea: *Within*

What is the use of living?

Come thunder!

Come lightening of the sky!

Come now and crash upon my head!

I cannot stand this pain!

Hades, come! Come Hades and cut down this miserable life of mine!

Chorus:

Did you hear that?

Chorus:

Father Zeus!

Chorus:

Mother Earth!

Chorus:

And you, Great Light!

Chorus:

Can you not hear the wailing of this lamentable maiden?

Chorus:

Poor girl! Why the pain? Why this awful pain for a lost bed? Such a pain will soon take you to your grave.

Chorus:

Why? Why ask for death? Why ask for such a thing?

Chorus:

So what if your husband has found another woman?

Why let this anger of yours to break your heart?

Chorus:

Zeus will grant you justice, Medea!

Chorus:

Don't tear yourself apart, Medea, mourning a husband who won't return to your arms.

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Medea: *Within*

Great Themis, daughter of Zeus!

Great, sacred Artemis! You see well how I'm suffering.

But now, now, I've bound my deceitful husband with the bonds of powerful oaths and curses. Curses that should destroy him and destroy also his bride and all his palaces! They dared to deceive me.

O, dear home, dear father from whom I parted! Dear brother whom I killed! Shameless woman! I'm a shameless woman!

Oh!

Nurse:

Did you hear that? Did you hear what words she finds to utter and how she calls for Themis? Themis, daughter of Zeus who understands oaths and Zeus who guards them?

It will take a great deed to put an end to my mistress' anger.

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Chorus:

I wish I could go and see her, speak with her, make a little easier this weighty anger of hers, soften this awful torture which has taken over her heart.

Chorus:

Such a wish to help friends should always exist.

Chorus:

Go then, Nurse!

Go and tell her! Use soft words and tell her to come out here.

Chorus:

Hurry! Before she does something awful to her children.

Chorus:

That dreadful grief of hers seems to deepen by the minute!

Nurse: *Reluctantly*

I shall go and do that but I'm afraid I won't be able to convince my mistress about anything.

I'll do it!

I'll do it for your sake, even though... even though every time one of her servants approaches her, she becomes wild with anger and looks at them with the eyes of a lioness who just gave birth.

People who call the men of the olden days fools and charlatans are right. Those men had invented songs that please the ear and the dinner table and pleased the drinking party, too, but no one managed to find the songs and the melodies to calm the tortured spirit of folk who suffered loss by death or by misfortune, losses that ruin their complete households.

It's for such things that these ancient men should have found songs to sing.

What's the use of all this happy shouting at the feasts?

A table full of food should quench their desire for joy. Why all those noisy songs?

Exit Nurse

Medea: *Within*

Ah! Gods!

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Chorus:

Ah!

I've heard the scream of bitter pain, the scream of mourning.

Chorus:

She raised her voice, the poor wretch, with curses against the deceiver of her bed, cursing him that he should find his new marriage to be a black one.

Chorus:

And she calls on Themis, Zeus' daughter, to witness her suffering. It was she, Themis, protector of oaths, who, one night, guided her, through the endless salty sea here, to Greece, away from her own land, Colchis.

Enter Medea with two attendants.

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Medea:

Corinthian women. I have come out among you so that you'll stop talking behind my back, condemning my every action.

I know many people –some directly, with my own eyes and others I've heard about- who were born good folk but because they stayed quietly away from society, got themselves the odious reputation of being arrogant and conceited individuals.

Eyes alone are inadequate judges of people. A judgement made without knowing a person well could result in hating that person, for no reason at all, except for the way he looks.

Sure, a foreigner must accept all the customs of his new city but I cannot praise the man who's local-born but who, due to ignorance and immaturity, hurts bitterly his fellow citizens.

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Corinthian women, you know that I have to suffer an insufferable thing, a thing that has worn my soul away. I'm no longer alive!

I refuse all of life's charms and I seek death. Yes, death, Corinthians, because my husband, who was my whole world, had become the most evil of all men.

Of all the living things, of all those things that have a soul and a sense, we, yes we, the women, are the most pathetic!

Imagine!

We need to spend a fortune to buy us a man who... what will he do? He will become the master of our bodies! And, it's obvious, that this dangerous thing we do, becomes even more dangerous when we don't find the right husband. Is he a good husband? Or is he a bad one? By the time you find that out it's already too late.

And then, for a woman to leave her husband is neither proper nor possible. To live in a place where new laws and customs apply one needs to be a prophet, since even your own folk don't tell you how you should behave towards your husband.

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And if all these things work out well and our husband lives with us without thinking the marriage yoke to be too heavy, well that would indeed be a great life. If not, though, only Death opens his arms for us. Only Death awaits us.

Whereas the husband, however, if he finds the house to be too great a burden for him, he leaves the place, he finds a friend or someone of similar age and immediately his heart shrugs off that weight.

We, on the other hand, we, women, can only let our eyes fall upon one person and one person only, our husband.

Then people also say that while we live quietly and without any danger at home, the men go off to war. Wrong! One birth alone is worse than three times in the battlefield behind a shield.

In any case, Corinthians, things between you and me, are different. You are here, in your own country and in your own home, enjoying your life and your friends, whereas I am here alone and without a country. My husband deceives me and treats me like a prize he has just ripped out of some barbarous country; I have no mother, no brother, no relative at all to whom I can turn for support at this dreadful hour of mine.

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From you, however I ask only one thing: If I manage to find some means by which I can punish my husband and his father-in-law, that man who gave him his daughter as wife, I ask of you to say nothing to anyone. Keep it a secret.

A woman is, in all things, timid, shy, weak and can't even look at weapons but when she's deceived by her husband, when her marriage is mocked, there is nothing more bloodthirsty than her.

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Chorus:

Of course, Medea. Do as you please.

Chorus:

It'll be a justified act to extract vengeance from your husband. It is no surprise to us that you lament your fate.

Enter Creon with attendants.

Chorus:

Ah, here's our king, Creon. He must have some new proclamation for us.

Creon: *To Medea*

You!

Frowning woman! Always arguing with your husband!

Yes, you, Medea!

I order you to pick up your kids and get out of this country immediately. You are now exiled! In fact, I'll execute this decision myself and will not return back to my palace until I see you walk away, beyond our borders.

Medea:

Ah! Now I'm truly lost! Poor woman. My enemies have used everything at their disposal to get rid of me. There's nothing left for me to do to escape my fate.

Still, Creon, with all these misfortunes I'm suffering, at least please, let me ask you why you are sending me away.

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Creon:

All right!

I won't mince my words: I'm sending you away because I'm afraid that you might do some irreversible harm to my daughter. In fact, there are many things which give rise to my fears: you're knowledgeable in many evil arts and also, you're angry at the fact that you're losing your husband. And there's yet another: I hear that you're scheming and threatening to do harm to me, personally and to my son-in-law and to my daughter. So I need to protect myself before I am hurt. Better I endure your hatred now than to feel sorry for you now and change my mind later, with pain and agony.

Medea:

Oh, Creon! Creon! This is not the first time that my reputation has hurt me enormously.

The wise man must never bring up his children to be too wise. Because, not only will the crowds call them "useless" but that same crowd will also turn their back on them and treat them with envy and hostility.

If you were to teach the uneducated something new and beautiful, not only will they not appreciate it but they'll call you "good for nothing." And if those who think themselves to be wise, consider you even wiser than them, then you'll hurt them most awfully. And that's where my own suffering stems from: They call me "wise" yet, in reality I am not very "wise" at all. Some people scorn me, others simply hate me and you are now afraid that I might do you some enormous harm!

Have no fear, though, Creon! I'm not capable of hurting kings! In any case, how did you ever hurt me? You simply married your daughter off to the man you liked. I hate my husband whereas what you did, you did with your mind intact. So, on my part now, I do not at all envy your good luck. By all means, have the wedding and may you rejoice by them. But let me stay here, in this land and, even though I've been dishonoured, I'll say no more of it because you are by far my superior.

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Creon:

The words you utter can tame a man but I'm afraid –my heart is afraid– that your mind is spinning some evil web. I no longer trust you as I did before. You're too silent now and whilst it is easy to protect oneself from a hot-headed man or woman, it is impossible to do so when the woman is scheming and silent.

So leave now! Leave right now, quickly and end all this chatter. The matter has been decided and you will not be allowed to stay here. You hate me far too much for that.

Medea: *Kneels before Creon*

No! No, don't do this, I beg of you, Creon!

I'm on my knees, my king. Please! For the sake of the young bride!

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Creon:

You're wasting your words. I will not change my mind.

Medea:

So you'll send me off into exile without the slightest respect to my prayers?

Creon:

Yes. My love for my family is far greater than my love for you.

Medea:

Oh how I miss you, now, Colchis!

How I miss my own land, my own country, now!

Creon:
Yes and I too, love my own country second only to my family.

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Medea:

Oh! What a dreadful thing love is!

Creon:

It depends...

Medea:

O, Zeus! May he who has caused all this suffering not escape his punishment!

Creon:

Leave now, you terrible woman! Leave and torture me no more!

Medea:

The torture, Creon, is mine!

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Creon:

Attendants!

His attendants approach Medea menacingly.

My attendants will send you on your way immediately! By force if necessary.

Medea:

No, Creon, don't do this! I beg you with all my heart!

Creon:

Woman, I can see, you're up to no good!

Medea:

Have no fear, Creon. I shall leave. This is not what I'm begging you for...

Creon:

You're persistently begging me about something! What is it then? Leave, I tell you!

Medea approaches him, takes his hand and bring it to her heart. Her voice is plaintive yet unsettling.

Coy. She is scheming.

Medea:

My request, king, is that you let me stay one day longer to prepare for my trip and to do what's necessary for the children since their father does not care for them in the slightest! Have pity on them, Creon. You, too are a father and surely you'll sympathise. I no longer care about leaving. My concern is only about the children.

Creon:

My heart is not at all tyrannical and I have suffered much because I am a compassionate man. Even now, I can see that I am making a mistake by giving in to your wishes...

However! I warn you that if the morning sunrays fall upon you and your children within the borders of this land, you shall die! These are undeniable, unalterable words.

Stay, if you need to but just one more day.

In any case, what harm could you do me in such a short time?

Exit Creon and attendants

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Chorus:

Poor, unfortunate woman!

Chorus:

Of all the things you must suffer! What will you do now?

Chorus:

Where is there a friendly family for you, what house, what place will you find to give you a haven from your terrible fate?

Chorus:

What an inescapable tempest the gods have thrown you into, Medea!

Medea:

There's no denying it. Everything around me has turned sour. Yet –

Yet don't think that all is lost for me. Don't think that at all, dear ladies.

Both, the newlyweds and their in-laws still owe me a great deal. Their debt has not yet been fully paid.

Do you think that all this begging and cajoling I just did was for no reason at all?

Oh, no! I did it because I had a scheme, a plan which would give me some profit. Do you think I would have spoken to him in such a manner, touched his hands even, for no reason at all?

And he! Oh, what a stupid man he is! He could have sent me away today, immediately! Sent me away from his country right here and now and destroy all my plans; but no, he has let me stay.

One more day!

One more day to execute my plans. To kill three of my worst enemies: A father, a daughter, a husband!

She's thinking and planning

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There are many ways of doing this deed. Many. But, let me see... which would be the best? Set fire to the wedding room? Or quietly enter it with a sharp blade and plunge it between their ribs?

No, no! There is a catch to this. What if they caught me as I was entering their house, trying to put my plan to practice and killed me? My enemies would laugh at me.

No, I shall follow my usual way, the way of which I am most experienced: The way of poison!

Yes! I shall poison them!

Still...

Let's say my plan had succeeded. The enemies are dead. Which city will then receive me? What stranger will give me asylum, a house where I may feel safe?

No one! Of course there's no one.

So I shall wait a little longer and if someone offers me some protection, some little castle, a solid little castle, then I shall perform the murderous deed quietly and expertly.

And if a black despair rages all around me, I'll take the matter to the very end and raise the sword with my own hands; and if it's written by the gods that I shall die, die I will after I will kill the newly married couple.

None of them will bring the suffering to my heart, none, while I have Queen Hecate's temple in my hearth. She is the goddess I respect the most, she is my protector and she is my helper.

I'll make a bitter affair of their wedding. Bitter and miserable and I'll make bitter their family and bitterly they will feel my exile from here.

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Well, then! Make use of all your wisdom, Medea! Make use of all the knowledge you possess about magic and about sacred crafts. Leave nothing out. Think and find schemes. Go forward with your terrible deed. This is the hour which you should show the might of your heart. Your suffering is before you. You can see it clearly. You must not become the subject of mockery by the scattered seed of Sisyphos and Jason's new wife; you, the grand-daughter of the immortal Helios, the sungod.

You know what to do, Medea. You know exactly how to go about the affair.

We, women might be awful at doing something good but we are very competent when we're doing something evil. No one is better than us.

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Chorus:

The order of things has changed. The holy waters of the rivers flow upwards.

Chorus:

Justice and all things human turn backwards.

Chorus:

Men's thoughts are evil now and their belief in the gods is gone.

Chorus:

And I can see that the coming stories will turn women's reputation to that of a glorious and honourable gender.

Chorus:

Their name will not longer be foul.

Chorus:

Old poets will stop singing our faithlessness, taking advantage of the fact that Phoebos Apollo has not blessed us with the sacred gift of poetry.

Chorus:

Or else, I, too, would be composing songs against men –

Time's experience gives us much material to sing about both, of us – of women as well as of men.

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Chorus:

And you, Medea, you left your family home with a frenzied heart, passed through the sea's giant twin rocks, to come and live here in a foreign land.

Chorus:

They've taken your wedding bed away and then, dishonoured and fate-stricken, they've sent you into exile.

Chorus:

Gone is the respect for the sacred oath and there's no shame left within Greece.

Chorus:

Shame has flown to the sky.

Chorus:

Luckless Medea!

Chorus:

You have no homeland to give you solace or protection from your suffering and your house and your husband are now used by another queen, a queen far more powerful than you.

Enter Jason

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Jason: *To Medea*

This is not the first time I've noticed what a great evil excessive anger is.

No, I've noticed this many times. You, for instance, could have easily stayed on here, in your own home, if only you had obeyed the wishes of your superiors and kept your mindless words to yourself. It's because of these mindless words of yours that you're being sent away.

I don't care about myself. I don't care if you never stop yelling that I, Jason, is the worst of all men.

But you've also uttered evil words about the king. Far too many words and far too evil. And now you're paying the price of that excess.

Exile!

I've often softened the king's anger against you because I wanted you to stay here but you, you've never stopped uttering your insults against him. So, here's your reward for it.

Exile!

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Still and all, here I am, with my love for you intact, to make sure that you and the children don't leave this land lacking money or anything else. Exile carries enough hardship as it is.

Even though you hate me, I'll never wish you any harm.

Medea:

Hateful, miserable man! Words defy my tongue to put together insult worthy enough of your sort of cowardice! You dare come here, to us! You! You, a man most hated by all the generations of mortals and immortals alike – and by me!

No, this is not "daring!" It takes no courage to lift your eyes and look upon the friends whom you destroyed. This is not courage. No! This is the worst of all human flaws.

This is shame!

Ha! But it is good you came. It's good because I'll be able to tell you what I feel and that way ease my heart somewhat and have yours taste my bitterness.

First, let me tell you, let me remind you, that I have once saved your life.

All those Greeks who were with you when you came on that ship, Argo, they all know this. When you were made to yoke the fire-spewing bulls and sow that deadly field with dragon's teeth, all those Greeks who were with you then, know that I have saved your life.

And it was I who also saved your life by killing the sleepless dragon who guarded the golden fleece with the coils of its body.

And again, it was I who betrayed my father and my home to come with you to Pelios' Iolcos, not moved by a mind but by a mindless heart.

And finally it was I who had killed Pelias, in the most abominable way, by his own children so as to save you from every fear.

And though I did all this for you, most disgraceful of all men, you betrayed me and even though we had children you took another wife. If you had no children then it was possible for someone to forgive your indecent act of preferring this new marriage to your old one.

Your oaths mean nothing to me these days.

Nor do I care what you think about gods. Are they the same as they always were or are they different?

Nor do I care if there are new laws for mortals to obey. To me you've broken all oaths, old and new – and you know it!

496

She raises her right hand

Poor hand! He has grasped you so often. Poor knees! Hand and knees! How often we were deceived by this coward! How often we've missed out on our hopes!

Yet... come now, Jason! I'll speak to you as one would speak to a friend. Not because I shall gain anything by doing so but because by your answers people will see just how big a coward you are!

Tell me then, Jason. Where can I go now? Tell me! Shall I go back to my father's home, to my homeland, which I have betrayed so as to come here with you? Or shall I go to the poor wretched daughters of Pelias? *Shakes her head bitterly* Oh, I can just imagine how well they will receive me!

Me who has killed their father!

Because, you see, Jason, the truth falls like this: because of you, I have become a most hated woman! Hated by both, my own folk in my own country and by the folk I should have never hurt.

And still, even after all this, I have become the envy of all the women in Greece and I, poor fool, think of you as the best, most faithful husband.

They envy me! Me, as I am going off into exile alone, with my children!

What great praise this is for a new groom, to have his poor children and the woman who has saved his life wandering about lost, away from their home.

Oh Zeus! You gave such obvious signs for men to tell the difference between genuine gold and fake and yet you gave not a hint for people to tell who's a good man and who an evil one!

520

Chorus: *To each other*

Friend against friend! An anger most implacable!

Jason:

Ha! I need to be a very capable sailor to escape the tempest of your words, woman. I'd need to be excellent at the wheel as well as at the sails to slide past the whirlwind of your words.

Such a bloated ego! Gods, how much you've exaggerated your beneficence, woman!

Of all our gods I can only call Aphrodite to help me with my sailing and you're intelligent enough to understand why I say this but you don't want to admit it. You don't want to admit that it was Eros only, Eros, with his faultless arrows who persuaded you to save me and nothing else. Lust and only lust! However I won't examine this in detail, since, to be honest, there were moments when I found you useful, though I'll prove to you that you've received far more than what you have given to have my life saved.

Firstly, you are now living in a Greek land and not one inhabited by barbarians and so you are enjoying Greek justice and Greek laws, instead of simply submitting to the law of the strongest.

Secondly, you've become famous and all the Greeks know of your wisdom, whereas if you still lived in your own land, at the end of the world, no one would say a word about you. No one would know about you.

As for me, I wanted neither endless wealth nor the voice of Orpheus himself. Nor would I have the fame of a fortunate man.

So much for the things I've done, answering your long speech about the golden fleece.

As for my marriage to the princess about which you disparage me, I prove to you that I've begun this affair, not only as a wise and well-tempered man but also in the way a good friend and a good father would behave.

551

So listen!

When I've arrived here, from Iolcos, I was full of suffering and totally lost as to what I should do next. But I was lucky. I came across this marriage and I took the opportunity. What better escape was there than to marry this young Princess? The king's very own daughter?

And I married her, not because I turned away from your love, from your jealousy, nor because of the love for my new wife, nor yet because of a desire to have even more children. No, those I have are enough! I am well satisfied on that score.

No, I'm doing all this because I want us to live well, missing out on nothing. I am only too well aware just how much people shun the poor. Then, I also wanted my children to be brought up equal to my birth and to have other children who'll become their brothers and equals. That's why I've decided to unite the two families and to live happily.

You have no need for any more children but I? I need those new children. I need them to help those I have now. They will be a great advantage to me. Am I wrong?

Surely, even you wouldn't disagree, at least not if the pain of missing out on some sex did not hurt you so much.

569

But then again, that's how you women are! When the duties of the wedding bed are maintained, all is well –you're fully satisfied. But when something goes wrong with that bed, everything – good things, beautiful things and things of use are turned into hateful things!

By Zeus! It would have been far better if men, somehow gave birth and women simply didn't exist.

How happy men would be then!

Chorus:

An eloquently speech, Jason. Nevertheless, my own heart says that you should not have betrayed your wife.

Medea:

My views differ to those of many folk.

What I believe, for example is the more eloquent the misfit, the greater the punishment he deserves because, thinking that his eloquence and pretty words will get him out of any injustice, he has the audacity to commit even greater evils.

We should certainly not consider such men to be wise!

It is the same with you, Jason. Don't just stand there pretending that you are an honourable man and a great orator because just one word from my lips will topple you completely. To put it in simple words, for you, Jason, if indeed you were an honourable man, you would have tried to persuade me that this new wedding was a good thing before you went ahead with it, instead of working on it in secret, behind your own family's back.

Jason:

Oh, sure, yes!

I can see it now! You would be really understanding then, wouldn't you, about my marriage!

Look at you!

You can't shed this dreadful anger of yours even now!

591

Medea:

No, that's not what bothered you Jason! That's not it at all! What, in fact bothered you was that you would be entering your old age still married to a foreigner.

Jason:

I've told you before and I'm telling you again now. I have not married into royalty out of love. I did so because I wanted to save you and to give to my children royal siblings, from the same blood, siblings who will protect our household.

Medea:

I hope I'm never given such prosperity by means of such bitterness and such wealth by means of such a sad soul.

Jason:

One day, Medea you'll think differently and you'll act more wisely. Let not joy ever appear to you as something bad and happiness as something unhappy.

Medea:

You mock me. You make fun of me because you have a place to stand on, a house, whereas I, I, on the other hand, will be thrown out of here, alone and desolate.

Jason:

Accuse no one else, woman. You're the cause of your own fate.

Medea:

Why is that? Is it perhaps because I have married and betrayed my husband?

Jason:

No, but because you've uttered sacrilegious curses to the royal family.

Medea:

True. Yes, it's true. And I did so not only to them but to your own household as well.

Jason:

Ha! I'm not interested in what you have to say now. Just tell me if you want some money before you and the children leave. I'd be quite happy to provide you with plenty of that and with plenty of referrals to my friends. They will do everything in their power to help you. Reject the offer and you'll prove yourself to be a fool; accept it, calm your anger and your benefits will be many.

614

Medea:

I need neither your money nor your friends. Gifts from an evil man are of no use at all to anyone.

Jason:

Fine! But remember I, on my part, have the gods as my witness. They know that I am ready to provide you and the children with anything you need. You, on the other hand, reject all the good things offered to you and arrogantly send away those who want to help you. For this, you'll suffer even worse.

Medea:

Go!

Go now!

The longer you stay away from your new little home the more your heart suffers for your new bride.

Enjoy your marriage!

Though, perhaps, with the aid of the Gods, you'll see that this... this new marriage of yours is not what

it seems to be. Perhaps you will even come regret it.

Exit Jason

627

Chorus:

When Aphrodite arrives in the hearts of people, with no fuss and with no exaggerated madness, she is a very enjoyable visitor but, alas, overwhelming lust brings neither honour nor glory to any one.

Chorus:

Oh, Lady Aphrodite!

I sincerely hope you don't shoot any of your unfailing golden arrows, dipped in lust at me!

Chorus:

I hope that wisdom, the most treasured gift the gods have given us, protects me from that misfortune!

Chorus:

And, Lady Aphrodite, don't plant into my heart improper love and then send me all the curses that go with it: Hatred, jealousy, endless fights. Instead, dear Lady, protect marriage and grand honour to all the peace-loving couples.

Chorus:

How I love my land and my home!

I hope I'll never lose them! Let me suffer the worst poverty and hunger, the most bitter of deprivations but let me die before I see the day when I lose my land and my home! There's certainly no greater pain than losing one's homeland.

Chorus:

No one came to console you, Medea. In your worst hour neither your city nor any of your friends stood by you. I know this, not through some airy rumour but because I saw it with my own eyes. Yet you have suffered the greatest misfortune.

Chorus:

I hope the man who does not honour his friends, the man who does not open an honest heart to them, I hope that man dies a horrible, a miserable death. Such a man will certainly never be a friend of mine!

Enter Aigeas. He is happy.

663

Aigeas:

A joyful day to you, Medea. I give you the best greeting anyone can give to his friends.

Medea:

And a joyful day to you, too, Aigeas, son of wise Pandion. Where have you come from?

Aigeas:

From the ancient temple of Apollo.

Medea:

Why go to that oracle in the centre of the Earth?

Aigeas:

I needed to ask the oracle what I need to do to have children.

Medea:

Heavens! Are you still without children?

Aigeas:

Unfortunately, yes, Medea. Some god must despise us.

Medea:

But how is that possible? Are you not married?

Do you lack the experience of the wedding bed, Aigeas?

Aigeas:

No, I *am* married, Medea. I have a wife with whom I share a wedding bed.

Medea:

Well then, what did Apollo say to you about having children?

Aigeas:

The god uttered words that are too wise for mortals like me to understand.

Medea:

May I ask what those words were?

Aigeas:

Of course Medea but one needs a very wise mind to understand those words.

Medea:

Tell me the words, Aigeas –that is, if you don't mind, of course.

Aigeas: *(Note: The oracle's words mean that he should not have sex.)*

The words were: "Do not let out the foot that pokes out of the wine skin."

680

Medea:

And you musn't do that before what? Before you reach what country?

Aigeas:

The oracle said not to do that before I return to my own homeland.

Medea:

And what is it that has brought you here?

Aigeas:

Someone by the name of Pitheus is the king of Troizen.

Medea:

Quite true. He is the son of Pelops. A very respectable man, from all accounts.

Aigeas:

I'd like to tell him the oracle, in case he can give me some understanding of it.

Medea:

Very possible because the man is a very wise one and one most experienced in such matters.

Aigeas:

Yes, not only that but he's also a great friend of mine.

Medea:

I hope you'll always be happy and that you succeed in your endeavours.

Aigeas:

But... Medea, why are your eyes so sad, your face so pale?

690

Medea:

Oh, Aigeas!

It's my husband. He is the worst man in the world!

Aigeas:

What? What do you mean, Medea? Tell me what the problem is!

Medea:

Jason has been unfaithful to me, even though I did nothing wrong to him.

Aigeas:

But how? What's happened?

Medea:

He has married another woman who will now be the mistress in my own house.

Aigeas:

What? He dared do such a despicable thing?

Medea:

Not only that but now he won't even turn to look at those whom he once loved.

Aigeas:

But... what made him do that?

Has he fallen in love with someone else or has he simply turned away from you?

Medea:

Lust. He is not the sort who's born to be faithful to those he loves.

Aigeas:

Well, forget him then, Medea!

If he is as you say, forget him!

700

Medea:

Suddenly he wanted to be related to the royal family!

He fell in love with the king's daughter!

Aigeas:

So what king would have him as a son-in-law? Tell me everything.

Medea:

Creon, King of Corinth.

Aigeas:

Ah, in that case your sadness is truly justified, Medea.

Medea:

I'm absolutely devastated and still, not only that but I'm also banished from this land!

Aigeas:

Who banished you, Medea? That's another awful thing to endure!

Medea:

Creon! He is the one who has banished me from Corinth.

Aigeas:

But does Jason allow this?

Oh, I don't agree with that either.

Medea:

His mouth says he doesn't but secretly, his heart hopes it happens.

Aigeas! Please!

By your beard and by your seed, I beg you! Feel pity for this poor, unfortunate soul.

Don't let me go off as an exile without a friend beside me. Let me come to your home, to your land as a suppliant.

May the gods grant you all of your wishes. May you have children and may your death be a happy end to a long and contented life.

Aigeas, you have no idea what you've stumbled upon when you come across me. I promise you, I will make it possible for you to have children.

I know the drugs that would bring this about.

719

Aigeas:

Of course I'll will help you, most readily and I shall do so for a couple of reasons. One is for the sake of the gods and another is because you have promised me children, a thing which I desire most deeply. So, if you come to my land, I'll try to protect you because I am a just man. However, let me tell you, Medea, let me tell you right now that I'm not willing to take you from here, with me. If you want to come to my place, by all means, do so and I will protect you and grant you all due hospitality. But I, personally, cannot not deliver you to anyone. So, you must leave here on your own, Medea because I do not want to be held responsible for your disappearance, particularly by my friends.

731

Medea:

I shall do that but if you were to reassure me with an oath then I'll have all I need.

Aigeas:

Don't you believe me, Medea, or is there something holding you back?

Medea:

Of course I believe you, Aigeas but Pelias' family and Creon are my enemies now, so if you've sworn an oath, you'd be constrained by that oath, if they come to you and try to take me by force. You would be tied by that oath. But if you just give me your word, without oath to the gods, perhaps their ambassadors might be able to convince you with diplomacy and you might become their friends. I'm a weak creature, you see, Aigeas whereas they are wealthy kings.

741

Aigeas:

I see quite some foresight in your words, Medea and since you wish it, I shall do so. It will provide me with some safety as well because I'll have a strong reason to give to your enemies for not surrendering you up to them. Both of us will gain safety by this oath.

Tell me then the name of the gods to whom you want me to swear the oath.

Medea:

Swear by Earth and by Helios, my grandfather, as well as the whole generation of gods.

Aigeas:

But what should I swear for? What must I do and what must I refrain from doing?

Tell me the words I must use.

Medea:

Swear that, for as long as you live, you will not exile me from your land, nor surrender me to my enemies, if they ever ask for me.

Aigeas:

I swear by the Earth and by the bright light of Helios that I shall do all those things you just said.

Medea:

Good enough. But if you break your oath, what then?

Aigeas:

I shall suffer what all mortals who disrespect the gods suffer.

Medea:

Well, then, dear friend, go in peace and happiness. All will be well and I shall come to your city as soon as I have accomplished my wishes here.

759

Chorus:

And may Hermes, son of Maia, protector of the traveller, guard your journey, Aigeas and may all your wishes come true.

Chorus:

You seem like a kind and generous man.

Aigeas bows to the chorus in thanks and exits

Medea:

Thank you, Zeus and you goddess of Justice! Thank you, too, Light of Helios!

Now, we will be victorious over our enemies.

The plan can now progress.

Now there is hope to punish my enemies! I was inside a ruthless tempest of troubles until this man came and brought me into a safe harbour.

To him then, I shall tie the cables of my stern before I enter the city walls of Athens.

And now, my friends, I shall tell you all my plans but you'll hear no words of joy.

Firstly, I shall send my servant to Jason to tell him to come here.

Then, I shall mock him, lie to him, tell him with sweet words that I think that all his plans are good and that his betrayal and his marriage to the Princess are both, wise and a good thing for all of us! I'll also beg him to let my boys stay here, not because I want them left here as objects of ridicule but so that I can then use my cunning to murder the King's daughter!

Then, I'll send them to her and they will be bearing gifts: a delicately woven dress and a golden crown. The boys will hand these gifts to her and ask her to let them stay here. These gifts will be steeped in such a deadly poison that she will die a most horrible death. She and whoever touches her.

790

But let me stop talking about that.

Ah! How I shudder with fear for the monstrous deed that I must do!

Immediately after the murder of the Princess I will have to murder my own children. No one can save them, now, no one!

Kill them and I kill Jason's house!

Then I will leave this land. Escape the consequences of this most unholy act because... the anger of the whole city would be unbearable!

Enter Nurse

Yes, I shall do that!

What is the point of living?

There is no land, no home, nor any means to escape my suffering. Miserable wretch! What a horrible mistake I've made, leaving my own father's house and trusting the words of a Greek!

Still, with God's help, the vengeance shall be mine. Because he'll see no more his own children, the children born by me; and he will see no children born by her, either!

That black soul, too, shall die a black death with my poisons.

Let no one think that I am some weak and sickly woman, or one of those quiet spirits!

Quite the opposite! I am most friendly to my friends and most fearsome to my enemies. It's only people like me who live a life of glory.

811

Chorus:

Medea!

You have entrusted your words to me and I wish you no harm but because I want to observe our laws, I must ask you not to go ahead with the execution of this deed.

Medea:

Don't waste your words!

Of course, it's easy for you to talk like this – you don't suffer the way I do.

Chorus:

How could you even think you could kill your own children, woman?

Medea:

I could because this deed, more than all others will hurt him –my husband!- the most!

Chorus:

But you, too, Medea!

Chorus:

You will be the most hurt woman on earth!

Medea:

That may be so...

But we've finished with words now. Nurse, go and bring Jason here. Now, mind, I trust you to be

discreet. If you love your mistress and if you are a true woman, say nothing of what I've decided to him.

Exit the Nurse SL

824

Chorus:

Descendants of Erichtheus, for ever happy and contented, children of the blessed gods, nourished by the glorious wisdom of a free land.

Chorus:

People who have always walked with grace in the bright air

Chorus:

The air in which, it is told, the golden crested Harmonia gave birth to the nine Pierian Muses.

Chorus:

Where, it is also told, Cypris Aphrodite, drew water from the cool founts of the bejewelled Kifissos and mingled it with the sweet breath of the soft airs of fields and mountains.

Chorus:

There, where she adorns her hair with the sweet rose-scented garlands and, they also say, she sends Eros off to sit by the side of Wisdom, to be her aid for ever and in every virtue.

Chorus:

Eros and Wisdom, together!

846

Chorus: *To Medea*

How then this city, this most welcoming city, whose rivers are blessed, will receive you, Medea when you will become a most cursed woman, a murderess of your own babies?

Chorus:

Think, woman, think how you will plunge your knife into the bodies of your own children!

Chorus:

Think, woman think of the size of the crime which your hand will commit!

They fall to their knees and shout

Chorus:

Medea! We kneel before you and we beg you!

Chorus:

We beg you by every possible means! Don't kill your children!

Chorus:

From where will your heart and your hand draw the dreadful courage to do this deed?

Chorus:

How will you turn your eyes towards your children before you kill them, without being flooded with tears?

Chorus:

No! No, Medea! You will not endure it. You will not endure their knee-delivered pleas to you, you will not endure painting your hand with their blood.

Chorus:

Your heart will not endure it, Medea!

Enter Jason

865

Jason:

I've come because you've sent for me and even though you hate me, your wish will still be granted.

Medea:

Jason, please, I beg you, forgive me for all the things I've said to you before.

It's not too unreasonable for me to ask you to be a little patient with me, Jason, after all, we had many sweet moments together.

I've weighed everything well, Jason and then I said to myself, "what a fool, I am! What a fool I must be to show such animosity to friends who have given me such wise counsel? Why did I want to become an enemy to my rulers and to my husband, who has done such a good thing for us, by taking a Princess as a wife and giving siblings to my children? When will I stop this stupid anger of mine?

What is wrong with me that I suffer so much from things which the gods have brought to me in such a wonderful way?

Can I not realise that I have the children and that I am an exile and in need of friends?"

882

I thought all this out and then decided that both, my anger and my thinking, were totally wrong. Now, I praise you and your wise actions in uniting our families and realise that I was unwise in not

immediately agreeing with you and helping you with your plan. I should have been there, during your wedding ceremony, standing next to your wedding bed, joyfully tending to your bride who loves you. But, then, that's how we women are. I won't say we're a bad lot but we are women! You, however, must not do as the fools do, nor address foolishness with foolishness. Oh, but let's forget all that, now. I admit that I thought badly of all this but now everything has changed.

Walks to the door, opens it and calls at the children

Come children, come out and kiss your father.

Enter the two boys with the tutor.

Come here, talk with him, darlings. Come and make friends with your mother again, whom you hated so much before. The harsh words have come to an end now. We are friends again.

Here, hold my right hand.

The children obey and at the very first touch, Medea turns away with horror.

Aside:

Oh, God! God, how my mind unfurls such dreadful horrors!

She turns back to them and addresses them gently.

How sweetly you extend your little hands! How long will you live my darlings?

Sobbing

Stupid woman! How easily my tears flow, what a timid coward I am!

Ha! It's that long argument your father and I had. It's over now but look, the tears still flow uncontrollably.

906

Chorus:

My eyes, too, are bursting with heart-felt tears.

Chorus:

Let's hope the horror ends here.

Jason:

I applaud you, for your words my lady and I hold no ill feeling towards you for your past actions.

Anger is a natural thing for women when their husband is planning other marriages. But, I see that your heart has turned towards other, more worthy sentiments and, at the end, you have realised which is the better decision. This is how wise women act.

And you, too, children. Your father has not neglected you but, with god's help he did what he could.

I'm confident that one day you and your brothers will become the best citizens of Corinth. Give yourselves some years first. Grow up a bit and, rest assured, that your father and the gods who love us will take good care of us. Long life to you!

My only wish is to see you one day, brought up well, strong and healthy, braver than my enemies.

To Medea who has turned to hide her tears.

But, you, Medea, why turn your pale white face away and flood it with tears? Are you not pleased with my words?

Medea:

No, it's not that. I'm overwhelmed with thoughts about the children.

Jason:

Courage, woman! I shall do all I can for them.

Medea:

Of course. I know you will. I have no doubt about that but women, you see, are weak creatures and their eyes are constantly full of tears.

Jason:

But why? What's the reason for your tears?

930

Medea: Amid more tears

Because it was I who has given birth to them, Jason and just then, when you wished them a long life, suddenly I was hit by some bitter uncertainty as to whether that wish would be accomplished.

I've already said most of what I wanted to tell you but the little that is left is this: Jason, since the king has decided to exile me, quite rightly too, since I'd only be a terrible nuisance to you and to the king because of our quarrel, I'll go but please ask Creon to let the children stay here and be brought up by you, by your own hands.

Jason:

I'll certainly try but I don't know if I'll succeed in persuading him.

Medea:

Then talk to your wife, Jason. Ask her to beg her father to let our boys stay.

Jason:

That's a better idea. I'm sure I'll be able to manage that.

945

Medea:

Yes, if she's like the rest of us women, I'm sure you will manage that. But I'll also help you with this, Jason. I'll send the children to her with gifts, the sort that women love: a finely woven gown and a crown made of gold.

To one of her attendants

Quickly, one of you go and bring those gifts.

Exit one of the attendants

Your wife, Jason is doubly lucky. Not only did she get for herself a man most worthy, but she has also inherited a jewel which my own grandfather, Helios has handed down to his grand children.

Enter the attendant holding a basket with the cloth and the crown which she hands to Medea.

Come, my children, take in your hands these wedding gifts and take them to the happy bride, the Princess. These are not the sort of gifts a bride could easily refuse.

959

Jason:

You're such a silly woman, Medea!

Do you think there are no dresses or gold in the palace? Why leave yourself short of them? Keep them, don't give them away.

If my bride truly respects me, then I'm certain she'd get more joy out of hearing my words than receiving your gifts.

Medea:

Please, don't interfere, Jason. They say that even the gods are persuaded more by gifts and gold than by a million words. She is the one blessed with luck now. She is young and she reigns – the gods are with her. I, on the other hand, am pleading for my children to stay here; and for that, I'd even give my life and more, let alone gold.

But go, now children! Go into your father's rich house, find his new lady, go down on your knees and, handing her these gifts, beg her not to send you away from this land.

Now be careful though, make sure it is her who picks up them up, with her own hands.

Go, now! Go!

Bring me back the happy news that my wish came true.

Exit children with basket. Jason and the Tutor follow them.

976

Chorus:

There's no hope now left for the children's life.

Chorus:

None! They're heading for their own death.

Chorus:

Our poor Princess! She'll accept the golden gifts and with them, with her own hands, she'll put them on her blond head.

Chorus:

Gifts from Hades! The beauty of these gifts will enchant her and she will put on the beautiful gown and the golden crown and so, she will become Hades' bride.

Chorus:

This is the trap, the deadly fate she'll fall into, the poor wretch.

Chorus:

And you, you, ill-fated Jason, your marriage will be your dire fortune. You've become the son-in-law of kings without knowing that you've sent your wife and children to a gruesome death!

Chorus:

Unfortunate man! You have no idea of what dire Fate awaits you.

Chorus:

Still, I sigh at your pain, too, poor Medea! You will kill your own children because your husband has betrayed you and because he has left you for another woman.

Enter Tutor with children

Tutor:

Madam, the children are safe. Here they are. They won't need to leave the country and the Princes joyfully received the gifts with her own hands. You need not worry about them any more, madam.

Medea: *With tears*

Oh!

Tutor:
Madam, what is it? What made you so afraid? I have brought you good news! Why turn your face?
Why not receive these news with joy?

Medea:

Oh!

Tutor:

This behaviour is not in tune with my news, madam.

Medea:

Oh! Alas! A million times, alas!

Tutor:

Have I brought bad news instead, dear lady? I thought the news were joyous!

Medea:

You have brought the news which you have brought. You can be blamed of nothing, old man.

Tutor:

But why have your eyes darkened so much? Why the flood of tears?

Medea:

Because I must, old man, because I must. It was the will of the gods and it was accomplished by my own schemes.

1015

Tutor:

Have courage, my Lady. Your children will bring you back here again some day.

Medea:

Back here? No, my dear old man. Before that happens, I, poor woman that I am, shall be taking others down there with me. *Indicating the underworld*

Tutor:

My lady, you're not the first woman who will miss her children. People must meet their ill luck with courage.

Medea:

Fine. Go now and prepare everything the children usually need during the day.

Exit Tutor

Oh, my darling children! My sweet, darling children! You now have a city and a house to live in, while you leave me in misery and loneliness. You will always be without your mother and I will now leave for another country, exiled, before I enjoy you, before I see your joy, before I see your weddings, before I dress your brides, before I fix your wedding beds before I hold your wedding candles!

How miserable my arrogance has made me!

There were other things in my mind as I brought you up, my darlings. I had other things in my mind when I agonised and burned under the awful pains of your births.

So many hopes! This ill-fated woman had nourished so many hopes for you. To look after me in my old age and when I leave this world, to adorn my body with your own hands, a thing which every parent hopes for.

What a heavy loss the loss of this hope is!

Now I shall live an unhappy life, bitter and without the slightest joy and you, you, my darlings, your sweet eyes will no longer see your mother. You'll be living a different life.

1040

Oh! But why, my darlings? Why look at me like this? Why... why give me a smile like that? As if it were your last?

Ladies, what should I do? My heart has melted with that last smile of theirs.

No, I can't go on with it. I can't go on with these plans.

Old plans, leave my head!

I shall take my children back with me. With me! Out of this country! Why should I suffer a double suffering? To make their father suffer with their suffering and I to suffer a double suffering?

No! That I cannot do! Out! Out old plans! Out of my head!

Oh what a fool I am! What's wrong with me? Do I want my enemies to mock me? Should I not punish my enemies?

No, I must go through with these plans! What a stupid coward this heart of mine is! How it bends to soft words.

Right! Off you go, kids! Back into the house!

And if anyone here thinks the sacrifice I'm about to make is an unholy thing, let him stay away. My hand will not shun the deed.

1056

She takes the children by the hand and moves towards the door. Then suddenly stops. Turns, lets go of their hands and moves forward.

No!

No, my heart, no! Don't do this! Leave them! Let these poor children live! Feel sorry for them. Wherever we live they'll soften my life. Let them live!

No!

Again no! By the all the destructive spirits that whirl about in Hades, the spirits that never forget, I cannot leave my children behind, to be killed by my enemies. And killed they will surely be! So, no! If anyone is going to kill them then it shall be me, their birth mother. Their death is fated. It is inescapable!

Softly, as if she is watching a ghostly event

Ha!

I can see it! That's right! She has just placed the crown on her head. It's in flames! The young Princess is burning in her gown!

Dismissing the apparition.

Abruptly changing topic

I need to speak with my children now. Now I'm entering the dreaded path and I'm sending these two into a worse path still.

Give me your right hand, my darlings. Let mummy kiss them.

Children obey

Sweet little hands... darling faces, most loved tiny bodies, wonderful hearts! I hope you'll be happy even down there because your earthly happiness was stolen from you by your father.

What a delight it is for me to embrace you! What tender flesh, what scented breath you have my sweethearts!

But no! Let's go! I can't endure this much longer. How can I even look at you? The pain is overwhelming. I know only too well how horrible the crime I am about to commit is. Logic makes it clear for me but anger, the only cause of man's most terrible suffering, anger, conquers my logic.

Exit Medea and the children

1080

Chorus:

I've often thought about things, perhaps more deeply than a woman should. I've pondered over an argument for a very long time, considering all of its subtle points.

You see, the Muse is within us women, also. We, too, are granted wisdom!

Chorus:

Not all of us, of course but enough of us to make one say justifiably that a woman's mind is not totally without wisdom.

So I have this view that those who have no children, children that they have given birth to and have raised, those people are much happier than those who do have any!

Chorus:

This is because whilst the childless folk don't know if children are a good thing or bad, they escape a great deal of concern and worry, whereas those who do have in their house these little blossoms, well, I see them worrying all day long about how to raise them properly and how to leave them a good inheritance.

Chorus:

And after all that, one doesn't know whether all this effort was made towards children who were worthy or unworthy.

Chorus:

And at the end, of course, remains something else, worse than everything else.

Let's suppose that the children have grown up, managed themselves a household and have turned out well. Then, suddenly, Death arrives and sends them down to Hades for no good reason at all. Is it right then, for the gods to add this most bitter of all bitter misfortunes, to the children?

Chorus:

What is the use of it?

Enter Medea

1116

Medea:

I've been watching anxiously for a while now to see how the matter has developed, ladies. *Indicating into the distance.* Ah, now I can see one of Jason's men approaching. I can see by his flushed face that he'll be announcing some new misfortune.

Enter Messenger

1116

Messenger:

Medea! Medea! What a gruesome crime you have committed!

Leave! Leave immediately, Medea! Leave by whatever means you can! Waste no time! Ship or carriage, take it but leave now!

Medea:

Why? Why should I leave? What have I done?

Messenger:

The Princess and Creon, her father, are both dead by your own hand, by your own poisons!

Medea: *Laughs*

Thank you, messenger. You've brought me the best possible news. I shall think of you as one of my friends and benefactors from now on.

Messenger:

Woman, what are you saying? Have the news made you insane? You have just heard that the whole royal family has been murdered, yet you're laughing. Are you not afraid?

Medea:

I, too have something to add to your words, messenger but don't be in such a rush, my friend. Tell me exactly how they died. My joy will be twice as great if I hear that they died in the most terrible way possible.

1136

Messenger:

The moment your children and their father entered the wedding chambers, we, the servants felt an enormous joy, though we also felt sorrow enough for your misfortune. The word was spread around the palace rooms immediately that you two have abandoned your earlier squabbles and everyone kissed the hands and the blond heads of the children. In fact, I, out of sheer pleasure, forgot myself and followed them all the way into the women's quarters.

Then our new lady, the one we serve now in your place, had not seen the two boys yet and looked angrily at Jason. Then she saw the children and again resented their entry into her room and with a veil covered her white face and turned it away. But your husband stepped in and quickly calmed her anger. Jason said to her, "Don't behave badly to those I love, sweetheart. Don't be angry and turn your head away again. You should love those whom your husband loves and you should accept their gifts. You'll be asking your father to let them stay here, in Corinth, for my sake, won't you?"

Then she, when she saw the golden gifts, she couldn't resist and she promised her husband whatever he asked for.

And, before Jason and the children had walked very far from the house, the Princess picked up the gown and wore it. Then she put the golden crown onto her blond head, walked over to the shining mirror to fix her hair and smiled at the lifeless image she saw in it. After that, she got up delirious with joy and went through all the rooms with her white little feet, every now and then standing on her toes turning to see her body from all sides.

1167

Suddenly though, the whole scene changed. It became awful, horrible to see.

First, the Princess changed colour. She moved back, all shaken with terror and she only just managed to get to her bed without falling down.

An elderly servant thought it was some ailment or other, delivered to the Princess by Pan or some other god, so she began to scream all sorts of prayers. But the Princess... froth rose up into her beautiful mouth and then... then her skin was flushed dry of all its blood, her eyes began to roll back upward. The old woman stopped her prayers and began a heartbreaking lament, a dirge full of tears and she began tearing at her grey hair.

One servant ran to her mistress' rooms and another rushed to tell the unbearable news to the new groom and from all that running the palace shook from its very foundations.

Then, not a moment later –a good runner couldn't have reached a hundred yards- the Princess woke up with a deep groan of agony because now she had to endure a double horror. The golden crown suddenly spewed forth a strange flame around her head, burning it, devouring it, and the fine gown, the two gifts your children gave her, began to eat away at the tender white flesh of the poor girl.

She jumped out of her throne and ran, like a bundle of fire, shaking her head, her hair, shaking it this way and that, struggling to rip the crown off her poor head. But the crown stayed there immovable and as she shook her head the burning blaze grew doubly fierce.

Eventually, unable to fight the evil attack any more, she fell to the ground, a bundle of horrible death! Only the woman who gave birth to her could recognise her.

1197

Where were her eyes?

Her face, her beautiful face was gone and from top to bottom she was a mess of blood and flames. Her flesh... her flesh had peeled off her bones while the poisons fed upon it, like the tears of a pine tree roll off its bark. A most horrible sight!

And us? What could we have done? None of us could touch or approach her dead body. We saw what horror Fate had wrought upon her.

Then her father entered the room, unaware of what had happened. He came in, saw his daughter on the ground and immediately fell upon her body.

He screams, holds her tightly in his arms, kisses her with tears in his eyes and says, "My sweet, darling, my sweet, darling daughter! What terrible God was it that has given you such an awful death? Which awful god took you from me? Me! Me, who has one foot in the grave! Oh! How I'd love to have died with you, my sweet daughter!"

Then, when the poor old man has quietened his grief a little and tried to stand up, he saw that his weak old body was stuck to his daughter's gown like an ivy sticks onto the branches of a Daphne bush.

He began a fearsome battle. He tried to stand up onto his weak legs but his daughter's corpse held him down. Her body was stuck to his. And as he charged at freeing his leg the old man's flesh broke away from its bones. Shortly, the ill-fated man gave up the fight and his soul left him.

How could he beat such a horror?

Such things are not for us to fight with.

1220

Now, they're lying there, two corpses, a father and a daughter, side by side, a most hideous death, a death, worthy of the deepest grief.

I... I have no idea nor do I care what you'll do next, Medea. You'll have to find your own escape from this deed of yours all alone, my lady.

As for me, I've said it often: All things accomplished by mortals are mere shadows. Nor am I afraid to say that those people who consider themselves philosophers and know the art of spinning good words and say that man can live in happiness, well, those men are stupid!

Wealth may make your life a little better than that of your neighbour but it will not give you happiness.

Exit Messenger

Chorus:

It's obvious that the gods are delivering a great many woes to Jason today. And rightly so.

Chorus:

But you, you, poor daughter of Creon! We grieve for your terrible suffering. A suffering caused because of your marriage to Jason.

Chorus:

How quickly you've come before Hades' gates!

Medea:

Enough, my friends!

My mind is made up. I've decided to kill my children and to leave this country. I haven't a moment longer lest someone takes my children and they are slaughtered by some enemy's hands. Die they must and so, better they die by me who gave birth to them.

Come, my heart, arm yourself. This is no time for equivocations. Need has forced this evil. So why wait? Come terrible hand, pick up the knife! Take it and take also the final, the most bitter step, the last step of life. Don't be a coward now. Don't think about the love you have for them, the life you gave them.

Today, forget that you have any children at all! Leave the crying for another day.

So what if you're their murderer?

Their love will follow you for ever – just as misery will.

Exit Medea

1251

Chorus:

Earth!

Chorus:

And you, too, wide and bright Light of Helios!

Look down!

Look at this destitute woman before she stretches her bloody and murderous hand to kill her children and stop her!

Chorus:

They have sprung out of your own golden seed, Helios and it is a terrible thing for the mortals to spill the blood of immortals.

Chorus:

Hold her back, immortal light! Stop her!
Send away this evil Fury from this house, a house fully plagued by vengeance!

Chorus:

How easily all the effort and all the years to have these children are to be wasted!

Chorus:

Was it for nothing that you gave birth to these children?

Chorus:

Was it for nothing that you once attacked the gruesome and dark crashing rocks?

Chorus:

Why flood your soul with wild hatred that throws you into such hard murders?

Murders!

Chorus:

Murders of one's own flesh and blood weigh heavily on mortals and huge curses are heaped upon the murderers.

Screams and tears of the boys within.

Boys:

Mother! Mummy! Ahhh!

1273

Chorus:

Ah! Do you hear? Do you hear the children?

Chorus: *Shouts towards the palace*

How harsh is your heart, Medea! How cruel your fate!

Boy: *From within*

Ahhhh! Help me! How can I escape my own mother's knife?

Boy:

I don't know, my brother. We are doomed! Ahhhh!

Chorus: Also shouts towards the palace

Ah... I can't take this any longer!

Chorus:

Shall I go into the house and save the boys?

Boy: *From within*

Come! Come inside!

Boy: *From within*

For God's sake save us! There's still time!

Boy: *From within*

Ah, here she is, knife raised above us! Ahhhh!

The boys die. Short, silent pause

Chorus:

Cruel woman!

Chorus:

Miserable woman! Is your heart made of stone or steel?

Chorus:

How can you murder the very children you bore?

Chorus:

I know of only one woman, from the olden days, who used her own hand to kill her children. That was Ino.

Chorus:

The gods had torn out her senses and Zeus' wife sent her off to wander aimlessly away from her house.

Chorus:

Then the woman took her children and jumped into the ocean. A triple drowning. What can be more horrible?

Chorus:

Such painful wedding beds! What endless suffering you bring to the mortals!

Enter Jason with two attendants.

1293

Jason: *Furious, shouting.*

You, ladies, you've been standing outside Medea's house all day. Do you know if that murderer, that criminal, Medea is still in there or has she escaped?

She would need to hide beneath the Earth, or to make wings and fly if she wants to escape her

punishment for what she did to the royal family! And if she thinks that because she has killed the heads of this country she'll be able to leave this place unpunished, she's very much mistaken! O, she'll get her punishment, all right. From those whom she hurt. I'm more concerned right now about the children. I came to save their lives, before they, too are harmed by the relatives, avenging on them their mother's unholy crime.

Chorus:

It's obvious! You've no knowledge of the misfortune you've suffered, Jason, otherwise your words would be different.

Jason:

Why, what happened? Tell me! Was she after me, as well?

Chorus:

Medea has killed your children with her own hands!

Jason:

What are you saying, woman? Your words are tearing me apart!

Chorus:

Consider your children dead, Jason!

Jason:

Where? Where has she killed them? Out here or inside the house?

Chorus:

Open the door, Jason and you will see their dead bodies.

Jason: *To his attendants*

Come, help me break down the door. Quickly, bend those iron bars! The hinges!

Quickly, let me see my children! Let my eyes fall upon this double murder so that I may get vengeance. Hurry!

But before his attendants make their way to the door, Jason throws himself upon it and tries to open it. His desperate efforts, however, are in vain.

The following dialogue is conducted while Medea suddenly appears high up, above the stage and behind the wall, inside a golden, brilliant carriage. The dead bodies of her children hang limply over the side of the carriage.

1317

Medea: *Laughing sarcastically, vengefully.*

What now, Jason? Why all this shaking and banging at the door? Are you after these dead children and after me, their murderer?

Don't waste your energy, Jason. Tell me what you want from down there. Your hand, Jason, will never touch me. Look at my chariot, Jason! My grandfather, Helios, gave it to me. Look at it! It is a mighty protection against every enemy.

Jason: *Shouts angrily*

Medea! Hateful bitch! Most evil of all women!

All the gods and I and the whole generation of men abhor you! How could you manage to kill your very own children? And, at the same time, deprive me of my own?

You've destroyed me!

And yet, there you are, alive! Alive, even though you've committed this most loathsome deed! How is it you are still allowed to see the Sun and the Earth?

Medea burn! A thousand curses to you, Medea!

Now it is all clear to me! Now I understand my mistake, a mistake that I did not understand before!

Not when I took you from a barbarous house and a barbarous land and brought you to a Greek one, not when I saw you betraying your father and the land that raised you, not when I saw you kill your own brother so as to climb aboard our beautiful ship Argo. I did not understand my mistake back then!

The gods have sent you to me, you evil spirit.

1336

And then, and then you have made yourself my wife, you gave birth to our children and then you have killed them, too!

A most heinous murder committed because of lust. Because I had left your bed.

No Greek woman would dare do such a thing. What a naïve idiot I was not to have suspected anything! I've married you!

You!

You're not a woman but a most destructive enemy! Not a woman but a lioness, whose heart is wilder than the Tuscan Skylla.

A million curses wouldn't touch you, you loathsome beast, such is the horror of your nature!

Go! Get out of my sight, evil woman, killer of your own children!

What is left for me to enjoy now? Not my young wife, nor can I talk sweetly with my lovely boys, the boys that I have raised and now lost.

Only grief. Grief and misery. How dreadful is my Fate!

1351

Medea:

There are many words I could answer you with, Jason but our God, Zeus, knows how well I treated you and how I've suffered because of you. Did you think that having turned me into something to be ridiculed would make you a happy man? Did you think that I'd let you live and go on mocking me? No! Not even Creon himself, nor his Princess would be able to send me away without my first being able to avenge myself.

Sure, call me what you like, Lioness, Tuscan Skylla, whatever you like! My job is done and I took my rightful vengeance.

Jason:

But, you, too, ache and suffer from what you've done.

Medea:

True but my pains are eased knowing I'm not the object of your ridicule.

Jason:

My darling children! What a despicable woman gave birth to you!

Medea:

My darling children! What a despicable man gave you such a destruction!

Jason:

They were not murdered by my hand!

Medea:

No, what killed them was the shame and your new marriage.

Jason:

Was an empty bed a good enough reason for your murders?

Medea:

Do you think an empty bed is such a small thing for a woman?

Jason:

For a normal woman yes. But for you, obviously, everything is a catastrophe.

1370

Medea:

Yet... look, they're not alive! Oh, my darlings! How this cuts deep into my heart!

Jason:

They're alive! And they will throw crushing curses upon your head!

Medea:

The gods know who is the primary cause of their destruction.

Jason:

And they know, too, your hateful soul.

Medea:

By all means, hate me. And I shall hate your sickening voice.

Jason:

And I yours... yet, we can both be easily saved.

Medea:

Saved? How? What would you have me do? I, too would love that.

Jason:

Let me bury the children. Let me bury them and grieve for them.

Medea:

Never!

Never! They will be buried by my own hands at the temple of Hera of the Cape, at the mountain, so that none of my enemies will be able to open their tombs and scorn them, mock them. And I'll make sure that a ceremony will be held in their honour and for their sinful murder, here in the land of Sisyfos.

And now, I'm leaving for the land of Erichtheus, to live with Aigeas, Pandion's son. You, of course, will die a fitting death! You will be struck on the head by a broken piece of wood, a piece that came out of your ship, Argo, since you've tasted the bitter end of my marriage.

Jason:

But the Fury will punish you! The Fury and Justice will destroy you, for committing the murder of your own children.

1391

Medea:

Which god or spirit will listen to you, Jason? You, who tells lies to foreigners and dishonours them?

Jason:

Medea! Medea! Child killer!

Despicable woman!

Medea:

Go home, Jason. Go home and bury your wife.

Jason:

I am going!

I'm going without my children.

Medea:

You're still not grieving as you should. Wait till old age comes to you.

Jason:

My darling sons!

Medea:

They were darlings to their mother, not to you!

Jason:

Darlings, yes. But it was still you who killed them.

Medea:

Yes, for the sake of vengeance.

Jason:

Ah!

Let me at least kiss their beloved lips.

Medea:

Now you want them!

Now you want to kiss them. Back then you were simply sending them away.

Jason:

In the name of the gods! Let me touch the soft body of my children!

Medea:

No, your words are in vain.

Jason:

Do you hear Zeus? Do you hear how she sends me away?

Do you hear how I suffer from this terrible child killer? This wild lioness?

I cry and grieve utterly for my children!

Gods! I call upon you to witness this! Witness, gods that even though she has killed my children, she won't let me touch them, she won't let me bury them!

Oh, how I wish that I, their father, had never seen them murdered by you, their mother!

Lights off.

All, except Chorus exit.

Lights on

1415

Chorus:

Our Olympian Zeus is most wise!

Chorus:

The deeds of the gods appear in many forms...

Chorus:

And gods often perform deeds even beyond our hopes.

Chorus:

Our wishes might not be granted but the gods will find ways of achieving what we never thought achievable.

Chorus:

Such was the path of our story.

Exit All
END OF
EURIPIDES'
"MEDEA"

Note: Readers might wish to also read Seneca's "Medea" Translated by F.J. Miller [here](#)