

EURIPIDES MEDEA

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DRAMATIS PERSONAE

NURSE: a servant of Medea – to be played by Chorus Member 6
TUTOR: a servant assigned to Jason's children –played by Chorus Member 1
MEDEA: wife of Jason.
CHORUS: consisting of 6 women
CREON: king of Corinth.
JASON: husband of Medea.
AEGEUS: king of Athens.
MESSENGER: a servant of Jason–played by Chorus Member 5

CHILDREN: Medea's and Jason's two young sons –played by Chorus members 2+3

HOUSEHOLD SLAVE : a servant of Medea– played by Chorus Member 4

NOTE: When the Chorus members aren't assuming a specific character, they are spectators on the action, as if they are watching the play themselves

Entrance

[The stage is set as follows: A gazebo/tent that represents Medea's home is set downstage right. A shelving unit is upstage in the center. In front of it there are 2 stools. This will be the "Chorus Corner" Downstage left is a garden bench.]

[The six Chorus members enter carrying the clothes and props that will allow them to take on different characters. Once Chorus members ushers Medea in, guides her into the tent and pulls the curtain. The other members tidy the clothes in the unit and take their position. Chorus 6 puts the Nurse garment and assumes position – This sequence is happening with music which gradually fades]

[The action starts outside the home of Jason and Medea in Corinth. The Nurse is standing by herself.]

NURSE (CHORUS 6)

O how I wish that ship the Argo
had never sailed off to the land of Colchis,
on Pelias's orders, to fetch the golden fleece.
Then my mistress, Medea,

never would have sailed away 10
to the towers in the land of Iolcus,
her heart passionately in love with Jason.
She'd never have convinced those women,
Pelias' daughters, to kill their father.
and she'd not have come to live in Corinth [10]
with her husband and her children
She gave all sorts of help to Jason.
That's when life is most secure and safe,
when woman and her husband stand as one. 20
But that marriage changed. Now they're enemies.
Their fine love's grown sick, diseased,
for Jason, leaving his own children and my mistress,
is lying on a royal wedding bed.
He's married the daughter of king Creon,
who rules this country. As for Medea,
that poor lady, in her disgrace, cries out, [20]
repeating his oaths, recalling the great trust
in that right hand with which he pledged his love.
She keeps calling to the gods
to witness how Jason is repaying her favours.
She just lies there, wasting away,
always in tears, ever since she found out
how her husband has dishonoured her.
She's not lifted her eyes up from the ground,
crying to herself for her dear father, her home,
all those things she left behind,
to come here with the man who now discards her.
Her suffering has taught her the advantages
of not being cut off from one's homeland.
Now she hates her children.
When she sees them, there is no joy in her.
And I'm afraid she may be up to some new mischief.
Her mind thinks in extremes. I know her well.
She'll not put up with being treated badly. 50
I worry she may pick up a sharp sword
and stab her stomach, or else she'll go [40]
into the house, in silence, to that bed,
and kill the king and bridegroom Jason.
Then she'll face an even worse disaster.
She's a dangerous woman. It won't be easy
for any man who picks a fight with her
to think she's beaten and he's triumphed.

[Enter Medea's and Jason's children with their Tutor – Chorus 1,2 and 3 move forward from upstage center and assume the roles of Tutor and Children using

the appropriate garments/accessories The Children initially run around the Tutor and then settle on the floor where they play with their toy soldiers.]

Here come her children. They've finished playing.
They've no notion of their mother's troubles. 60
Young minds don't like to dwell on pain.

TUTOR (CHORUS 1)

Old slave from my mistress's household,
why are you here, standing by the gate, [50]
all alone, complaining to yourself about what's wrong?
How come Medea is willing to stay inside without you?

NURSE

Old servant of Jason's children,
when a master's lot falls out badly,
that's bad for faithful servants, too—
it affects their hearts as well.
My sorrow was so great, I wanted to come here,
to speak to earth and heaven, to tell them
about the wrongs inflicted on my mistress.

TUTOR

Unhappy lady! Has she stopped weeping yet?

NURSE

Stopped crying? I envy your ignorance. [60]
Her suffering has only just begun—
she's not even half way through it.

TUTOR

Poor fool—
if I can speak that way about my masters.
She knows nothing of her latest troubles.

NURSE

What's that, old man? Don't spare me the news. 80

TUTOR

Well, I was passing by those benches
at the holy spring, and I heard someone say
(I was pretending I wasn't listening)
that Creon, king of this country, intends
to ship the children away from Corinth, [70]
with their mother, too. I've no idea 90
if the story's true or not. I hope it's not.

NURSE

But surely Jason wouldn't let his children
go into exile, even if he's squabbling
with their mother?

TUTOR

Old devotions fade,
pushed aside by new relationships.
Jason is no friend of people in this house.
But listen—the time's not right 100 [80]
to let your mistress know about these things.
So keep quiet. Don't mention anything.

NURSE

Come on, children, get inside the house.

[The Children go inside the tent. They will exit from the back and resume their part within the Chorus. The Tutor also returns to the Chorus Corner]

MEDEA *[crying from inside the house]*

I can't stand this pain, this misery.
What do I do? I wish that I could die!
O my children, cursed children of a hateful mother—
may you die with your father and his house,
may it all perish, crash down in ruins!

NURSE *[Chorus 2+3 return to Chorus Corner]*

O the sorrow of it all. Poor woman! 140
Why link your children with the nasty things
their father's done? Why do you hate them so?
I'm terrified the children will be hurt..

[Enter the Chorus of Corinthian women. The Chorus grabs old lady garments (like shawls) and dons them on as they each do the following lines. Chorus 2 and 3 will only assist and remain in Chorus Corner. Chorus 1,4,5 will become Corinthian Women]

CHORUS 2 (normal voice)

I heard her voice,

CHORUS 3 (normal voice)

I heard the cries

ALL CHORUS (eerie)

of that sad lady here from Colchis.

CHORUS 1 (becomes old lady)

Has she not calmed down yet?

CHORUS 4 (becomes old lady)

Old nurse, tell me.

I heard from some household servant in there
that she's been screaming.

CHORUS 5 (becomes old lady)

I find no pleasure ¹⁶⁰
in this house's suffering.

CHORUS 1+4+5

We've been friends.

NURSE

This house is finished—already ruined.
For Jason's bound by his new marriage tie ^[140]
to the king's daughter. As for my mistress,
she finds no consolation
in the words of any of her friends.

MEDEA [*still from inside the house*]

I want death to come and sweep me off! ¹⁷⁰
Let me escape this life of suffering!

CHORUS 1

Thoughtless lady,
why long for death's marriage bed
which human beings all shun?

CHORUS 2+3 (still Chorus –eerie)

Death comes soon enough
and brings an end to everything.
You should not pray for it. ¹⁸⁰

CHORUS 4

And if your husband
devotes himself to some new bed,
why get angry over that?

CHORUS 5

Zeus will plead for you in this.
Don't waste your life away,
with too much wailing for your husband.

MEDEA [*within*]

O how I want to see him and his bride

beaten down, destroyed—their whole house as well—
for these wrongs they dare inflict on me,
when I've done nothing to provoke them!
O father and city, I left you behind
in my disgrace when I killed my brother.

NURSE

Do you hear what's she's saying?!
She's bound to do something quite serious 200
before this rage of hers comes to an end.

CHORUS 4

Go now—bring her here outside the house. [180]
Tell her she'll be among some friends of hers.
And hurry, before she harms someone in there—
that power in her grief will make her act. 210

NURSE

All right, though I'm afraid I won't persuade
my mistress. Still, as a favour to you,
I'll see what I can do.

[Nurse goes into the house]

[Chorus 1, 4 and 5 huddle and pretend to gossip while the following lines are spoken by Chorus 2 and 3]

CHORUS 2 (in a gossipy tone)

I have heard Medea's crying,
full of sorrow, full of tears,

CHORUS 3

her shrill accusations against Jason,
the husband who's betrayed her.

[Medea exits from her house to meet the Women along with the Nurse.]

MEDEA

Women of Corinth, I have come out here—
outside the house - so you won't think ill of me.
There's no justice in the eyes of mortal men.
The person who was everything to me, 260
my own husband, has turned out to be
the worst of men. This I know is true.
Of all things with life and understanding, [230]
we women are the most unfortunate.

First, we need a husband,
 someone we get for an excessive price.
 He then becomes the ruler of our bodies.
 And this misfortune adds
 still more troubles to the grief we have.
 Then comes the crucial struggle:
 this husband we have selected, is he good or bad? 270
 For a divorce loses women all respect,
 yet we can't refuse to take a husband.
 Then, when she goes into her husband's home,
 with its new rules and different customs,
 she needs a prophet's skill
 to sort out the man whose bed she shares.
 She can't learn that at home. [240]
 And if the marriage doesn't work,
 then death is much to be preferred.
 When the man tires of the company he keeps at home,
 he leaves, seeking relief for his distress elsewhere,
 outside the home. He gets his satisfaction
 with some male friend or someone his own age.
 We women have to look at just one man.
 Men tell us we live safe and secure at home,
 while they must go to battle with their spears.
 How stupid they are! I'd rather stand there
 three times in battle holding up my shield 290 [250]
 than give birth once. But your story and mine
 are not the same. For you have a city,
 you have your father's house, enjoy your life
 with friends for company. But I'm alone.
 I have no city, and I'm being abused
 by my own husband. I was carried off,
 a trophy from a barbarian land.
 I have no mother, brother, or relation
 to shelter with in this extremity.
 And so I want to ask something from you. 300
 If I find some way to punish Jason [260]
 for these injustices—his bride, as well,
 and her father—say nothing. In other things
 a woman may be timid—in watching battles
 or seeing steel, but when she's hurt in love,
 her marriage violated, there's no heart
 more desperate for blood than hers.

CHORUS 4

We'll do what you request. For you are right
 to pay back your husband. And, Medea,

I'm not surprised you grieve at these events. 310

[Chorus 1, 4 and 5 rejoin the Chorus and take off the Women garments. Enter Creon, with armed attendants.]

CHORUS 2

I see Creon, king of Corinth, coming.
He'll be bringing news, announcing
some new decision that's been made. [270]

CREON

You there, Medea, scowling in anger
against your husband. I'm ordering you
out of Corinth. You must go into exile,
and take those two children of yours with you.
Go quickly. I'm here to make quite sure
that this decree is put into effect.
I'm not going back into the palace 320
until I've cast you out beyond our borders.

MEDEA

Why banish me I'm the one abused?
What have I done?

CREON

I am afraid of you.
I won't conceal the truth. There's a good chance
you might well instigate some fatal harm
against my daughter. Many things lead me 330
to this conclusion: you're a clever woman,
very experienced in evil ways;
you're grieving the loss of your husband's bed;
and from reports I hear you're making threats
to take revenge on Jason, on his bride,
and on her father. Before that happens,
I'm taking some precautions. Woman, [290]
it's better that you hate me than for me
to grow soft now and regret it later.

MEDEA

Alas, this is not the first time, Creon, 340
my reputation has badly damaged me.
It's happened often. No man with any sense
should ever educate his children
to know anything beyond what's normal.
For they stir up in their fellow citizens

a hostile envy. If within the city, people think of you
as greater than those men who seem quite wise,
you'll appear a nuisance. So it is with me.
I'm a knowledgeable woman. I make
some people envious.
Have I hurt you at all, made you suffer?
Don't fear me, Creon. It's not in me
to commit crimes against the men in charge. 360
Besides, in what way have you injured me?
You have married your daughter to a man,
one your heart selected.
My husband's the one I hate.
In my view, you've acted
in this business with good sense.
So now, I'll not begrudge you your prosperity.
Have your marriage, and good luck to you.
But let me remain here, in this country.
Although I've suffered an injustice,
I'll obey the rulers and stay silent. 370

CREON

What you say sounds comforting enough,
but I'm still afraid that heart of yours
is planning something evil.
No. You must leave Corinth—and right away.
It's not possible for you to stay here, 380
not with us, given your hostility to me.

MEDEA [*kneeling in front of Creon*]

No, don't send me away. I'm begging you,
at your knee, in your daughter's name.

CREON

Your words are useless. You won't persuade me.

MEDEA

You'll send me into exile without hearing
my supplication?

CREON

Indeed I will.
I don't love you more than my own family.
It's time to leave,
Time to rid myself of all this trouble.

MEDEA

No, don't do that. I beg you, Creon . . .

[Medea seizes Creon's hand.]

CREON

Woman, it seems you're trying to provoke me. 400

MEDEA

All right then. I will go into exile.

I wasn't begging to escape from that.

CREON

Then why squeeze my hand so hard and not let go?

MEDEA

Let me remain here one day to prepare, [340]
to get ready for my exile and provide
something for my children, since their father,
as one more insult, does nothing for them.
Have pity on them. You're a parent, too.
You should treat them kindly—that's what's right.
If I go into exile, I don't care,
but I weep for them in their misfortune.

CREON

For a tyrant my will is by nature tender,
and by feeling pity I've been hurt before,
more than once. And now, woman, I see
I'm making a mistake, for you can have [350]
your extra day. But let me warn you—
if the sun catches you tomorrow
within the borders of this country,
you or your children, you'll be put to death.
Don't assume I'm not telling you the truth. 420
So, if you must remain, stay one more day.
In that time you can't do the harm I fear.
[Exit Creon]

NURSE

Alas for you, unfortunate woman—
Where will you find someone to take you in?
What country, what home will you ever find
to save you from misfortune? [360]

MEDEA

Things have worked out badly in every way.
Who can deny the fact? But nonetheless,

you should not assume that's how things will stay
Do you think I'd prostrate myself before a man like that,
if there was no advantage to be gained?
If I did not have some plan in mind,
I'd not have talked to him or grabbed his hand. [370]
But the man's become completely foolish—
for he let me stay one day,
a day when I'll turn three of my enemies
to corpses—father, daughter, and my husband.
Now, I can slaughter them in many ways.
I'm not sure which one to try out first.
There's just one problem. If I get caught 450
entering their house meaning to destroy it,
I'll be killed, and my enemies will laugh.
No. The best method is the most direct,
the one at which I have a special skill—
I'll murder them with poison. Yes, that's it.
But once they're dead, what city will receive me?
Who will give me safe shelter as a guest,
and offer me physical protection?
There's no one. Still, I'll wait a little while.
If someone shows up who can shield me, 460 [390]
I'll set my scheme in motion
and kill them without saying a word.
But if events force me to act openly,
I'll push my daring to the very limit
and slaughter them. By Hecate, goddess
I worship more than all the others,
the one I choose to help me in this work,
who lives with me deep inside my home,
these people won't bring pain into my heart 470
and laugh about it. This wedding of theirs,
I'll make it hateful for them, a disaster—
Creon's marriage ties, my exile from here, [400]
he'll find those bitter.
So get to work.
Besides, we possess a woman's nature—
powerless to perform fine noble deeds,
but very skilled in every form of evil.

CHORUS 1

The waters in the sacred rivers [410]
are flowing in reverse.

CHORUS 2

And all well-ordered things

are once more turning on themselves. 490

CHORUS 3

Men's plans are now deceitful,
their firm trust in the gods is gone.

MEDEA

Honour's coming to the female sex.
Slander will no longer injure women. [420]
Those songs by ancient poets
will stop chanting of our faithlessness.

NURSE

You 've lived in a foreign land.
and now you're driven out,
hounded into exile in disgrace.
The honour in an oath has gone.
And to you, unhappy lady,
no father's house is open,
no haven on your painful voyage. 520

[She moves to the Chorus Corner to re-join the Chorus. Enter Jason.]

JASON

Right now is not the first time I've observed
how a harsh temper can make all things worse—
You could have stayed here in this land and house,
if only you'd agreed to the arrangements
and showed some patience with those in command.
Now you're exiled for your stupid chatter. 530 [450]
Not that I care. You don't have to stop
calling Jason the worst man in the world,
but when you speak against the ruler here,
consider yourself very fortunate
that exile is your only punishment.
Anyway, I won't neglect my family.
I've come here, woman, looking out for you, [460]
so you won't be thrown out with the children
in total need and lacking everything.
Exile brings with it all sorts of hardships.
Although you may well despise me now,
I could never have bad feelings for you.

MEDEA

As a man you're the worst there is—that's all
I'll say about you, no trace of manhood.
You come to me now, you come at this point, 550

when you've turned into the worst enemy
of the gods and me and the whole human race?
It isn't courage or firm resolution
to hurt your family and then confront them, [470]
face to face, but a total lack of shame,
the greatest of all human sicknesses.
I saved your life—I killed the dragon
guarding the Golden Fleece, coiled up there, [480]
staying on watch and never going to sleep.
For you I raised the light which rescued you
from death. I left my father and my home,
on my own, and came with you to Iolcus, 570
beneath Mount Pelion. My love for you
was greater than my wisdom. Then I killed
Pelias in the most agonizing way,
at the hands of his own daughters,
and demolished his household, all of it.
Now, after I've done all this to help you,
you brute, you betray me and help yourself
to some new wife. And we have children!
If you'd had no children, I'd understand [490]
why you're so keen on marrying this girl. 580
And what about the promises you made?
I don't know if you think the ancient gods
still govern or if new regulations
have recently been put in place for men,
but you must know you've broken faith with me.
I've no idea what sort of kindness to expect from you. [500]
Where do I now turn?
To my family I'm now an enemy,
and by assisting you I declared war
on people I had no need to injure.
What a wonderful and trusting husband [510]
I have in you now, in my misfortune!
What a fine report for a new bridegroom,
his children wandering round like vagabonds
with the very woman who saved his life!

CHORUS 1

When members of a family fight like this, [520]
rage pushes them beyond all compromise. 620

JASON

Woman, in my view,
you overestimate your favours to me.
However you helped me, you did it well.
But by saving me you got in return

more than you gave, as I will demonstrate.
First of all, you now live among the Greeks,
not in a country of barbarians.
You're familiar with justice and the laws,
rather than brute force. Besides, all the Greeks
know you're clever, so you have earned yourself 640
a fine reputation. If you still lived [540]
out there at the boundary of the world,
no one would talk about you. And great fame
I'd sooner have than houses filled with gold
As for your complaints about this marriage,
I'll show you that in this I'm being wise 650
and moderate and very friendly to you
and to my children. You must have patience. [550]
When I came here from the land of Iolcus,
I brought with me many troubles, hard ones,
things impossible for me to deal with.
What greater good fortune could I have found
than marrying the daughter of the king,
me—an exile? On the point that irks you,
it's not the case I hate our marriage bed,
overcome with lust for some new bride, 660
nor am I keen to rival other men
in the number of my many children.
We have enough. I'm not complaining.
The most important thing for us to do
is to live well and not in poverty,
knowing that everyone avoids a friend [560]
once he's a pauper. As for my children,
I want to raise them in the proper way,
one worthy of my house, to have brothers
for the children born from you, and make them 670
all the same. Thus, with a united family
I might prosper. Do you need more children?
In my case, there's some benefit to have
new children to help those already born.
Was this a bad scheme? You'd agree with me,
if you weren't so upset about the sex.
What mortals need is
some other way to get our children.
We ought to have no female sex, and then
men would be rid of all their troubles.

CHORUS 2 (sarcastic)

Jason, your reasons here seem logical,
but it strikes me, if I may presume,

you're in the wrong abandoning your wife.

MEDEA

One word demolishes your argument:
if you were not corrupt, you'd ask me first,
get my consent to undertake this marriage,
but you did not even tell your family.

JASON

O yes, if I'd told you of the wedding, 700
I'm sure you would have lent me fine support.
Even now you can't stand to set aside
that immense rage in your heart. [590]

MEDEA

You're lying.
You thought as you grew old a barbarian wife
would bring you disrespect.

JASON

Get this straight—
I wanted to save you and have children,
royal princes, with the same blood as my sons.
That way my house has more security. 710

MEDEA

You have your refuge.
I'm alone and banished from this country.

JASON

That's what you've chosen. The blame rests with you. 720

MEDEA

What did I do? Marry and desert you?

JASON

You kept making all those bitter curses
against the ruling family in Corinth.

MEDEA

And I'm a curse against your family, too.

JASON

I'm not arguing with you any more [610]
about all this. But if you want me
to provide some money, some assistance
for you and for the children in your exile,
just ask. I'm prepared to give you some,

and with a generous hand. I'll send my friends 730
introductory tokens, so they'll treat you well.
You'd be mad not to accept this offer.
Woman, stop being so angry. If you do,
things will turn out so much better for you.

MEDEA

I'll accept no assistance from your friends,
nor anything from you. Don't make the offer.
Gifts from a worthless man are without value.

JASON

All right, but I call the gods to witness
I'm willing to help you and the children. [620]
But you reject my goods and stubbornly 740
push away your friends, and for that reason
you will suffer still more pain.

MEDEA

Get out of here.
For someone so in love with his new bride
you're spending far too long outside her home.
Go act married. The gods will see to it
your marriage changes into one of those
that makes you wish you had rejected it.

[Exit Jason. Medea wraps her arms around her and goes to sit on the bench]

CHORUS 2

I pray I never lack a city,
never face such hopeless life,
one filled with misery and pain. 770
For there's no affliction worse [650]
than losing one's own land.

CHORUS 3

The man who shames his family, [660]
who does not open up his heart
and treat them in all honesty—
may he perish unlamented.
With him I never could be friends.

[Enter Aegeus, King of Athens.]

AEGEUS

I wish you all happiness, Medea.

There is no better way to greet one's friends.

[Medea gets up and goes to shake his hand.]

MEDEA

All happiness to you, too, Aegeus,
wise Pandion's son. Where are you coming from? 790

AEGEUS

I've just left Apollo's ancient oracle.

MEDEA

What business took you there?

AEGEUS

To ask a question.
I want to know how I can have some children.

MEDEA

In the gods' name, have you lived so long [670]
without ever having any children?
So what did Apollo say about it?
It is appropriate for me to learn?

AEGEUS

Of course. I need a clever mind like yours.

MEDEA *[leading Aegeus towards the bench. Both sit down]*

What was the prophecy? Tell it to me—
if it's all right for me to hear.

AEGEUS

He told me this:
"Don't untie the wineskin's foot. . ."

MEDEA

Until when?
Until you do what or reach what country? [680]

AEGEUS

". . . until you come back to your hearth and home."

MEDEA

What were you looking for when you sailed here?

AEGEUS

A man called Pittheus, king of Troezen. 810
I want to share the god's prophecy with him.

MEDEA
He's a wise man and skilled in things like that.

AEGEUS
And the friendliest of all my allies.

MEDEA
Well, good luck. I hope you find what you desire.

AEGEUS
Why are your eyes so sad, your cheeks so pale?

MEDEA
O Aegeus, my husband has been cruel— [690]
of all men he has treated me the worst.

AEGEUS
What are you saying? Tell me truly—
what things have made you so unhappy? 820

MEDEA
Jason's abusing me. I've done him no harm.

AEGEUS
What has he done? Give me more details.

MEDEA
He's taken a new wife. She now rules his home,
instead of me.

AEGEUS
That's completely shameful.
He hasn't dared something like that, has he?

MEDEA
Indeed, he has. He's dishonored me, the wife
he used to love.

AEGEUS
Leave him, then, since, as you say, he's worthless. 830

MEDEA
His passion is to marry royalty.

AEGEUS

Who's giving her to him? Tell me the rest.

MEDEA

Creon, who rules this land of Corinth.

AEGEUS

Then, lady, it's quite understandable
why you're in such distress.

MEDEA

I'm done for, finished.
I'm being banished from this country.
Creon is driving me into exile,
forcing me out, away from Corinth.

AEGEUS

With Jason's full consent? I find that disgraceful. 840

MEDEA

He says not. Still, he's planning to accept it.
But, Aegeus, take pity on me in my misfortune.
Don't let me be exiled without a friend.
Accept me as a suppliant in your home,
your native land. If you will take me in,
may the gods then answer your desire
to have children. May you die a happy man.
You don't know what a lucky one you are 850
to find me here. I'll end your childlessness.
I know the sorts of medicines to use,
and I can help you have many children.

AEGEUS

Lady, I'd like to grant this favour to you,
for many reasons. First, there's the gods. [720]
Then, for the children you say I'll produce.
Here's what I'll do. If you get to my country,
I'll strive to treat you as a foreign guest—
that's the proper thing for me to do. 860
But, Medea, I'll give you fair warning:
I won't plot to get you out of Corinth.
If you can reach my household on your own,
you may stay there in safety. Rest assured—
I won't surrender you to anyone.

But you must make your own escape from here.
I don't want my hosts finding fault with me. [730]

MEDEA

That's fine with me. If you could promise this,
you'll have done me all the good you can.

AEGEUS

Don't you trust me? What in this still bothers you? 870

MEDEA

I do trust you. But the house of Pelias
dislikes me, and so does Creon's, too.
If you bind yourself to a promise now,
you'll not hand me over when they come,
seeking to remove me from your country.
If you use words, and don't swear by the gods,
you may become their friend and then comply
with their political demands. I'm weak,
and they have wealth, a king's resources. [740]

AEGEUS

What you've just said is very shrewd. All right, 880
if it's what you want, I'm not unwilling
to do what you require. Your proposal
gives me some security. I can show
those hostile to you I've a good excuse.
And it makes your position more secure.
Tell me the gods that I should swear by.

MEDEA *[Gets up and gestures for him to get up as well]*

Swear by the plain of Earth, by Helios,
my father's father, by the family of gods,
by all of them collectively.

AEGEUS *[They hold hands]*

Tell me
what I must swear to do and not to do. 890

MEDEA

Never to cast me out from your own country.
And if some enemy of mine asks you [750]
if he can take me off, you'll not agree,
not while you're still alive.

AEGEUS

To that I swear.
By the Earth, by Helios' sacred light,
by all the gods, I'll do what I've just heard.

MEDEA

That's good. And if you betray this promise,
what happens to you then?

AEGEUS

May I then suffer
the punishment that falls on profane men.

MEDEA

All is well. Now, go your way in peace. 900
I'll come to your city as quickly as I can,
once I've completed what I mean to do,
and my plans here have been successful.

[Exit Aegeus.]

CHORUS 3

May Hermes, noble son of Maia,
go with you on your return, Aegeus. [760]
I hope you'll get what your heart's so set on,
for in my eyes you are a worthy man.

MEDEA

Now, my friends,
we'll triumph over all my enemies. 910
The plans I've made have been set in motion.
For at the point when I was most in trouble,
this man came and helped me
plan safe harbour for myself.

I'm going to send one of my household slaves 920

[Chorus 4 gets up and puts the Household slave garment and approaches Medea]

to ask Jason to come and visit me.
Once he's here, my words will reassure him.
I'll tell him I agree with what he's doing,
that leaving me for this royal alliance
is a fine idea—he's acted properly
and made the right decisions. Then I'll ask [780]
if my children can remain. My purpose

is not to leave them in a hostile land
surrounded by insulting enemies,
but a trick to kill the daughter of the king. 930
I'll send the children to her with gifts.
They'll carry presents for the bride, as if
requesting to be spared their banishment—
a finely woven robe and a tiara
of twisted gold. If she accepts those presents
and puts them on, she'll die—and painfully.
And so will anyone who touches her.
I've smeared strong poisons on those gifts.
So much for that. I'll say no more about her. [790]
But the next thing I'll do fills me with pain— 940
I'm going to kill my children. There's no one
can save them now. And when I've done this,
wiped out Jason's house completely, I'll leave,
evading the punishment I'd receive
for murdering my darling children,
a sacrilegious crime. You see, my friends,
I won't accept my enemies' contempt.
So be it. What good does life hold for me now?
I have no father, no home, no refuge.
I was wrong to leave my father's house,
won over by the words of that Greek man,
who now, with the gods' help, will pay the price.
He'll never see his children alive again,
the ones I bore him, nor have more children
with his new bride, for she's been marked to die
Let no one think that I'm a trivial woman,
a feeble one who sits there passively.

SLAVE (CHORUS 4)

Since you've shared your plans with me, I urge you
not to do this. I want to help you,
holding to the standards of human law.

MEDEA

In this matter there's no choice. I forgive
what you just said, because, unlike me,
you don't have to bear this suffering.

SLAVE

But, lady, can you stand to kill your children?

MEDEA

Yes. It will be a mortal blow to Jason.

SLAVE

But as a woman it will devastate you. 970

MEDEA

That's beside the point. Until that time
it's useless to continue talking.

Go and fetch Jason here. [820]

When I need to trust someone, I **have chosen** you.

Tell him nothing of what I mean to do,
if you like your mistress and are a woman.

[Medea goes into the house, and the Slave moves off stage.]

CHORUS 5

Consider this—the killing of your children.
Consider the murder you are going to do.

CHORUS 3

By your knees we beg you,
in every way we know,
do not butcher your own children.

CHORUS 2

Where will your hands and heart
find the strength, the courage
to dare this dreadful action?

CHORUS 1

When they kneel before you,
and implore your mercy,
you'll find it impossible
to steel your heart,
then soak your hands
in your own children's blood.

[Enter Jason with the Slave.]

JASON *[tentatively going near the house door.]*

I've come, as you requested. You hate me,
but I'm here, and I'm prepared to listen.
Woman, what it is you now want from me? 1020

MEDEA *[Exiting house]*

Jason, I ask you to forgive me
for what I said before.

I realize I've been in the wrong.
Why fight against the rulers of this land
or against my husband, whose actions serve 1030
my own best interests with this royal marriage,
producing brothers related to my sons?
Why can't I stop being angry?
Don't I have children? [880]
Don't I know we're going into exile,
where friends are hard to find?"

[Chorus 2 and 3, who will have taken a spot in the Chorus Corner as close to the tent as possible, take their Children garments and head inside the tent from the back. They will prepare inside during the rest of that speech]

So now I agree with you. It strikes me
you've been acting prudently.
I should have worked with you in your design,
helped you with your plans, stood there beside you
in this marriage, rejoiced along with you
for this union with your bride. But women are,
well, I won't say bad—we are what we are.
You should not copy the bad things we do, [890]
repaying foolishness with foolishness.
So I give in. I admit that I was wrong.
But now I see things in a better light. 1050

[Medea goes to the door of the house and calls inside.]

Children, come out here—leave the house.

[Children exit the house]

Come on out. Welcome your father here—
talk to him with me. You and your mother
will end the bad blood in this family.
We've patched things up, and no one's angry now.

[Medea hugs her children.]

O my children,
will you keep holding your dear arms out like this
through all the many years you have to live?
O dear, I'm just too tearful, too afraid!

JASON

Lady, I approve of what you're saying now.
Not that I blame you for what went on before.
Although it took a while, you understand

the wiser course of action. In doing so,
you're acting like a woman of good sense.
Now, as for you, my children, your father
has not been neglectful. With the gods' help,
I've made secure provision for you both.
At some future date, you'll be leaders here,
in Corinth, alongside your new brothers.
But first you must grow up. I pray I see you [920]
mature into fine young men, victorious
over all my enemies.

[Medea starts to weep.]

Medea,
why turn away? Why weep and fill your eyes
with these pale tears? What I have said,
does that not make you happy?

MEDEA
It's nothing.
I was thinking of the children.

JASON
Cheer up.
I will see that they are well looked after.

MEDEA
I will cheer up. I trust what you have said.
But it's a woman's nature to shed tears. 1090

JASON
But why be so tearful with the boys?

MEDEA
I gave birth to them. When you made that prayer [930]
about them growing up, I felt pity,
wondering how things would turn out for them.
But let's discuss the reasons for your visit.
I've mentioned some. Now I'll let you know the rest.
Since the rulers here are keen to banish me,
I recognize the best thing I can do
is try not to stand in their way or yours,
by staying here. This royal house thinks me 1100
their enemy. So I've made up my mind
to leave this country and go into exile.
But you should beg Creon to spare our boys,

not banish them, so they can grow up here, [940]
under your direction.

JASON

Well, I don't know
if I can convince him. But I should try.

MEDEA

You could tell your wife to ask her father
not to send the children into exile.

JASON

A good idea. I think I can persuade her.

MEDEA

You will, if she's a woman like the rest. 1110
And I'll give you some help. I'll send her gifts,
by far the finest human gifts I know,
a finely woven gown, a diadem
of twisted gold. The boys will take them.
One of my servants will fetch them here— [950]

[Medea gestures to Slave .]

You—bring me those presents right away.

[Slave goes into the house.]

That wife of yours- she's blessed in countless ways-
and now she gets these gifts, 1120
which my grandfather Helios once gave
to his descendants.

[The servant returns with the gifts. Medea takes them and hands them over to her children.]

Come, children,
take up these wedding gifts and carry them
as offerings to the happy royal bride.
What she's getting will be worthy of her.

JASON

What are you doing, you foolish woman,
disposing of these things of yours?
Don't give them away. If my wife values me,
she'll set more store on what I want to do 1130
than on rich possessions. I'm sure of that.

MEDEA

Don't say that, gold works
more wonders than a thousand words.
And to spare my children banishment,
I'd trade more than gold. I'd give my life.
Now, children, when you get inside the palace,
you must beg this new wife of your father's, 1140 [970]
our mistress, not to send you into exile.
When you present these gifts, you must make sure
she takes them from you herself, in her own hands.
Now go and be quick about it. Good luck!
Bring your mother back news of your success,
the happy news she so desires to hear.

[Exit Jason and Slave with the children.]

CHORUS 1

I've no longer any hope
that these children stay alive,
as they stroll to their own slaughter.

CHORUS 5

The bride will take her diadem, 1150
she'll take her golden ruin.

CHORUS 6

With her own hand she'll fix
across her lovely yellow hair [980]
the jewelry of death.

CHORUS 1

And you, unlucky man, [990]
married to the daughter of a king—
how ignorant you are right now,
bringing death to both your sons,
to your bride an agonizing end.

CHORUS 5

Next, I mourn your sorrows,
unhappy mother of these children, 1170
intent on slaughtering your sons,
because your lawless husband
left you and your marriage bed [1000]
and now lives with another wife.

[Enter the Slave with the children.]

SLAVE

My lady, your children won't be exiled.
The royal bride was happy to accept,
with own hands, the gifts you sent her.
Now the boys have made their peace with her.
[Medea starts to weep.]

MEDEA

Alas . . .
All I can say is that I feel so sad

SLAVE

Have I mistakenly said something bad?

MEDEA

You've reported what you had to tell me.
I'm not blaming you.
But now go in the house.^[1020]

[Slave rejoins the Chorus. The children remain with Medea. (The children must keep their toy soldiers in their pockets)]

O my children, I must go to another country,
an exile, before I've had my joy in you,
before I've seen you happy, or helped
to decorate your marriage beds, your brides,
your bridal chambers, or lifted high
your wedding torches. How miserable
my self-will has made me. I raised you— 1210
and all for nothing. The work I did for you,
the cruel hardships, pains of childbirth— ^[1030]
all for nothing. Once, in my foolishness,
I had many hopes in you—it's true—
that you'd look after me in my old age,
that you'd prepare my corpse with your own hands,
in the proper way, as all people wish.
But now my tender dreams have been destroyed.
For I will live my life without you two,
in sorrow, and those loving eyes of yours 1220
will never see your mother any more.
Your life is changing. O my children, ^[1040]
why are you looking at me in that way?
Why smile at me—that last smile of yours?
Alas, what shall I do?

[Medea moves to the bench and the children play with their toy soldiers on the floor]

CHORUS 6

[approaches Medea and sits on stage right arm of the bench]

My heart gives way when I see those eyes,
I cannot do it. Good bye to those earlier plans of mine.
Why harm them as a way to hurt their father 1230
and have to suffer twice his pain myself?
No, I won't do that. And so farewell
to what I planned before.

CHORUS 5

[approaches Medea and sits on stage left of the bench]

But what's going on?
What's wrong with me? Do I really want
my enemies escaping punishment, [1050]
while I become someone they ridicule?
I will go through with this. What a coward
I am to let my heart even admit
such sentimental reasons.

MEDEA

[Gets up and says in unbelievably cold determined voice]

Children,
you must go in the house.

*[The children move toward the house but remain at the door, looking at Medea.
They leave their toys on the floor]*

My hand will never lack the strength for this.
And yet . . . My heart - do not do this murder.
Spare my children. No!
I'll never deliver up my children, [1060]
hand them over to their enemies, 1250
to be humiliated. They must die—
that's unavoidable, no matter what.
Since that must happen, then their mother,
the one who gave them life, will kill them.
At all events it's settled. There's no way out.
What I want to do now is say farewell. 1260

[Medea moves to the children near the door, kneels down and hugs them.]

Give me your right hands, children. Come on. [1070]
Let your mother kiss them. Oh, these hands—
how I love them—and how I love these mouths,
faces—the bearing of such noble boys.
I wish you happiness—but somewhere else.
Where you live now your father takes away.
O this soft embrace!
But you must go inside. Go!
I can't stand to look at you any more like this. 1270

[Chorus 2 and 3 go into the tent and then quietly move out. This time they leave the Children's outfits inside]

The evil done to me has won the day.
I understand too well the dreadful act
I'm going to commit, but my judgment
cannot check my anger, and that incites
the greatest evils human beings do. [1080]

[Medea goes into the house followed by Chorus 5 and 6, Chorus 5 will exit the stage completely so she can re-enter as Messenger.]

CHORUS 1

Often, before this present time,
I've gone into more complex arguments,
I've struggled with issues more serious
than those that women ought to wrestle with.

CHORUS 2

I can claim that among human beings [1090]
those who have no experience of children,
who have never given birth to offspring,
such people have far more happiness
than those who have been parents.

CHORUS 3

With those who have no children, 1290
because they never come to see
whether a child of theirs grows up
to be a blessing or a curse to men,
their failure to have offspring
shields them from many grievances.
But those who in their own homes
have a sweet race of children growing,
I see them worn down with cares [1100]

their whole life long. First,
how they can raise their children well. 1300

[Enter Medea from the house.]

MEDEA

I've long been waiting in suspense
to see what's happening in the royal house.

[Enter the Messenger, coming from the royal palace.]

Now I see one of Jason's servants coming. 1320
His frantic breathing indicates to me
he brings fresh news of some catastrophe. [1120]

MESSENGER – CHORUS 5

Medea, you must escape—leave this place.
You've done an awful deed, broken every law.

MEDEA

What's happened that I have to run away?

MESSENGER

The king's daughter has just been destroyed,
her father, too—Creon. You poisoned them.

MEDEA

What really splendid news you bring. 1330
From now on, I'll consider you a friend,
one of my benefactors.

MESSENGER

Are you in your right mind, lady, or insane?
To commit this crime against the royal house, [1130]
and then be happy when you hear the news,
without being terribly afraid?

MEDEA

Tell me of their deaths. If you report
they died in pain, you'll double my rejoicing. 1340

MESSENGER

When your two children came with their father
and entered the bride's home, we servants,
who had shared in your misfortune, were so glad.
In my joy, I went with the children right inside,
into the women's quarters. Our mistress,
before she caught sight of your two children,

wanted to fix her eyes on Jason only.
 But then she veiled her eyes and turned away
 her white cheek, disgusted that they'd come.
 Your husband tried to change the young bride's mood, [1150]
 Once she saw the gifts, she did not hold out,
 but agreed in everything with Jason.
 And before your children and their father
 had gone any distance from the palace,
 she took the richly embroidered gown
 and put it on, then arranged the golden crown, [1160]
 fixing it in her hair at a bright mirror,
 smiling at her body's lifeless image there. 1370
 Oh but then it happened—a horrific sight.
 One of the servants, shouted when she saw
 the white spit foaming in her mouth, her eyes
 bulging from their sockets, and her pale skin
 quite drained of blood. Another slave
 ran off at once towards her father's palace,
 and another to the girl's new husband
 to tell him the grim fate his bride had met. 1390
 She was suffering a double agony—
 around her head the golden diadem
 shot out amazing molten streams of fire
 burning everything, while the fine woven robe, 1400
 consumed the poor girl's flesh
 She fell down on the ground,
 overcome by the disaster.
 Her eyes had lost their clear expression, 1410
 her face had changed. And there was blood
 across her head, dripping down, mixed with fire.
 The flesh was peeling from her bones, chewed off
 by the poison's secret jaws, just like resin [1200]
 oozing from a pine tree. An appalling sight!
 Everyone was too afraid to touch the corpse—
 what we'd seen had warned us. But her father,
 poor wretch, did not know what she'd been through.
 He came unexpectedly into the house
 and stumbled on the corpse. He cried aloud, 1420
 embraced his daughter and kissed her, saying,
 "My poor child, who's taken you
 away from me, an old man near my death?
 O my child, I wish I could die with you."
 He ended his lamenting cries. But then,
 when he tried to raise his old body up,
 he was entangled in that woven dress,
 like ivy wrapped around a laurel branch.

The poor man at last gave up.
His breathing stopped—he could not stand the pain
a moment longer. So the two of them lie dead—
the daughter, her old father, side by side. [1220]
It's horrible, something to make one weep.
Concerning you there's nothing I will say.
For you'll know well enough the punishment
that's coming to you.

[Messenger re-joins the Chorus. They all approach Medea. They take off pieces of her clothing (what is easily removed) and they don them on Chorus 5. Chorus 1 hands Medea the dagger. Once her speech is done she goes into the tent]

MEDEA

I've made up my mind, I'll do it—
kill my children now, without delay,
and flee this land. I must not hesitate.
That would hand them over to someone else
to be slaughtered by a hand less loving. 1460
No matter what, the children have to die.
Since that's the case, then I, who gave them life, [1240]
will kill them. Arm yourself for this, my heart.
Why do I put off doing this dreadful act,
since it must be done? **Come, wretched hand of mine,
move to where your life of misery begins.**
Don't play the coward. Don't remember now
how much you love them, how you gave them life.
For this short day forget they are your children— 1470
and mourn them later. Although you kill them,
still you loved them.

[Medea goes into the house.]

CHORUS 5 *[Chorus 5 here represents Medea's remnants of motherly instinct]*

Hail to the Sun,
whose rays illuminate all things.
Turn your eyes, look down,
see this destroying woman,
before she sets her bloody hands,
her instruments of murder,
onto her own children, 1480
those offshoots of your golden race.^{4]}

[Chorus 5 tries to run into the house and save the children, while the rest of the Chorus try to stop her. This sequence will be choreographed. Chorus 5 speech grows more desperate]

The pain you felt in giving birth
was useless, wasted.
Those children you so love, 1490
you bore them all in vain.
you unhappy woman,
why does your anger
fall so heavily upon your heart,
and one harsh murder
follow so quickly on another? 1500

CHILD[*recorded voice*]
Help me . . . help . . .

CHORUS 5
Did you hear that?
Did you hear the children cry?
That wretched, evil woman! 1510

CHILD[*recorded voice*]
Mother please...

[Stage lights go dark. The only light comes from a torch within the tent. We see Medea raise the dagger and strike. The moment she strikes, Chorus 5 who is held by the others SCREAMS. Lights go up again]

CHORUS 5 [*trembling, crying*]
You hard and wretched woman,
just like stone or iron—
to kill your children, [1280]
ones you bore yourself, 1520
sealing their fate with your own hands.

CHORUS 6
But what horror still remains
after what's happened here?

CHORUS 1
A woman's marriage bed— [1290]
so full of pain—how many evils, 1540
has it brought on humankind?

[*Enter Jason.*]
JASON
Is she still inside? Or has she left here?
Did she really think she could kill the rulers of this country

and get away unharmed? But at this point
she's no concern of mine. I'm worried
for my children. Those whom she has wronged
will take care of her. I've come for the boys,
to save their lives, in case the next of kin
try to harm me and mine, retribution
for their mother's profane murders.

CHORUS 3

Unhappy man, you don't know the full extent
of your misfortune, or you would not say this.

JASON

What is it? Does she plan to kill me, too?

CHORUS 4

Your boys are dead, killed by their mother's hand. 1560⁵

JASON

No. What are you telling me? Woman, [1310]
you have destroyed me.

CHORUS 2

Open the doors and you will see them,
your slaughtered children.

JASON *[draws the curtain open, sees the children dead and yells in agony. He
kneels and says the following line with both rage and mourning]*

Where is she that wretched woman,
on whom I shall exact revenge. 1570

*[Medea appears coming from behind the tent. She is wearing a long black cloak
embroidered with the symbols of Hecate.]*

MEDEA

If you desire something from me,
then say so, if you want to.
But you'll never have me in your grasp *again*
for the power of Hecate I carry
will now protect me from all enemy hands.

JASON

You accursed woman, most abominable
to the gods and me and all mankind.
You dared to take the sword to your own boys, 1580
you—the one who bore them—and to leave me
destroyed and childless.

May you be destroyed! Now I understand—
I must have lost my mind to bring you here,
from that savage country, to a Greek home. [1330]
You were truly evil then—you betrayed
your father and the land that raised you.
But the avenging fury meant for you 1590
the gods have sent to me. You slaughtered
your brother in your home, then came aboard
our fine ship, the Argo. That's how you began.
When you married me and bore my children,
in your lust for sex and our marriage bed,
you killed them.
You're not a woman. You're a female lion. 1600
Your nature is more bestial than Scylla,
the Tuscan monster. But my insults,
multiplied a thousand fold, don't hurt you.
Your heart's too hard for that. So be off,
you shameful murderer of your children.
Let me lament my fate.

MEDEA

I would reply to your words at length, 1610
if father Zeus did not already know
what I did for you and what you did to me.
You weren't going to shame my marriage bed
and have a pleasant life ridiculing me,
nor was that royal bride or Creon,
who gave her to you, going to banish me,
throw me from here with impunity.
So if you want, call me a lioness
or Scylla, who lives on Tuscan shores.
For I've made contact with your heart at last. 1620 [1360]

JASON

You have your own share of pain and sorrow.

MEDEA

That's true. But there is relief in knowing
you cannot laugh at me.

JASON

O my children,
you had such an evil mother!

MEDEA

O my children,
victims of your father's evil actions!

JASON

At least it was not my hand that killed them.

MEDEA

No. It was an insult—your new marriage.

JASON

Was it right to murder them for that?

MEDEA

Do you think an insult to a woman
is something insignificant?

JASON

Yes, I do, ¹⁶³⁰
to a woman with good sense. But to you
it is completely evil.

MEDEA

Well, your sons are gone.
That should cause you pain. [1370]

JASON

I think their spirits live
to take out their revenge on you.

MEDEA

The gods are aware who began this fight.

JASON

Yes, they well know your detested heart.

MEDEA

Keep up your hate. How I loathe your voice.

JASON

And I hate yours. It won't be difficult
for the two of us to part.
Let me bury these dead boys and mourn them.

MEDEA

Never. My own hands will bury them,
so no enemy of mine
will commit sacrilege against them

by tearing up their graves.
And in this place, I'll initiate
a solemn celebration, with mystic rites,
future atonement for this profane murder.
I'll now go to the land of Erechtheus, ¹⁶⁵⁰
to live with Aegeus, son of Pandion.
As for you, you'll have a miserable death,
as is fitting for a coward

JASON
May the avenging Fury of our children
destroy you—may you find blood justice. [1390]

MEDEA
What god or spirit listens to you,
a man who does not keep his promises, ¹⁶⁶⁰
a man who deceives and lies to strangers?

JASON
You polluted wretch! Child killer!

MEDEA
Go home.
Bury that wife of yours.

JASON
I'll go.
I've lost both my sons.

MEDEA [*spoken low, like she knows its her fate too*]
Your grief's not yet begun.
Wait until you're old.

JASON
O such loving children!

MEDEA
Their mother loved them. You did not.

JASON
And yet you killed them?

MEDEA
Yes, to injure you.

JASON
Alas, how I long to see my dear boys' faces,

to hold them in my arms. [1400]

MEDEA

So now, at this point,
you'll talk to them, you'll give them an embrace. 1670
Before this, you shoved them from you.

JASON

By the gods,
I beg you, let me feel their tender skin.

MEDEA [*Yells 'No' like she is using the last of her strength. As she finished the line she looks down and sees the toy soldier. She carefully picks it up and moves to the bench*]
No. Your words are wasted.

JASON [kneels in despair]

O Zeus,
do you hear how I'm being driven off,
what I must endure from this child killer,
this she lion, this abomination?
But I'll use the strength I have for grieving
and praying to the gods to bear witness [1410]
how you have killed my children and refuse
to let me hold their bodies or bury them. 1680

JASON (devastated) / MEDEA (detached)

How I wish I'd never been a father / **How I wish you 'd never been a father**
and had to see you kill my children. / **and had to see me kil your children**

[Medea's is mournfully looking at the toy soldier on the bench while Jason remains kneeling devastated./ Chorus moves as the speak and form a line behind and between Jason and Medea. They stare directly into the audience]

CHORUS 1

Zeus on Olympus,
dispenses many things.

CHORUS 2

Gods often contradict

CHORUS 3

our fondest expectations.

CHORUS 4

What we anticipate

CHORUS 5

does not come to pass.
What we don't expect

CHORUS 6

some god finds a way 1690
to make it happen.

ALL CHORUS

So with this story.
[Lights off /Curtain.]