

SIDE ONE - AEGEUS & MEDEA

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

SIDE ONE - AEGEUS & MEDEA

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.

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,

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.

SIDE ONE - AEGEUS & MEDEA

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.

SIDE TWO - CREON & MEDEA

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 [*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.*]

SIDE TWO - CREON & MEDEA

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]

SIDE 3 - JASON & MEDEA

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.
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

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.

SIDE 3 - JASON & MEDEA

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.
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]

SIDE 3 - JASON & MEDEA

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*]

No. Your words are wasted.

SIDE 4 - MEDEA

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.

SIDE 5 - JASON

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.

SIDE 6 - CHORUS 5&6 & MEDEA

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

SIDE 7 - CHORUS

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?

SIDE 7 - CHORUS

CHORUS 5

Zeus will plead for you in this.

Don't waste your life away,
with too much wailing for your husband.

SIDE 8 - CHORUS 5

MESSENGER (CHORUS 5)

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,

SIDE 8 - CHORUS 5

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.

SIDE 9 - CHORUS 6

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.