

Euripides, *Medea* 230-91, 358-409

Medea, the daughter of King Aeetes of Colchis, had helped Jason, using her magic powers with herbs, to win the golden fleece, and then assisted in his escape from Colchis. After returning together to Thessaly, Medea and Jason had been expelled after she had encouraged King Pelias' daughters to kill him in the disappointed hope of rejuvenating him by means of Medea's magic. Therefore, Medea and Jason had fled to Corinth and settled there with their two children. Euripides' play, which is set in Corinth, begins with the news that Jason has now abandoned Medea for a younger woman, Glauce, the daughter of Creon the king of Corinth. Our extract begins as Medea emerges from her house to address the chorus of Corinthian women who are her friends.

Medea: Of all things which are alive and have intelligence
we women are the most wretched creature;
first of all it is necessary for us for an excess of money
to buy a husband, and to take a master of our body;
for this is a more painful evil than the first evil. 5
Even in this there is the greatest challenge, either to take a bad one
or a good one: for divorces do not offer a good reputation
for women, nor is it possible to refuse a husband.
And a woman who has come to new ways and customs
has to be a prophet, not having learned at home, 10
as to what kind of man in particular she will deal with as her bedfellow.
And if, when we work these things out well,
our husband lives with us bearing the yoke without compulsion,
life is enviable; but if not, one should die.
But a man, whenever he is fed up being with those inside, 15
having gone outside he releases his heart from annoyance
by turning either to a friend or to a peer;
but there is a necessity for us to look to one soul.
But they say of us that we live a life without danger
at home, while they do battle with the spear, 20
reasoning wrongly: how I would wish to stand three times
beside the shield rather than give birth once!
For the same argument does not apply to you and to me:
you have this city and the home of your father
and the enjoyment of life and the company of your friends, 25
but I, being deserted and without a city, am treated badly
by my husband, having been taken as plunder from a foreign land,
without a mother, without a brother, without a relative
to find a different shelter from this disaster.
Therefore, I will wish to obtain this much from you: 30
if a way and a means is discovered by me
to exact justice from my husband for these wrongs,
and from the man who gave his daughter to him, and from the woman who married him,

that you keep quiet. For a woman in other respects is full of fear
and cowardly with regard to combat and at looking on the sword: 35
but when she happens to be wronged with regard to her marriage-bed,
there is no other mind more murderous.

Chorus: I will do this; for you will take vengeance on your husband with justice,
Medea. And I am not surprised that you lament your fortunes.
But I actually see Creon, ruler of this land, 40
coming, bearing news of fresh decisions.

Creon: I publicly tell you, who are scowling and furious with your husband,
Medea, to go outside this land
an exile, having taken your two children with you,
and not to delay at all: for I am the authority 45
for this decree, and I will not go away back to my home
until I throw you outside the boundaries of the land.

Medea: Oh no! I, utterly ruined, the wretch, am destroyed.
For my enemies are letting out the whole rope indeed,
and there is no accessible way out from ruin. 50
But although I am suffering badly, I will nevertheless ask:
for what reason do you send me away from the land, Creon?

Creon: I am afraid (there is no need to conceal my reasons)
that you may do some irreparable evil to my child.
And many indications contribute to this: 55
you are clever and skilled in many evils,
and you feel pain since you are deprived of a man's bed.
And I hear that you are threatening, so they report to me,
to do something to the one who gave her, and the man who married her,
and the girl marrying him. Therefore, before I suffer these things,
[I will be on my guard. 60
And it is better for me to be hated by you now, woman,
than, having softened, later to regret it.

In the sixty or so lines that are omitted from the set-text, Medea fails to persuade Creon that she poses no threat and should be allowed to stay in Corinth. However, against his better judgment, he allows her to stay for one more day on the pretext that she has to make arrangements for herself and her children's impending exile. He has now left, and the chorus react to this latest blow for Medea.

Chorus: Alas! Alas! Wretched in your pains, unfortunate woman,
Where on earth will you turn? In what hospitality
will you find either a home or a land as salvation from your troubles? 65
How the god has carried you into an impossible storm
of troubles, Medea!

Medea: Things have turned out badly in every way: who will deny it?
But this situation will not at all turn out in this way, do not yet think it.
There are still challenges for the newly wedded pair 70
and not small troubles for those who arranged the marriage.

For do you think that I would ever have flattered this man
 if I were not gaining some advantage or plotting something?
 Nor would I have spoken to him, nor would I have touched him with my two hands.
 But he has reached such a level of stupidity 75
 that, when it was possible for him to defeat my plans
 by banishing me from the land, he allowed me to remain
 this day, in which I will make three of my enemies corpses,
 the father and the girl and my husband.
 But having many paths to death for them, 80
 I do not know which kind I should first attempt, friends:
 whether I should set alight the bridal house with fire,
 or I should thrust a sharpened sword through the liver,
 after in silence entering the house, where the marriage-bed has been made.
 But one thing is against me: if I am caught 85
 entering the house and plotting,
 I will be killed and cause laughter in my enemies.
 It is best by direct means, in which I am by nature
 especially clever, to destroy them by poisons.
 Very well:
 now suppose they are dead: which city will receive me? 90
 What friend will provide a safe land and a secure home
 and protect my person?
 There is no one. Therefore, after waiting for a small time further,
 if some safe fortress appears to us,
 I will pursue this murder with deceit and silence; 95
 but if impossible misfortune drives me out,
 myself having taken a sword, even if I am going to be killed,
 I will kill them, and I will go to the extremity of daring.
 For by the mistress, whom I revere
 especially out of all and I chose as my partner, 100
 Hecate, who dwells in the innermost parts of my hearth,
 not one of them will hurt my heart with impunity.
 But I will make the wedding bitter and painful for them,
 and the marriage bitter, as well as my exile from the land.
 But come then! Spare nothing of what you know, 105
 Medea, making plans and plotting;
 proceed to the terrible act: now it is a test of courage.
 Do you see what you suffer? You must not incur laughter
 from this Corinthian marriage of Jason,
 you who are born from a noble father and are descended from Helios. 110
 But you do understand; in addition, we are by nature
 women, the most powerless when it comes to noble deeds,
 but the cleverest craftsmen of all evils.