

The Jackal

Cast of characters

Arrian, a student of Epictetus and later the scribe who preserved his works

Locutus, a friend of Arrian and student of Epictetus

Mersephone, a young woman who lives in Nicopolis

Epictetus, a former slave turned philosopher, exiled from Rome

In 90 CE, the Roman emperor Domitian outlawed philosophy. He expelled every philosopher from Rome, sending them into permanent exile, and forbade Roman citizens from the study and discussion of the discipline. The philosophers fled to Nicopolis, a tiny town by the Ionian sea in a remote Roman province of Epirus. There, they tried as best they could to rebuild their lives.

SCENE ONE

A hillside path, shadowed from the afternoon sun by myrtle and olive trees. In the distance, the sparkling blue Ionian sea. Arrian, a young man, and Locutus, his friend, are walking together, immersed in conversation.

Locutus

I'm telling you, the old man's lost his touch.

Arrian

He hasn't. And don't call him that.

Locutus

Why not? He's old. It's a fact.

Arrian

Yes, but your tone turns fact into insult.

Locutus

He's not here with us, Arrian, defending him won't raise your standing in class.

Arrian

I respect him.

Locutus

As do I.

Arrian

And my respect extends to when he isn't here. Some might say that's a necessary component of the feeling.

Locutus

I respect him in the schoolroom, where he's my teacher. Outside he's a man like me, and I can criticize him freely. I daresay he'd side with my perspective over yours.

Arrian

Why don't we take the debate to class now and he can help us settle it?

Locutus

There's no need for that.

Arrian

Spoken like a man confident in his convictions.

Locutus

I'll tell you where we can take the debate—

Arrian

Once again your tone alarms me—

Locutus

—straight to the skamma!¹

¹ The area of softened earth used for wrestling and other sports in Ancient Greece and Rome.

Locutus jumps on Arrian, tackling him to the ground. They wrestle, grunting and panting with effort. It is crucial, when the play is staged, that the actors wrestle for at least twenty minutes, and that the audience watches in uncomfortable, yet rapt, silence.

Arrian

Alright! Enough! You are champion!

Locutus

As usual.

Arrian

Yes, congratulations. You've once more proven that brawns matter more than brains. Our dear teacher will be ever so pleased by your discovery.

Mersephone, a young woman, is walking towards them on the path. They straighten up and brush off the dirt off their togas. Arrian tries to fix his hair and Locutus sniffs his armpits.

Mersephone

Hello, boys.

Arrian

Mersephone.

Mersephone

I hope I'm not interrupting. I thought I spied some tussling through the trees.

Arrian *[clearing his throat ostentatiously]*

Perhaps a lynx, or jackals, chasing a wild goat.

Mersephone

What strange jackals they were. I believe they were wearing clothes.

Locutus

What brings you to these woods, little girl? Foraging for blackberries?

Mersephone

Little girl? I believe I am your equal in years.

Arrian

Pay no mind to him. His blood runs hot.

Merspehone

No surprise, after all that homoerotic exertion.

Arrian

We weren't—

Mersephone

No matter. Do either of you ever wonder about the stars?

Locutus

Why the Hades would I do that?

Arrian

Of course, yes.

Mersephone

Sometimes I wonder if we take them for granted. We look at them as pretty engravings for us to admire, but what if there is more behind those pinpricks of light that speckle against the firmament of the gods?

Locutus

I'd bet a boatload of my farts that there isn't.

Arrian shoves Locutus, who shoves him back harder.

Arrian

More behind the stars? Like what?

Mersephone

Perhaps they are moving. Towards us. What if the stars are coming here, journey to tell us something, and it is only because of our perspective that we cannot see their bright tails?

Locutus

Stars do not move. They are ornament.

Mersephone

Then what of shooting stars?

Locutus

They are the tears of laughter which spring from Aphrodite's eyes whenever her lover Ares makes a particularly funny jape, such as sticking his foot out as her husband Hephaestus passes, in order to make him trip and fall over.

Arrian

No, that is nonsense. Shooting stars are the sparks which fly from Zeus's lightning bolts while he conducts throwing practice on the celestial cattle of Olympus.

Mersephone

I wager that they are spheres of fire which hurtle through an empty sky along routes calculable by some as-yet undiscovered formula which waits in the wings of human knowledge to be uncovered, like gold ingots in a muddy stream.

Arrian and Locutus look at her, then each other, and then laugh uproariously.

Arrian

My lady, I have always admired your intellect, but this theory of yours is beyond preposterous. Your mind is a sharp knife that rests unused in a warrior's sheath, and you must learn to wield it. Philosophy—that which concerns man and his actions, not the starry sky—may be of some use to you yet. We're on our way to hear Epictetus lecture now. Why not come with us?

Mersephone

The old man is wise, but he cannot teach me anything I have not surmised myself, from my own observations. But I may attend—after I am done picking blackberries.

Mersephone disappears into the trees.

Locutus

A woman? In the schoolroom? Really, Arrian. I know you have a crush but this is going too far.

Arrian

Why should she not come? She has more brains in her head than you. And the most beautiful green eyes...

Locutus

A flagrant, false and degrading statement. And she insulted our dear teacher. I'm surprised you let it slide.

Arrian

Men of less intelligence have shown themselves more arrogant than she. I will indulge it.

Locutus

She called him old!

Arrian

He is old.

Locutus

But you said I couldn't—

Arrian

I think I may be in love with her.

Locutus

You "think you may"? What would Epictetus make of this construction?

Arrian

Let us find out post-haste.

They walk off.

SCENE TWO

The schoolroom—a grove of olive trees beside a small hovel. Several men of varying ages, though mostly in their twenties, sit in a circle on the ground, including Locutus and Arrian. Epictetus, in his sixties, with bright, animated eyes, a hunched back and a pronounced limp, sits on a rock next to them, but frequently stands up and walks around, gesticulating while he speaks. Mersephone stands behind a tree, listening in. None of the men have noticed her.

Epictetus

What, then, does it mean to be getting an education? It means to be learning how to apply the natural preconceptions to particular cases, each to the other in conformity with nature, and, further, to make the distinction, that some things are under our control while others are not under our control.²

Locutus *[raising his hand]*

What are the things which are not under our control?

Epictetus

Why not begin by listing the ones which are? What is under your control?

Locutus

My actions?

Epictetus

And what controls your actions?

Locutus

Uh, myself?

² Epictetus, *Discourses*, Book 1.22

Epictetus

Simply by dint of being alive?

Locutus

I suppose the gods have bestowed our aliveness onto us.

Epictetus

The gods have also bestowed aliveness onto this sparrow. And the goats which your mother milks in the morning. And this tree, whose branches give us shade. They are alive, and they perform actions. Are we the same as them?

Locutus

Of course not.

Epictetus

Why not? What separates us from the tree?

Locutus

Trees cannot speak.

Epictetus

Perhaps the tree growing its branches long and its leaves green is the tree's way of speaking. Perhaps the tree perceives us and thinks, that fleshy being cannot grow branches or leaves, it is not like me, it cannot act, therefore it must not be alive in the way that I am alive.

Locutus

Trees cannot move; they are bound by space; they are unfree.

Epictetus

Many a fellow I knew in my slave days, by the end of his life, could not walk, thanks to all the beatings to which our kind master treated us. He was certainly unfree. Is he not a man?

Locutus *[elbowing Arrian]*

I'd like to phone a friend, sir.

Arrian

What separates us is that we can reason. Trees cannot reason.

Epictetus

And what is the source of reason? Whence does reason spring?

Arrian

From our minds. It is the logos of which Plato speaks.

Epictetus

Indeed. You have read your Plato. Reason, logos, is of the mind. But what is it?

Arrian

It is reason.

Epictetus

Reason is reason?

Arrian *[flustered]*

Why—yes.

Epictetus

Is everyone satisfied by this discovery?

A few of the students laugh.

Epictetus

Let us return to our original proposition. Our actions, as Locutus said, are under our control. And our reason, as Arrian said, determines our actions, and it comes, as Plato said, from our mind.

These three philosophers have laid a solid foundation for our thinking. We thank them.

The students laugh again.

Locutus

So we are still missing something.

Epictetus

What is it you think you are missing?

Arrian

Is it that we observe before we act?

Epictetus

Observation is a part of reason, no?

Arrian

Yes, yes it is.

Epictetus

How does reason form?

Arrian

The mind...it...

Mersephone [*shouting from behind the tree*]

Reason itself is reasoned.

Epictetus

I beg your pardon?

Arrian

Oh, sir, that's just—

Mersephone

We reason reason! We reason reason!

Arrian

I'm so sorry sir, she—

Epictetus

Young lady, please come out from behind the tree.

Locutus *[giggling, whispering to Arrian]*

This is your fault. And it's gonna be so good.

Mersephone steps forward. Some murmurs among the students, but they let her into the circle. Epictetus is standing; Mersephone does not sit down.

Epictetus

What were you saying?

Mersephone

As Arrian says, we observe, yes, and we reason. But all beings reason in this way. The jackal observes the wild goat *[winking at Arrian and Locutus]* and in doing so learns when he should pounce. He also observes that it is a goat, and that he is hungry, and many more things. We do these things too, like the jackal, but we also do something more. We reason reason. We may think to ourselves, yes, I am hungry, but is it wrong to kill this goat when I can be sated by its milk, by the blackberries on the trees, by water, wine and bread? Perhaps the answer is yes, perhaps it is no. Perhaps we think of the goat's children, and wish them to be grown before we take away their carer. Perhaps we believe that killing goats is wrong just as killing men is wrong. Perhaps we know that a little boy in our village is attached to the goat, sees it as his friend, and so decide to spare it. The jackal simply observes the opportune moment, and pounces.

Epictetus

Does anyone have a response?

Locutus

It is specious. I would simply kill the goat.

Arrian

You are literal to a fault, Locutus.

Epictetus

Tell me, young lady—this reason's reason of which you speak—can you identify it?

Mersephone

I wager it is moral purpose. This is what is under our control—our moral purpose. It cannot be taken from us, unlike our land, our house, our family, the clothes on our back, even our life. These may all be taken. The weather, our friends, our lovers, *[the male students titter]* the movement of the stars, none of these are under our control. But our moral purpose is under our control, and we use it to reason, and to question our own observations, and the reasoning we derive from them.

A pause.

Epictetus

Today's class is concluded. I want you all to ponder the relationship between Reason and the Good. This will be the subject of my next lecture.

Everyone starts to get up. Some stare or mutter but most are already forgetting Mersephone. Locutus is smirking, Arrian looks lost. Mersephone starts to leave.

Epictetus

Excuse me—young lady—what is your name?

Mersephone

Mersephone.

Epictetus

I also want you all to commit to your memory what Mersephone has said. Because it is what I believe, and what I would have said. Moral purpose—this is the key, the key to everything that matters. I expect a half-intelligent statement from each of you next time on the function of moral purpose as it pertains to reason and action. A wood nymph has bested you all today. Shape up.

SCENE THREE

Mersephone sits outside her house, scrubbing clothes in a wash basin. Arrian enters.

Arrian

You were brilliant.

Mersephone

Oh, hello.

Arrian

I've never seen anything like it. I am in awe.

Mersephone

Thanks.

Arrian

Will you come back?

Mersephone

I don't think so.

Arrian

What! You must!

Mersephone

To what end?

Arrian

Is knowledge not an end in itself?

Mersephone

Didn't I tell you I knew everything he was going to teach? He even agreed that I did.

Arrian

But there is opportunity for discussion with others that solitude can never provide.

Mersephone

I'm fine with solitude.

Arrian

Your mind is wasted, sitting here alone. Scrubbing.

Mersephone

I saw the way the others looked at me. They didn't like having me there—a woman in a place meant for men. I don't want to make them uncomfortable.

Arrian

Damn the others! Damn them to Hades!

Mersephone

Even your friend?

Arrian

Damn him too!

Mersephone

He is your friend. You should speak of him as if he were here.

Arrian

I—I am chagrined.

Mersephone

You should write down everything he says.

Arrian

What, for a joke?

Mersephone

Not him. Epictetus. You should write it down, so that students outside Nicopolis can learn from his ideas, and so that his ideas can be preserved for the future.

Arrian

Domitian has outlawed our subject. There will be no future philosophy students. There may not even be philosophy in the future.

Mersephone

Domitian's reign won't last forever. We may outlive it ourselves. Even Rome won't last forever. But ideas, they live longer than emperors. So write it down. The arguments he makes, his moral clarity, it all deserves passing on.

Arrian

If you really believe so, why don't you write it down?

Mersephone

I can't.

Arrian

Because of a few dirty looks from jealous students? Don't be so sensitive—

Mersephone

I can't write, or read.

Arrian

Ah. Again I am chagrined.

Mersephone goes back to scrubbing clothes. Arrian watches her.

Arrian

These domestic tasks seem a waste of your talent.

Mersephone

It is important to have clean clothes.

Arrian

Your mind should be engaging with philosophy, not lime-ash and sponges.

Mersephone

My mind is free to wander while my hands make work. It may even assist the mind's functions. I suppose you'll never know, being man rather than woman, and thus born unable to scrub.

Arrian

If you were born a man you might be sitting on his rock yourself, teaching us your own theories. Or perhaps you would be sensible, and stay clear of philosophy, and enrich yourself in Rome. I daresay you have the self-assurance required of an imperial advisor, if not the servility.

Mersephone

I'd rather wash undergarments.

Arrian

Is that a true statement?

Mersephone

If I repeat it enough it may become one.

Arrian

Is it...difficult? To live with a mind so quick, and stimuli so few?

Mersephone

I can transform into anything I want, if I put my mind to it. I do not resent my life. It is out of my control, and I do better to accept my lot.

Arrian

Spoken like Epictetus. Though I have always thought his dictates easier said than done.

Mersephone

It's funny how we've come to so many of the same conclusions.

Arrian

It is astounding. You possess an intellect gifted by the gods. Athena herself, I'd bet.

Mersephone

Any woman with half a mind ends up a philosopher. There is not much else to do but observe, and scrub, and observe. Did you come here for a purpose?

Arrian

Oh, I—well. I was hoping to speak to your father.

Mersephone *[stops scrubbing]*

My father.

Arrian *[embarrassed]*

Yes.

Mersephone

He is away.

Arrian

In that case...

Mersephone

Pretend I am him, since you think I have the capacity to be a man, and tell me what you wished to tell him. Or is it something that you wished to ask?

Arrian

I will wait for his return.

Mersephone

He is away for many days.

Arrian

I cannot speak these words to a woman.

Mersephone

Ah. So I'm a woman after all.

Arrian

No! I mean, yes, but not any woman—you're—well—you're—it's custom to—

Locutus comes bounding in.

Locutus

Arrian! At last! You are needed! For a bout of mead-drinking!

Arrian

I am engaged, Locutus, not now.

Locutus

Daddy said yes? Congratulations, brother! And to you, too, Little Miss Philosopher! Mrs Arrian!

Arrian

No, no, no—not—I am *busy*, gods, man, I meant I am busy!

Locutus

Ah. So you are not...engaged.

An awkward silence, broken only by the sounds of Mersephone furiously scrubbing clothes.

Eventually she stands up.

Mersephone

I must hang these to dry. Good day to you both.

She leaves.

Locutus

I am chagrined.

Arrian

I, too, brother, am chagrined.

Locutus

Let us give her a proper explanation!

Arrian

Let us by no means do that.

Locutus

Come, brother! Huzzah!

Locutus dashes off. Arrian groans and runs after him.

They follow the path behind Mersephone's house and enter a copse of trees, Arrian almost sprinting to keep up with Locutus, who laughs as he runs. They enter a clearing. The sun shines down and Mersephone's clothes hang from tree branches, fluttering in the breeze, but she is nowhere to be seen.

Locutus

Where is the wench?

Arrian

Don't call her that.

Locutus

I'd never say it to her face.

Arrian

What's the harm in speaking of someone as if they are beside you?

Locutus

Doesn't sound very fun.

Arrian

Yes, but I believe it is more moral. You know, I think I ought to start taking notes in class.

Locutus

What for?

Arrian

Posterity.

A loud CRACK makes them jump. They turn their heads to search for the sound. Slowly, from the shadows, a jackal emerges and steps into the clearing.

Locutus

Shit. Any long sticks within reach?

Arrian

Leave it be.

Locutus

I will maim it. I will kill it, if I can.

Arrian

You will not. It is calm.

The jackal reaches the middle of the clearing, just steps away from Locutus and Arrian. It is a beautiful creature, with piercing green eyes.

Locutus

Shit. Fuck.

Arrian

She can transform into anything she wants...

Locutus

Huh?

Arrian

...if she puts her mind to it.

The jackal steps closer. Locutus panics and steps back. The jackal looks at Arrian. He smiles. Briefly, the jackal nuzzles against his foot. Then it blinks and lopes off, back into the trees.

ΤΟ ΤΕΛΟΣ
(The End)

The Circle of Tiryns

3rd Panhongkongaia, December 2023

by Tilman Hohenberger

Introduction:

Hipponous: My friends! I'm .. lalala .. haha .. [giggles] .. a bit tipsy. But that's all right! That must be allowed, to be a bit tipsy, in your own hometown!

Belleros: Yes Hipponous, it is allowed. I, Belleros, allow it! I'm also .. hihhi .. a bit tipsy. Remind us again though, what's the occasion for this celebration?

Friend: Do you really want to hear the story again? [Drinks] Are you not sick of it yet? [Drinks more]

Hipponous & Belleros: No! How can we ever be sick of Corinth's successes? Yes! We want to hear the ... the glorious deeds .. of our countrymen again ... of us!

All: Lyreman! Sing us our.. glorious successes! With a tune and in .. in modern.. form.. Dactylic hexameter!

Lyreman: [Plucking the Lyre] E'en 'fore the red rays of the dawning sun, her own Charioteer was alarmed by the sight of two heroes. Great were they, Hipponous and Belleros, and their host of friends. A swift spear each beside their bedstead their only weapons, they went out to frighten the might of Argos' strong-walled towns. The red rays of the dawning sun touched their golden locks, and arose the Heroes' might from welcome slumber...

Hipponous: Aaaaah, that's not good hexameter!

Belleros: He.. he skipped a syllable in the second sentence! Makes my head hurt.

Hipponous: [Drinks] I'm retelling it in Prose! My friend Belleros and me, we went cattle raiding! [Loud cheers all around]

Belleros: And we got! 20 sheep! And a.. a pregnant cow! The day was so nice! Raiding cattle with my friends, that's the best life! I love you all! If I died tonight, I would be happy! Hipponous! Retell to these people here the story of that damned shepherd dog!

Hipponous: Ah, we were just about to get to the pens, but a huge hound was guarding the way. [Drinks] It was about to bark and jump at me. It would have alarmed the whole village! [Talking louder] It was jumping. Jumping high! Directly at my throat. But I took out my knife.. This knife here! See the blade, still black from the dog's gallbladder. [Licks the blade] I just stood there, knife in hand, and threw it, slaying the beast, hitting it in mid-air. No bark anymore from this one, ha!

Belleros: I saw it! How our hero threw the knife! He is the most skilled in all Corinth! I'd trust Hipponous to throw a knife from 20 feet distant, hitting any target! Proof them, Hipponous! Proof that we are the greatest Heroes of Corinth!

[Belleros goes to a wall and places the dead dog's body on a small stool. Then Belleros goes a few steps aside and waits, leaning against the wall. Hipponous goes 20 steps back, knife in hand.]

Belleros: Hit the dog again!

Lyreman: That will be another song in the Epos of Hipponous and Belleros deeds.

[Hipponous throws the knife]

Friend: I think.. I think we need to call Belleros parents. And.. and a servant to clean up all the bile from the gallbladder.

Act 1

Scene 1:

Acrisius: It always hurts me, passing through this land divided. It is torn up by mistrust between brothers, between twins. The Gods have decreed that the oldest would inherit the land, but then they removed this favor from me far too quickly again.

Danae: Still, father? Are you not contend with what we have?

Acrisius: If it was this easy! Here, at this little stream, ends my land and the land of your uncle begins. This fir there, I could cut it down and burn it as firewood, and would only need to justify my actions to the Gods.

Danae: I thought firs are bad as firewood. The smoke stings in the eyes and the soot covers the walls of our palace hall.

Acrisius: [Ignoring her] Her brother over there, if I'd cut her down I had trouble with my own dear brother. But we have to play nice to him, he is family, after all.

Danae: Couldn't I stay home? It is such a close distance between Argos and Tiryns. When I stand on the terrace of our palace, I can count the fires in the palace in Tiryns. I feel this trip is unnecessary for me, even a short ride in the chariot could be bad for the complexion of my skin. Didn't you tell me the importance of my looks pleasing the suitors?

Acrisius: Dear daughter, I felt it important to make an effort to reunite our family again. As you know, my brother and I have a complicated history. But it is important to never to give up on family. When he returned home from Lycia, with an army of foreign men and the protection from the mighty king Iobates as his stepfather, I chose not to continue a brother's war with him but offer him a generous treaty, dividing half my kingdom and let him have Tiryns over there, all for the sake of peace and the future of our family.

Danae: It is for men to order the welfare of the state well. For us women, the task is to keep our household in order. But when both mix, affairs become muddy. Is this why you wanted me to join you on this trip, Father? To mix politics with things domestic?

Acrisius: It is good that we speak openly about these things before we arrive at my brother's palace. It has come to my ears that my brother Proetus welcomed a new retainer into his hall. A young man of Corinthian nobility, a noble Hero, and with connections to society. If we could bring him under our influence, we might gain a strong ally. The Gods so far have denied me my own son, but I have a daughter who may still contribute to our family's success.

Danae: Father, I thought you told me to look out for a potential suitor at the last Argos games? And my eye fell on one or two of the runners, and you wanted to invite them to a feast in our hall soon?

Acrisius: Yes. But now, these runners, they seem like a bad option against a Corinthian nobleman. Zeus and the other immortals found it wise to deal us a bad hand, but we have to

play it as best as we can. Oh, and don't pay too much attention to my dear brother. He is an old geezer, you know that better than most. Pay him some courtesy, that's all.

[They are both silent for a while]

Danae: So we won't speak more about this?

Acisius: No. I said all I wanted to say. Roughen up child, we might still come out on top after all.

Scene 2:

Proetus: My dear wife, let's discuss the issue of my brother making his way up here. As you know, he has written me ten days ago, and we expect him soon. And he brings his daughter Danae as a possible match for our own Bellerophon.

Anteia: You call him our own, but this boy has given you nothing but trouble. Don't you remember the Corinthian delegation last month, deserving his surrender?

Proetus: I remember them well, and I tell you that I still am a man of my word. To me, a *Xenos* is holy! Turning a guest-friend away would anger Zeus, who after all protects all guests and strangers. These Corinthians can go back to where they came from! Throwing a knife at a party while being drunk is a mishap that could literally happen to anybody, and demanding revenge for this seems very farfetched.

Anteia: Some would say that it was your mistake by *making* him a guest. You invited him to a three-day feast, without even asking him his name first. And after he told you his story, it was already too late to uninvite him again.

Proetus: That was not a mistake! Zeus protects all guests and strangers, and we have to honor the will of the Gods. If we fail to do that, life breaks down and we could as well marry our sisters and burn children alive, disregarding all human nature and dignity and law. Besides, having him here made our life richer! Finding him was like finding a lost son, or a younger brother.

Anteia: Well, your *son* is in our palace for over a six months now, eating and drinking.

Proetus: He is not only eating and drinking. He is also very good with the discus. He helps the boys with spear-throwing. He taught my son knife-throwing. And if he ever becomes a problem, well. Let me say it this way, the Corinthians would be happy to have him back.

Anteia: And now you want to marry him off to Danae? To your own crooked brother's daughter?

Proetus: Acrisius is a sly fox, but he is also quite impotent. He will see this wedding as strengthening his position, as getting a stepson whom he can control against us. Danae is of good marriage age and he is getting desperate. By now he might even think to marry her off to one of his own citizenry, gaining nothing. But I am about to trick him, yet again.

Anteia: How will you do that, my dear?

Proetus: After he agreed to the wedding, and only after, I will tell him about my decision to adopt Bellerophon. He will be my son, and the whole kingdom will fall onto my family in the end.

Anteia: Your brother will not be pleased.

Proetus: He thinks he is too smart, when he is plotting his own demise.

Anteia: Bellerophon has a troubled history, if we are not careful he will make his own moves soon. I am not sure that you can control him in this way. He could fall in love with a princess in another palace in Mycenae or beyond. And he would say goodbye to Tiryns faster than we could count to three. I know another man who found love in a far-away city [Looking at her husband].

Proetus: Exactly. I made an investment in him, and now he will pay it back to us. After Arcisius' death, the throne of Argos will be united in my family once again.

Anteia: But if they were to marry, where would they live? Bellerophon owns not even a single village, let alone a palace. We couldn't send them out in the wilderness, where Corinthian spies might catch him day and night. I told you I am not fond of the boy, but I would not risk his life for lack of charity.

Proetus: And it will not be good for them to continue to live as guests under my roof. He needs to be his own lord soon enough. And my kingdom is already small, divided between my brother and me. I can't give him anything, even if he would be my adopted son.

Anteia: We will think about that after the wedding. I could give up one of my chambers for the couple, as a temporary solution. So for now, they can stay here, and if it all gets too much we could give them two ships to set up a colony somewhere in the land of the sun-burnt races in Africa or at the icy coasts of the northern Barbarians.

Proetus: Let's hope they will not have to leave too far. Danae is my own blood, after all. What I am more worried about is whether Bellerophon will agree to this proposal or not. He has his own head and can be impulsive and hard to reason with.

Anteia: He doesn't know Danae yet. She is a pure and sweet girl, and of the right age and standing for him. I see no reason why they shouldn't be drawn to each other. And still, love is like a wild mare that often finds its own woody sticks to nibble on, even when being surrounded by the most lush meadow.

Proetus: We will just have to prepare him a bit. Soften him up! Plant a seed in his head. Why don't we talk to him now, before our guests arrive?

Anteia: We could. Servant! Servant! Bring Bellerophon here, his master and mistress demand to talk to him.

Servant: Very well. Oh, sir. You have an important message from the captain of the fishermen.

Proetus: Has he lost a ship again? A few clouds and a light steady wind from the North, all in all it is a beautiful day. Not even a complete beginner could lose a good fishing boat on a day like this.

Servant: He has indeed lost a ship again. Steered it against the cliffs in search for eels, if I am not mistaken.

Proetus: This amateur, intelligence of a sheep and body of a Chimera! He is like the Hydra, but worse. The Hydra grows heads. He loses ships and grows nothing, not even better at sailing!

Lead me down to the fishermen's village, quick! Anteia, my wife, could you talk to Bellerophon now? We might have only a few hours left before our guests arrive.

Scene 3:

[In Queen Anteia's bedchambers]

Anteia: Bellerophon! It is not right that you deny your Queen what is rightfully hers.

Bellerophon: A Queen may enjoy the spoils of her country, may it be fine wine, a select piece of meat at the table or fine-crafted pottery. But I feel that the retainers of her Master are not included in this list.

Anteia: All people strive for the pleasures of the flesh, men and women alike. Only some are too weak to concede to theirs. Doesn't Aphrodite leave her marriage bed from time to time to seek enjoyment in the arms of younger, more handsome men. Finding a capable lover is no small feat for a woman. You are beautiful and strong, and I have grown mighty fond of you over our past rendezvous, since that first summer night we spend together in the palace gardens, looking at the moon. But fortune has not send you the skill in speech to deny me my wishes. So don't try, and we might find a better way to use our time.

Bellerophon: Even if I had the power of persuasion to match yours, I would not use it for the endeavor. My small teasing only aims to heighten your pleasure and make me a more wanted in your eyes. And yet, today you didn't wait for me undressed in the bedsheets as it is your custom. Have I grown unattractive to your eyes?

Anteia: Not unattractive, my dear Bello. But your feeling is right, there is something I have to discuss with you today before we might embrace love and common oblivion together.

Bellerophon: Do tell me then. I am well prepared to tackle any challenge or new information.

Anteia: At this moment, my husband's brother is coming down from Argos to pay us a visit. And with him comes his daughter Danae. You have not seen her before, but she is a sweet young girl, and it would be well acceptable for any young Greece's young princes to court her for marriage. My Lord Proetus and me have today decided that you should make her such a marriage proposal. And it would be wise of you to honor your host's charity to propose such a good match for you.

Bellerophon: Lord Proetus has given me security and safety, and I am deeply indebted to him. But I am young and strong, and Greece has a host of walled cities and palaces in which I would be happily welcomed. A talented young man is welcomed everywhere, if he knows how to play his role well, flattering the men and flirting with the women. The accident in Corinth has set me free to wonder far and wide, without strings and attachments to my old self. As you know, I am not trying to hide the death of my friend, caused by a ploy of one of the Olympians. Hipponous is gone, and I am now known to the world now as the Slayer of Belleros! Why then should I tie myself to this domain and land forever, without having even seen the bride?

Anteia: You talk of Belleros but don't see the lessons for your own life. Alas, young men often overplay their cards and trust forever in their own strength. Don't you see that a single wink from one of the Immortals could make you a homeless vagabond, or end up in a Corinthian cell? Take this olive branch of a wedding that we are proposing as a guarantee for later misfortune.

Bellerophon: I thought about Belleros' death more than you have, great Cattle Queen, and I see it as neither sad nor deplorable. You can only call a man happy once he is dead, and my friend died surrounded by happiness and success in prime constitution of both body and mind. Whereas most men pass the Styx crippled, sickly, bowed down by age and robbed of all illusions of life, his youth will last forever in the underworld. So in contrast to keeping your feelings at bay and your risks low, taking chances and disregarding future worries is thus the only guarantee for true happiness and a good life.

But I think I know your real motivation for my wedding to princess Danae is to bond me longer to this household and your charms, and this is reasoning I can finally sympathize with. So don't hide your lust behind charitable motives and let us finish this conversation the way it should have started.

Scene 4:

[At a banquet table in the hall of Proetus]

Proetus: It has been such a long time, dear brother! How blessed I am that you came through Tiryns mighty double gates and into our palace. How I have missed you, even though we live so close to each other. I am so busy with my affairs, and I am sure you are as well.

Acrisius: I found that governing half a kingdom still takes more than half of my time. Danae, why don't you introduce yourself to your uncle again? It must have been some time since you last saw him, and you changed so much since then and turned into a real prince.

Danae: Uncle, don't listen to Acrisius! Many thanks for the invitation, I am happy to have come here and spend some time with you and aunt Anteia again.

Anteia: You have become even more beautiful since we last saw each other, Princess Danae! But now, I know that in this family problems are often handled indirectly, so let me be a little more frank. Here is Bellerophon, the new young hero of Tiryns. If I am not mistaken he stands in the center of your visit today. Having come from Corinth, he is now a guest-friend of this household, and we feel great responsibility for his future happiness.

Bellerophon: Dear uncle Acrisius and Princess Danae. You being the brother and niece of my King Lord Proetus, I feel the recent streak of luck that I have experienced continues by being blessed to meet you.

Acrisius: It has been a stroke of luck for us as well, and when I heard of Bellerophon's arrival to Tiryns I felt that now we could finally disentangle the Gordian knot that my brother and me were too shortsighted to free. Plagued by pettiness and ambition, we are embittered that we each rule only over half of a divided kingdom. We are both capable of being great kings, warriors and administrators, but are forever weighted down by each other's existence, a state not right for siblings and twins. Now, a younger generation has the chance to mend what the older one couldn't.

Proetus: Well spoken, brother. This morning my dear wife was still nagging me that it was not a good idea from me to honor Zeus commandment for hospitality. And now he might achieve what my own sons couldn't, a wedding to beautiful Danae for the sake of the reunion of our domains.

[Danae blushes]

Acrisius: Then, we have to sort out some details first, trivial things concerning the great plans we are about to make. What about your legal status, Bellerophon? Am I correct that you won't be able to bring a big endowment into the marriage? I am not interested in any money, I just want to know the facts plain and clearly before taking any decisions.

Bellerophon: I have considerable funds, back in Corinth. If you lend me an army of a few thousand capable, well-armed men, I can retrieve them for you, no doubt. If you don't want to lose any of your men, I might go alone anyway, come in the night and sneak out with a few golden trinkets from one of my enemies houses. The more I think about it, the more that sounds

like a good idea. I feel ready for a new adventure. Let me just get my sandals and robe, and I will be gone this hour.

[He half gets up, but is put down again by Proetus]

Proetus: Hahaha. Like a storm in summer, our dear guest. You see, brother? Finally a fine Greek lad who is no coward after all! But no, Bellerophon. Please, stay with us for a while, no need for you going off so recklessly again.

Acisius: Yes. Endowment is, after all, traditionally a task for the bride's family, and I won't burden you unnecessarily. Sometimes in the future it may be even possible to muster an army and strike Corinth with our united strength. Who knows. But I need to know another detail. After marriage, the young couple would be coming back to the bride's home and stay with us? My dear Danae is very prone to homesickness, and I don't want to deprive her of her childhood home.

Anteia: It is tradition that the bride will leave her family and move to the grooms house after the wedding.

Acisius: Traditions are guidelines in the world the Gods gave us. My daughter is getting married to a stranger, and I must at least get to know him better. I am very protective of my only child, you see?

Proetus: Brother, as we are now making large steps towards a reunion of our divided family, in the same way we need to learn again the way of trust.

Anteia: And Bellerophon has already settled down here so much, made friends with the other young heroes of the palace and teaches my children how to ride and shoot with boy and arrow.

Acisius: It would be highly unfair if I lost my only child to a household that is already blessed with other children and full of activity.

Proetus: Then, the couple will stay in our house until fall, then move to your palace until spring, and we after that they might decide for themselves what the future holds?

Acisius: Very well. That is just right and just. We agree then, Brother?

Proetus: They will marry. We agree.

[A solemn pause, then loud cheering and clapping.]

Act 2:

Scene 1:

Chorus A: He is enraged!

Chorus B: He is mad with anger!

Leader: Who?

Chorus A + B: Acrisius!

Leader: Why is the King mad with anger?

Chorus A: He says he was tricked!

Chorus B: Betrayed by his own brother!

Chorus A + B: Betrayed *again*, he says!

Leader: Ah, this fool! He let his brother best him again. First Proetus had nothing, not even a single village to rule over. Expelled and lost, losing the fight with his twin brother. But then, luck turned, and he found strong allies overseas.

Chorus A: And now he is about to lose his only child!

Chorus B: What do you mean? What has happened?

Chorus A: After the Kings agreed on the wedding of Bellerophon and Danae, King Proetus quickly moved on to adopt Bellerophon. He is now one of his legal heirs. It all happened so quick, Acrisius was powerless and just witnessed the events without daring to say a single word. Acrisius' domain will pass on the Bellerophon, thus belonging to King Proetus.

Chorus A + B: He should have been happy with what he had. The more he fought, the less he could keep for himself.

Chorus A: Argos, ruled under a single will. To what heights could we fly if our kingdom was united, and not weighted down anymore by brotherly hate?

Chorus B: Bellerophon and Danae would steer us into a new future. We could rival Sparta, Athens and Corinth then. The Olympian sun would shine over us with new rays.

Leader: Would it? The old rule over the young, that has always been the case. They marry and will be suspect to Proetus wishes.

Chorus B: Bellerophon has a strong will. He would not bow down to the old anymore.

Chorus A: He cannot be tamed. He will run away and search better luck elsewhere, a more beautiful princes, a richer lord to impress, a greater adventure to overcome. He will leave Tiryns in a whirlwind of chaos.

Leader: How can we know? When I look into his face I see that he has not yet made up his mind.

Scene 2:

[In Tiryns bathhouse, in the middle of the night. Anteia and Bellerophon are naked in a large stone pool and talking.]

Anteia: I must say, it was a good idea to have a meeting in the bathhouse! I needed to calm down a bit after all this politics. It bores me.

Bellerophon: It bores me as well! And that Danae had to suffer through this as well! Her father just saw her as a bargaining chip. And now he will get nothing out of her.

Anteia: But you will marry her, my dear?

Bellerophon: What else can I do? Either I marry her, or I would have to leave tonight, alone and on horseback.

Anteia: Lycia is not that far, one only needs a good ship and the stars will guide the way. We could go back together, and my father would provide for us richly.

Bellerophon: Everywhere I go, people want to provide for me. This is my curse. Don't they see that a man needs to make his own success in order to feel accomplished in this world?

Anteia: If you inspire love and affection from others, then who are you to disregard the gifts of the Gods?

Bellerophon: I didn't ask for a cruise through this world. And I also don't disregard gifts. The gift of your body. I never disregard it.

Anteia: This is why I'm glad you will stay with us for a bit longer.

[Acrisius enters. Bellerophon takes a big breath, and submerges his head under water]

Acrisius [to himself]: Should I not just drown myself in this hot water? This wedding will be my downfall. But what, it is the middle of the night and I am not alone? Is this a woman in the bathhouse?

Anteia: Acrisius? Why are you here, so late at night?

Acrisius: I am here to take a bath, it helps me relax even under the worst circumstances. But a woman shouldn't be here. Bathhouses are for men, and even my degenerate brother would not allow the mixing of genders in such a public place. But I am not blushing to see you all naked, Queen. Your majesty clothes you in dignity before my eyes.

Anteia: As I am the Queen of Tiryns, I am free to use the bathhouse as I please. The citizenry knows this, and gives me privacy in the late hours of the day. You are a guest, and could not have known my habits, so you are forgiven. But I will get up and leave this pool now. Then we can go outside together.

Acrisius: Not before I had my bath. Once you left, I will submerge myself in the hot water. Your husband tricked me with adopting Bellerophon, you know that, I assume? Maybe you planned it together with him all along? I need to think in the hot water. Alone.

Anteia: Hot water? This water is very cold tonight. The slaves have been lazy again. It will not be good for your health to step closer to the pool. Let us go now, and I will tell the slaves to get to work again.

Acrisius: Steam is rising from the water, and the ambient temperature is quite acceptable. If you would leave me alone now, I am about to undress.

[With a loud splash, Bellerophon arises from the pool]

Bellerophon: Aaaaaair! Sweet air, my lungs are bursting!

Anteia: Bellerophon! Naked! A young man naked in the bathhouse, laying his eyes on the Queen?

Bellerophon: This is no new sight to me.

Acrisius: The King's wife and his guest, together in the bathhouse at night and naked. Where is decency left anywhere in Tiryns? My brother needs to know this. I feel he does not know what happens under his own roof.

Anteia: Bellerophon spied after me. That is all understandable, the young lad that he is. Proetus would take this quite badly, your brother's trust in him would be ruined. Don't do anything rash now. We can work this out.

Acrisius: Bellerophon spying after you? I feel the situation has been a bit different indeed. But you are correct in another thing. My brother will not take this well. Most probably, the wedding will be called off, and this will be a great relief to me how things stand now. Maybe his own health will fail, seeing disloyalty everywhere. And if your head will be removed on the same day, that is nothing I have to take into account now. Proetus is still my brother, and I am sure that he would like to distribute justice to his wife and son in a way that he sees fit. Guards! Guards!

Scene 3:

[In the great hall in Tiryns. Proteus sits on his throne as the judge. Bellerophon and Anteia are at opposites sides of the hall. Acrisius sits next to his brother.]

Proteus: My guards testify what my brother has told me. Queen Anteia has been found naked with Bellerophon in the bathhouse, in the middle of the night. I am a just king. Both may speak in this hearing, and then I will find a decision. One is my son, one is my wife. I cannot be angry now, for I know not what has happened. But not both can keep their life after I heard these accusation, that I am quite certain. Bellerophon, you may speak now.

Bellerophon: When I entered the bathhouse at night, I did so after the Queen's wishes. She told me that she had to tell me things about my future wife that I should know before the wedding, and even though I was weary that it was not my place to accept a meeting with the Queen alone, at night, I was mad enough to accept, for I was only too curious about any information she would tell me about Danae. I asked myself, is it good news? Or bad? Was there something I should know before plunging into wedlock with a stranger, even though from good family? When I came, she was already naked, luring me with sweet words into the warm water. I refused and stayed fully clothed the whole time, and rebuked her with gentle words, fearing for the honor of myself and King Proetus foremost. The longer I delayed her advances, the more helpless I found my situation, for she threatened me to call the guards and tell them the lies which you will now surely hear for yourself soon. In the end I agreed to take off my clothes so that the view of my youthfulness would finally satisfy her. In just this moment, I heard steps of the person that turned out to be Acrisius. Mortally frightened, I hid myself the best I could and as long as I could: In the pool of the bathhouse, until my lungs would burst and my unfortunate situation come to light. Tyche, who was my faithful friend until now, has left me suddenly. On one day, the promise of wedding rolled past me like a pebble rolls down a steep hillside in the countryside. There was no justice for me in Corinth, and if a stranger can stand in trial against the King's wife remains to be seen.

Proetus: Are these lies or is this the truth? I feel my wife's gaze has lingered often on Bellerophon, but I could not tell if from motherly love or womanly passion.

Anteia: Proetus, kill Bellerophon or die, for he would have had converse with me against my will! My love to you has made me come to Argos from green Lycia, with many golden gifts from my father, the strong king Iobates. And afterwards I have borne you children, both boys and girls. Never would I look at another man in desire, and may he be formed after the image of Apollon or Ares. My demise comes then from the other way, for often do I notice men look at me with lust in their eyes, I do not know if this comes from the Gods or from other attractions, as it is my habit to clothe myself with golden diadems and bracelets as is fitting to my station as Queen of Tiryns. I was taking a bath after a long day in the bathhouse, my habit well known to you all. Bellerophon must have known this, he is a guest with us long enough to know the patterns of our lives. He is a young hero, and his physical skills rival the Olympians, for he waited in the pool of the bathhouse, already submerged for a long time and ready to take advantage of his Queen once she let herself slide into the hot water. Only the presence of Acrisius saved me today from pain and shame without end.

Proetus: And what am I to make of this story? Should I believe Bellerophon waited in the pool, submerged, while you didn't notice him when you undressed?

Anteia: It was steamy in the room. I did not see what was beyond the surface of the water.

Proetus: And you, Bellerophon? Why did you comply with the Queen's wish to see you at night and alone? That is shameful already.

Bellerophon: It is indeed my fault to not have warned you. But I have trusted Anteia so far, and it has been never to any disadvantage.

Proetus: Acrisius, was it indeed so steamy in the room that one could not look through and recognize a young man in the water? But, why am I even asking this? Surrounded am I by my own blood, and yet can I not see through to the truth of their words, for I am only certain that I cannot trust them.

[To himself] Acrisius would lie to harm my position, and I cannot trust what he says. And Bellerophon and Anteia? Now that I think about it, I seem to remember looks between them, flying from eye to eye like a thunderbolt. But what would Zeus say, the mightiest of the Gods, if I commit unjust offense against my guest whom he protects with his might and power. By the Gods, our family feud was about to conclude here, and now this acts perspired within my own walls ruin all my devices.

[To all] Meeting the Queen alone at night, that is a capital offence, even more when it comes from a stranger of our town. That speaks for itself, and undermines the trust and authority of the king. But there will be no full proof of the events, and I have to make a decision, well aware of the anger of the Gods if I punish unjustly. They hold me back, even though I would have had it otherwise. How it will play out is not under my control anymore. Bellerophon, I am sending you further to Lycia, and giving you an introductory letter to King Iobates. You will be a guest of his palace. King Iobates is a honorable king and will surely find you deeds worthy of your talents. Go there, and leave Tiryns forever. The Gods will judge you there.

[He goes to the scribe, and quietly dictates him the introduction letter to King Iobates. The scribe writes down a letter on a framed wax tablet with a stylus.]

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King of Tiryns, Proetus, to the King of Lycia, Iobates, my stepfather:

Greetings and may all your affairs go well.

With this letter I am sending you Bellerophon of Corinth. He has dishonored Queen Anteia, but I do not dare to punish him as he stands under the protection of Zeus as my guest-friend. Please remove him from this world, he attempted to violate my wife, your daughter.

~~~~~

[He takes the sealed letter from the scribe and hands it to Bellerophon.]

This is an introductory letter to King Iobates. Give it to him when you see him, and he will welcome you friendly into his kingdom and give you a place in his palace. As I cannot deal out justice here, you may start a new life far away from these events on the coast of Asia.

Act 3:

Scene 1:

[In the bathhouse in Tiryns.]

Proetus [to himself]: Had I only a faithful brother, a faithful wife, a faithful guest. To hell with all those traitors! May Bellerophon's luck run out finally on the Asian continent, killed by Iobates guards the moment he touches Lycian soil.

I hear footsteps. Is this my brother, wanting to spin his web of lies around me again?

Danae: I saw you entering the bath alone, and I thought you might want some friendly company.

Scene 2:

[At the dining hall in Xanthos in Lycia. King Iobates sits with his wife and daughter Philonoe, the younger sister of Anteia]

Iobates: Dear guest [drinks].. Your arrival here has been such a welcome.. such a welcoming.. gift for all of us. A friend sent to us from Argos by my dear son-in-law Proetus, a good opportunity indeed for nine full days of feasting.

Bellerophon: I am so glad that we welcomed me with open arms.

Iobates: Who is to disagree that the hospitality of the Lycians is unmatched except for these dining with Ambrosia at Olympos' high seats? [All cheer] Neither have I inquired about your story and name during these first nine days of your visit, as would be unfitting to do for such a fine guest. But now the time of feasting is passing [drinks]. Let us then have it all, your name, your family, and the letter of King Proetus.

Bellerophon: Here is the letter, the seal unbroken. I am not skilled in the art of reading, which is a menial task for the scribes. Proetus told me he would write kind words of introduction for you in it. I am Bellerophon from Corinth, and after wandering the world as an exile have found final refuge on Lycian soil.

Iobates [reading the letter and sobering up immediately, to himself]: I would have him killed now for wanting to violate my daughter. But after nine days in my household, he has become my guest and Zeus would not forgive me for such a murder in my household.

[to all] King Proetus from Argos has sent us a noble hero! The best of Greece! Bellerophon, have you heard of the twin-headed, fire breathing Chimera, which is plaguing the region of Caria since time immortal?

Bellerophon: Back in Corinth we have heard stories of such a monster. A lions' and a goat's head on a goat's body, serpent as a tail. Breathing fire and devouring flesh of men wherever she goes.

Iobates: It would be a fine task for a young hero to slay the beast.

Bellerophon: Are you certain this can be done by a living man, and not only by one of the Immortals?

Iobates: I am certain you will try it if I order you to.

Philonoe: Many young heroes have tried to slay the Chimera, and never returned. This will be the end of our guest.

Iobates: This is alone up to the Gods. We have no stake in this anymore.

Philonoe: You could as well ask him to tame Pegasus.

Bellerophon: As you say it, beautiful Philonoe. Tomorrow, I will set out to firstly tame Pegasus, and then slay the monstrous Chimera. I am not afraid of men nor monsters as the Gods favor me before all mortal heroes.



Medea Kills

Translated from the original Greek by John Jamison ©2023
Original text by Neophron (431 BCE)

Historical note: Medea Kills was written by Neophron and first performed in the Dionysian festival in 431 BCE, concurrent with the similarly titled Euripidean play *Medea*. *Medea Kills* came in second in the competition, ahead of Euripides' third place. Euripides' loss was due largely to his play being widely rumored to have heavily plagiarized the far superior Neophron tragedy. From Grene and Lattimore's *Euripides* (2013), "Some ancient scholars report that, according to Aristotle and his student Dicaearchus (fourth century BCE), Euripides revised a play called *Medea [Kills]* by a certain Neophron (a prolific and successful rival Athenian dramatist) and passed it off as his own; a few even claimed that Euripides' *Medea* was in fact completely the work of Neophron and should be attributed to him." To date, this strong claim to authorship has gone untested beyond the word of the otherwise reliable Aristotle and his student, mainly because the Neophron text was considered so much stronger than its weak Euripidean imitation. However, recently a copy was unearthed during the digging of a sewage pipeline in distant Hong Kong (a location that had long gone unexplored by philhellenists), suggesting that the work had had a wider audience than initially suspected. The original Neophron text was immediately painstakingly translated by Jamison with an eye for the closest literal translation possible. The newly translated play is being performed live for the first time at the 2023 PanHKaia. For the first time, audiences can compare the two texts to deduce for themselves the subtle differences between the two dramatists' interpretations of the classical myth.

CHARACTERS

Medea, wife of Jason, princess of Colchis

Jason, of Iolcus, son of King Aeson

Aeëtes, king of Colchis, father of Medea

Safety, a son of Medea and Jason

Value, a son of Medea and Jason

Meaning, a son of Medea and Jason

Chorus, of Argonauts

Glauce, prince of Melos

Nurse to Medea

Neophron, playwright

Creon, king of Melos, father of Glauce

Helios, grand-father of Medea, god of the sun

Messenger

Orestes, son of Agamemnon and Clytemnestra

* * *

ACT I

A MAGICAL ESCAPE FROM COLCHIS

* * *

As the curtain rises, the scene is the stern of the Argo sailing on the sunny Aegean Sea. On the deck of the Argo see the silhouette of Medea stood over a table chopping meat and throwing it into the sea. From the Argo's hull rises Jason. He is bare chested and impressive, wearing swashbuckling pants and boots. Allow time for audience to applaud. Jason embraces Medea and then breaks into balletic dance around the deck. All around the stage, the Argonauts dance onto the stage. The argonauts are dressed brightly and heroically. They dance with confidence and masculine sexuality as they address the smiling Jason on the deck.

CHORUS OF ARGONAUTS

Yo ho ho, King Jason!
The sailors of the Argo are we.
We pillage and plunder and rifle and loot,
We ignite forest fires and don't give a hoot.

Yo ho ho, King Jason!
We've sailed with you at our helm.
We've fought six armed monsters with natural science,
We've passed clashing rocks on our own self-reliance,
We've kicked down Olympus in raging defiance,
We've named our own cocks
cyclopean giants!

Yo ho ho, King Jason!
The crown of Iolcus' your right.
But when king Pelias refused to receive us,
You set sail to heir a prince right here in Melos!

Yo ho ho, King Jason!
You've stolen the princess of Colchis.
You love bombed Medea and 'napped her lil' brother,
You chopped the boy up to turn the king's rudder,
You banged the queen Hecate, Medea's own mother,
You've screwed this dumb broad
now it's time for another!

Yo ho ho, King Jason!
The sailors of the Argo are we!

The argonauts dance merrily off stage leaving only Jason and Medea on the deck. Jason approaches Medea and embraces her as she works. With the lights coming up, we now see that Medea is wearing a common butcher's apron over her royal Colchian robes. Her royal robes are now encrusted with mud, salty with sea water, and splashed in blood.

From far away off stage we now hear the tormented calls of King Aeëtes, Medea's father. Those audience members familiar with Aeëtes' native Colchian will recognize that he is calling down terrible curses on Medea; archaic bargaining with the old gods for them to torment Medea, to destroy her house, and to put her to death. These are genuine curses that should never be said by a man of culture, that should be outlawed by rulers, and should never be spoken aloud in front of an audience. But as Medea continues to work silently, the curses fade further and further away until they are almost unintelligible.

Jason walks contentedly to the back of the Argo to stare back at Aeëtes, then embraces Medea as she continues chopping. Feeling his touch, Medea stops her butchering momentarily and gives a short sob.

MEDEA

He was my brother, Jason.

Medea holds up from her butcher's block what is clearly a baby's leg and foot. Jason squeezes Medea's shoulders comfortingly.

JASON

This was your plan, Medea. This is how we escape from your father. Now cast the last of him over the side to divert your father's pursuit.

Medea stares at the tiny leg for a moment then throws it over the edge along with the other chopped up remains of her murdered baby brother, Absyrtus. As this last piece splashes into the water, we hear one more mortal wail from Aeëtes in the distance. We hear him leap from his own boat into the sea, splashing around to pick up the pieces of his butchered child while the Argo speeds away.

MEDEA

This was my spell. This is how I would keep us safe. This is what I would sacrifice to be with you, to protect you. I've left my royal house behind. I've left my people, become an alien in a new land across the sea. I've torn my royal robes and become like a servant to you and your Argonauts. This was what I wanted. And now I've butchered my own brother just to divert my father's pursuit. This was the deal I made, Jason. Simply out of love for you.

Jason silently holds Medea close for a long pause. Just then we hear a rustling from the ship's galley and see Medea and Jason's three sons, Safety, Value, and Meaning, appear from within the boat. They are all three beautiful, finely dressed boys. As they enter the deck they look around at the carnage.

MEDEA

No! Boys, go back into the Argo. The vast sea, the yonis is dangerous to children!

SAFETY

I heard chopping and felt a dripping down below, mother. We can help you if you need.

JASON

Oh, let them stay. Our children should know the smell of blood and how to wield a sword.

Jason picks up Medea's cleaver like a rapier and pretends to fence with the boys.

MEDEA

Are you mad? We can't infect our children to the horrors of what we've done. Were they to know all that we've done to bring them into this world and to sail them across it, they would go as mad as you've clearly gone. Shoo! Back into the belly of the ship!

The children rush back below deck clearly more terrified of their mother than their father. Medea removes her butcher's apron and throws it and the cleaver overboard.

JASON

Medea, be generous to the boys. See, we're free from the chase by your father King Aeëtes. Our endangered days drift far behind us. And look, ahead rises our destination, the island paradise of Melos. The land where our patron King Creon, father of fair Glauce has assured us safe harbor and a favorable future. See the majestic castle on the mountaintop, that is where we will hold court alongside our new fath...uh, benefactor. And see down below, the quaint town where you will raise our boys in peaceful matriarchy.

MEDEA

But don't we fear that King Creon will become unsettled by the presence of aliens in his land? Especially a rightful king such as yourself who might someday seek to play the game of thrones?

JASON

Hush my dear. The arrangements have been made. Creon anxiously awaits the arrival of the Argos. We can expect to be welcomed into the royal family with open arms. But look, we have arrived on the shores of Melos. Our wandering has ended, we are in our new home.

The Argo settles onto the Melian beach. Jason leads Medea to the front of the boat and gestures for her to step off onto the beach. As she disembarks, there is no ladder and Medea unceremoniously slips off the side of the ship into the waves. Medea emerges from the sea covered in seaweed and sea foam. As Jason poses heroically at the bough of the ship surveying

his new land, the Argonauts emerge from around the side of the ship and fill the beach. The chorus of burly men laugh heartily at the clownish sight of Medea pulling seaweed from her face and wrestling a starfish off of her leg.

JASON

Ho ho, what great comedy my spouse! Seaweed and starfish and sea cucumbers. You truly are the princess of tides. But see here come my glorious murder of Argonauts!

CHORUS

Yo ho ho, King Jason!

JASON

Yo ho ho, my Argonauts! Well met. Now fetch me my doormat so I may enter my new land in the mode of a king.

The Argonauts hurry around the ship and emerge with the golden fleece. The golden fleece, stolen from Medea's home of Colchis, radiates the sun's golden rays as if the souls of every Colchian swirls about in its hairs. The Argonauts throw the golden fleece down in the green briny sea water at the feet of Jason. Jason jumps down from the ship onto the golden fleece, thoughtlessly grinding it down into the sand. As he walks away, an Argonaut picks it up from the shore, now covered in sand and sand crabs. Medea gasps in shock.

MEDEA

The Golden Fleece! Jason, that's the prize that you sailed to Colchis to take possession of! It's the treasure for which you de-toothed a dragon, for which you yoked my father's fire breathing bull to sew those teeth. It is the treasure for which you begged my aid. For which I killed my brother.

JASON

Calm down, Medea. Let me explain it to you. The golden fleece is a nice looking piece of fur, but really it's just my ticket to my crown in Iolcus. Apollo already declared that I'll be king; I just needed to go pick up this rug and then BOOM I'm king. Now that I've got it, there's no need to keep it in mint condition. Let's just have some fun with it while we've got it.

CHORUS

Yo ho ho, King Jason. There from the castle sashays your local Melian hookup...er, host. Prince Glauce of Melos.

Glauce enters. Glauce is a stunning 13-year-old boy dressed in flamboyant rainbow robes with wildly permed hair and a massive candy cane cod piece. Scantly dressed manservants with hairless and oiled chests dance gaily close behind throwing streamers, blowing kisses, and twirling sparklers.

GLAUCE

Heyyy Jason, you bitch!

Glauce and Jason embrace and kiss deeply. Jason rolls his tongue down Glauce's neck and bare chest and sucks hard on his nipples until Glauce screams in delight. Jason gives Glauce a slap on the ass and a wink. Glauce puts his hand down Jason's loincloth and gasps.

GLAUCE

Oh my god, you fucking whore.

MEDEA

Husband, what is this? Are you becoming entwined with the prince of this land?

JASON

Calm down, calm down, Medea. Glauce is just extending me the customary good welcome of the Greeks. You wouldn't get it since you're not from around here.

GLAUCE

That's right cow, I'm gonna show your big burly man-friend how we do it around here. Now come on you faggy cunt, I want to introduce you to my father so he can announce our wedding.

MEDEA

Your what!

JASON

Calm down, calm down, calm down, that's just how they talk around here. You wouldn't get it. Trust me, I know how things work here in the West.

Jason sweeps Glauce up in his arms and they make out steamily as Jason carries Glauce up the hill towards the king's castle.

GLAUCE

OMG, just look at that sad skank. She doesn't even know what's happening. That hurts harder than my dad's kidney stones lol.

JASON

Argonauts, take my wife's children to their new flat in the town. Let them dine as they await their mother.

Jason and Glauce exit the stage using the wide regal steps carved into the stone mountainside up towards the royal castle of Melos.

MEDEA

Wait, my children! I want them to stay with me.

Two Argonauts escort the three boys off stage up a small beaten path, a much different road from which Jason and Glauce exited. Their rocky road leads towards a shoddy shanty town in the lowlands to which the laborers and servants of the city are entombed. The remaining Argonauts begin to bustle around offloading the ship, generally ignoring Medea and knocking her around as they work.

MEDEA

Oh what calamity! Brought by my new husband to a foreign land, cut off from my family, and now separated from my children. I desperately need council from an ally. Where is my nurse? Nurse! Nurse! Come out and hear my story.

NURSE

Here my queen! Here I am.

From around the boat comes one of the Argonauts, clumsily pulling on a nurse's uniform. The Argonaut wears an unconvincing wig and attempts unsuccessfully to talk in a high pitched lady's voice.

NURSE

What's up?

MEDEA

Oh thank heaven, nurse. I am in desperate need of an understanding ear. Only another woman could understand my heart and speak their council with compassion, understanding, and empathy. Will you hear my tale and give me your maternal wisdom in response?

NURSE

Sure thing, hot lips.

MEDEA

Well it began when...I say, nurse. Is it common for the Greek women to grow a beard when crossing the wide Euxine Sea? And say, is that an Argonaut uniform under your nurse's dress? Mercy! You're no woman nurse! Have you fallen under a witch's trans-genderfication spell? Oh you're another one of Jason's manly Argonauts. Has your large clitoris been a small penis this whole time? Away from me! I require the council of another woman. Let all the women of the Argo come to me for a congregation. All the ladies in the hull come forth!

Medea and the Argonauts look around the stage, but no one emerges.

OK then, any women in the cast. Any serving wench or handmaiden, come forth. Come on stage now and you'll get a bigger part as my nurse. Any female character in the play at all.

Again, everyone looks around but to no response.

MEDEA

Seriously? Not a single female character in this whole play? Even Glauce is a guy? What kind of lazy, misogynistic writing is this? Where is that bitch playwright, she ought to be ashamed!

Neophron enters from offstage with a copy of the script in hand. Neophron is a short bespectacled man who shuffles his feet. He wears a fedora and has a thin, untrimmed, patchy beard. He is involuntarily celibate.

NEOPHRON

Typical woman! Typical that a play could only be written by a woman just because it has a woman character in it. Men can write women characters just as well as a woman can.

MEDEA

Well you wrote a whole play with a female lead and then didn't include any other women in the play.

NEOPHRON

So? You should be happy; there's no other hot women taking the attention away from you. You should feel glad that I didn't cast some hot, big breasted model-turned-actress to play Glauce. You should feel lucky that everyone's looking at your tits instead of hers. You should feel grateful. You should feel happy. That's how you should feel.

MEDEA

But there's no one for me to talk to! There's just a big chorus of men. These Argonauts don't know anything about what I'm going through. They're all buddy buddy with Jason. Look at them, they won't even listen to anything I have to say. What about a female nurse? How about a female chorus that I can actually talk to?

NEOPHRON

Look, it's not perfect, but this is the real world. We can't just fire all of our male chorus so we can hire a bunch of women. You'll do better in this industry if you just learn how to talk to men and get over your dependence on working with other women.

MEDEA

OK, if I can't get a female cast member, how about just any woman? Anyone in the audience? I see you out there. Please, come on up to the stage. Let's have a talk. You can be in the play, it's a big honor. Let's establish a chorus of liberated maidens to engage in dialogue and represent the female voice of Greece!

Looking out into the crowd, the scant few women in the audience shift nervously but do not stand or approach the stage. The cast may find an occasional woman uncertainly moving to stand, but these few cases will surely be pulled down by their embarrassed husbands and fathers. In the unlikely case that any woman in the theater does stand and make her way to the stage, the theater's ushers are asked to take a firm grip of the hysterical woman by the nape of her neck and box her around the ears while calling for her male guardian to come collect her. Better yet, to avoid any of this kind of uncertainty, the theater is encouraged to simply bar all women from attending the performance. A woman could only gain a certain amount of edification from the theater which would certainly be overshadowed by a woman's disruptive spirit in the midst of a fine theater performance. A woman is far less likely to pay attention to the performance and far more likely to vape and give her Tinder date a handy.

MEDEA

Then that's it then. No peers. No confidants. No mentors or rolemodels. I am on my own in this tragedy.

NEOPHRON

Look at you, you're wasting everyone's time here with your complaining. You don't have this, you don't have that. You don't want to get a reputation for being hard to work with, do you? And now we've run out of time for the Nurse's exposition about what's happening in the story. So here's the short version: Jason has secretly sent communications to Creon, the king of Melos weeks ago asking for his heir's hand in marriage. Jason plans to unite their houses and use the Melian army to invade his homeland of Iolcus and reclaim his crown there by force. King Creon has accepted the proposal and the three of them are up in the castle now making the wedding announcement to the king's court. OK, have I explained everything to you? Then why don't you get up to the castle and get on with confronting the king and Jason.

Medea is silent for some time. The Argonauts are now silent, gathering around her departure menacingly. As she leaves the stage, she begins to climb her way up the small beaten path.

MEDEA

I must go to greet the king and his court. If my husband and I... If I am to make a place for myself in this kingdom, I must first let myself be known. And I have so many questions. What was Jason's intention with me. What is the plan of King Creon for me and my children.

The Argonauts now silently crowd around her, staring threateningly at her.

MEDEA

But no, there are no questions that need to be answered, are there. I may ask a hundred different questions a hundred different ways, but there is only one answer to all my questions. Jason has betrayed us. I've seen with my own eyes how he tramples my contribution to his grandeur. I've seen the man for whom he intends to leave me, that homewrecker prince Glauce. He has made his intentions towards

me clear. Married or not, he has sucked my dry of all my utility and now has found a new corpuscle to suckle. All my magic spells are already just a footnote in his memoirs. Leaving my family and my people behind is just a vague memory that grows cloudier by the hour. Even murdering my brother to set my father the king off track is a completed transaction with no debt or gratuity accrued. Even our children will now be mine alone. They will grow up without a father. And worse, they will see their father from afar up on a hill in a beautiful palace with his glowing young paramour. My children. His children. His seed shoved sleepily into me. His burden bound beleagueringly to my back.

Medea glances around hatefully at the Argonauts now mirroring her hateful stare. As she climbs the small rocky path, she stops briefly to look down at her monstrous appearance in disgust. Medea's royal Colchian robes are now tattered, draped in seaweed, drenched in seawater and blood.

MEDEA

I can not approach a king like this. I need change. I will change before I see my husband again.

Medea exits. As the curtain falls, a low solo cello plays dark ponderous music.

* * *

ACT II

RIGHT AND POWER IN MELOS

* * *

The scene is the interior of a tremendous throne room of an enormous castle. The castle has flying buttresses in the gothic style with stonework of pure white marble like a scene from the Lord of the Rings¹. High up in the rafters hang banners celebrating regional football, baseball, and ice hockey championships.

Attendants, servants, statesmen, football players, and chorus members line the throne room. At the center of the hall, under an enormous elaborate chandelier (a recreation of the one in the Paris Opera House), on an enormous elaborate throne, in enormous elaborate robes that flow down over the wide marble steps like an ocean wave of heavy melted purple marshmallow, sits great King Creon of Melos. To his right side in an also quite reasonable throne sits his son Prince Glauce. To the side of Glauce's throne, whispering in his ear, stands Medea's husband Jason. Jason is dressed in fine Chinese silk robes but still has an intimidatingly bare chest that bristles with manliness and curly hair, as if he's got a solid carpet of pubes right from his ball sack all the way up to his chin.

Medea enters quietly, freshly bathed, perfumed, clean and dry, wearing an elaborate red crepe dress. Only Jason notices Medea enter and glares at her venomously.

CREON

And so my Melian minions, as many of you have heard rumored on the wind, I officially announce this day the merging of my house with the Iolcians through the wedding of my son Glauce to the rightful king of Iolcus, Jason.

The whole hall politely applauds and cheers at the announcement. A giant banner is dropped from the ceiling showing Glauce and Jason with a giant heart uniting them. Medea confidently steps towards the throne. As people see her, they all part from her way in awe of her beauty and regalness.

MEDEA

My king, if I may.

CREON

Certainly my dear citizen. Speak.

¹ It's worth reminding readers that this is an exact literal translation of Neophon's 431 BCE text, despite references to what might appear to be modern 21st century culture. In fact, the Athenians themselves had a well-known sport that took place in a giant marble arena and involved players using brooms to bat a red leather ball (the quaffle) through golden rings; thereby becoming the "lord of the rings". It's all very historical, trust me.

Medea takes a step towards the throne to speak, but is immediately barred by the king's enormous, armored guards. The crowd gasps as they see such a beautiful woman treated so harshly.

CREON

From there, my dear. I said speak, not approach.

MEDEA

Of course my king. And may I congratulate you on the auspicious news. Surely a treaty by marriage with the Iolcians will be a tremendous boon to Melos and its people. It is truly noble of your house to sacrifice your first born son to securing your city's safety. Your son's value to his father is truly incalculable. He truly gives the title prince meaning. But my king, it is also rumored that the...ahem...king Jason comes to us in a somewhat lowered station. Is it true that his father Aeson, the former king, was in fact deposed by his brother Pelias? And that Pelias then sent Jason on a doomed voyage to the East to capture the fabled golden fleece?

CREON

Indeed all of this is true, my lovely. But is it not shrewd business to buy low and sell high? I have made this treaty with the true Iolcian king while he is at his lowest so that I could negotiate the highest agreement. When all of this is over, I'll hold the entire East by the balls for my shrewd investment now.

MEDEA

Truly long-viewed my liege. But is Jason of the right stature then? After all, it's whispered on the waves that he hardly made the voyage or captured the fleece on his own. It is said that he has employed not just the heroic Argonauts in his mission, but also frail women and children in his aid.

CREON

So Jason is a weakling! All the better. Is it not managerial for a man to employ all the resources at his disposal? I have tied my future to a man who I know will not shy away from his objectives, even at the price of a few women and children. When this is over, the heirs of my kingdom will be sired by a father who has the temperament of a true king.

MEDEA

Truly wisdom unheard of outside of a royal house. And if you'd allow one more question. Isn't it also true that Jason comes to your son as "used goods". For see, he already has a wife and three children who landed on this island with him

CREON

Ah, the greatest characteristic of a king: sacrifice. What would it gain a man like Jason to stay obedient to a wife that has served her purpose? To sacrifice is better than obedience. In Jason we have a prince who has gladly sacrificed his wife and

children. I assure you, they will be treated humanely. But beyond that, well how can a ruler leave a claim to the throne to run wild. After all, isn't that the lesson that Jason is about to teach his uncle Pelias? The wife and children will be kept close, but only at best in a protective prison. And at worst, well...

JASON

Enough father. Do you not see the game of masks that's being played. The woman before you is my wife Medea. She has skulked into your throne room to harass me and to undermine our agreement.

MEDEA

Only a schemer like you would see a scheme in a simple question, Jason. A schemer who would romance a princess and then throw her away. A schemer who would sire three children with no intent on raising them. And now a schemer who would seek out a new lover while his wedding ring is still loose.

JASON

Don't try to pin this all on me. I didn't decide anything. It's my nature that's dictated what I will do. It's natural for a man to want to be polygamous. See, there are animals all throughout nature that have many partners. The elephant seal, the red-winged prinia, Bengal tiger, all contain males who keep harems and stables. So it's natural for an animal to have multiple partners, so I haven't chosen anything wrong. And there are gay animals in nature as well. Haven't you heard of those lesbian seagulls they discovered in Santa Barbara? If there's homosexuality in nature, then I haven't chosen anything wrong. I haven't chosen anything. I just have my nature. It's just biology. It's just the way I was born or my genes or my neurology. I didn't decide anything, it's just my nature.

MEDEA

Stop saying that the only determinant of your behavior is your nature. How would we even know what your nature is? Is there a blood test to tell if you're gay or straight? Is there a genetic marker to tell you if you'll cheat on your taxes or play the violin or dye your hair purple?

JASON

Yes, yes, and yes. I am genetically determined to cheat on my taxes, I am genetically determined to never play the violin, and I am genetically determined to not feel like dying my hair purple. And I'm genetically determined to leave you for Glauce and have royal children and raise an army and march on my homeland and retake my kingdom of Iolcus. It is my nature. I can not stop me and you can not stop me. The gods won't stop me because it's the gods themselves who made my body and my blood and my DNA to live out my life in the way that it is to be lived.

MEDEA

When you are young, you have the face the gods gave you. As an adult, you are responsible for your own face.

JASON

My mama told me when I was young, “We are all born heroes. There’s nothing wrong with loving who you are cause the gods made you perfect, babe.” I was born this way.

MEDEA

Who cares how you were born? There is a you inside of you who decides. What do you decide for yourself?

JASON

Oh don’t you dare try to put this on me. I can only do what’s in my nature. I can only do what I was created to do. If the gods made me to love Glauce then I’ll love Glauce. The gods make no mistakes. I was born this way!

MEDEA

Again, who cares how you were born? If it’s wrong, then your nature will barely be a poor excuse for doing what’s wrong. If it’s right, then you only surrender your virtue to your biology. What good will your nature do in the struggle to live righteously?

JASON

There ain’t no other way, I was born this way!

MEDEA

Then you’re cursed to die as you were born with no change in between. As Carol Dweck discusses in her 2006 book *Self-Theories*, you are trapped in a fixed mindset about your own potential, believing that you have a certain amount of potential and that nothing that you do can increase or diminish that potential. By accepting an entity lay theory about yourself, you lack any motivation to change.

JASON

You want to talk about lay theories? You’re trapped in a post-modernist narrative self-construction that sees no firm structure on your life except that which you impose on it yourself. To critique Vygotsky, you’ve become a product of the cultural and environmental forces imposed on you with no unalterable self at the helm of your ship.

CREON

Enough! This is Greece. In my house we don’t discuss Vygotsky’s narrative self and Dweck’s incremental self-theories. In Greece we talk of Protagoras’ being and Heraclitus’ becoming. But see I grow tired of this talk. It’s always talk with you women. No action. You talk to yourself and talk to your girlfriends, but when it’s time to take action, when it’s time to strike a man dead, when it’s time to cut

off a head and pull out a heart, then that's when you need a man. Men are the ones who fight, and kill and protect their little women from having to kill. Oh my pity on the entire female race for their complete inability to fight a man. Just look at you and Jason, look at how much stronger he is than you. How could you ever hurt such a man? You couldn't best him at arm wrestling. You couldn't throw a javelin further than him. If he held you down or slapped you or demanded sex from you, how could you ever resist such a powerful man?

And see here is the heart of the issue. You have no power. I as the king of Melos have decreed that Jason will marry my son Glauce. That is my concern and your fate is but an afterthought. As an alien in my land with no husband and no lineage, it is the epitome of generosity that I have gifted to you and your three children a small flat in the peasants' town below. I hear that the boys have been taken there already and been taken care of. But make no mistake, you have no power here. I give you an ultimatum: surrender to my will or be destroyed.

MEDEA

You talk of who has power, but who has the right? I came into your city under the banner of Zeus Xenios. But now you have betrayed your responsibilities to Zeus Hikesios. This is the clear and simple moral conflict at play here. You are morally in the wrong.

CREON

On behalf of the city of Melos, I have no appetite for arguing the morality of the situation and I will not allow it in our discussion. I will only discuss realist arguments about who has what power and how they may use it. Here I am the powerful king and you are the weak peasant girl. You say that I can't allow Jason to break from you and that I must treat you like a royal princess. But this is not the nature of power. The nature of power is on our side and will be forever on the side of Melos: the strong do what they will and the weak suffer what they must!

Guards, take her away to her hovel and lock her inside with her wretched bastards.

MEDEA

A moment though, your majesty. You are truly right that I have no power here. After all, what am I but a frail woman, an alien, an exile from my home. You are the realistic one. I see now that you are the powerful and I am the powerless. But if I can not win your favor through threat of power, may I offer to earn your favor through offering?

JASON

What is this, Medea? What are you playing at?

CREON

Go on, my dear. It is glorious for a king to pardon the faults of the weak if it will benefit his kingdom.

MEDEA

As you may know, I am experienced in practical magic. I have experience in both the dark arts and those of empathy and homeopathy. And I have heard on the wind that the King suffers from kidney stones. In my homeland of Colchis, such diseased kidneys are a distant footnote to history. Our magical artists have long since discovered the mystical methods to remove an offending kidney with no pain, no ill-effect, and instant recovery. Perhaps in exchange for your majesty's kind favor on myself and my boys I might offer this magical gift to the king?

JASON

I don't like it, Creon.

GLAUCE

Oh father, what joy to be released from your pain. Surely it's worth a try. It's homeopathic!

CREON

Jason has told me that you're a witch, but I had thought that he was just being figurative. If you really can remove a kidney by way of magic, then let's see it then.

MEDEA

Certainly. If the king would just remove his shirt then I can remove...

As Medea approaches the throne, the king's guards push her back forcefully.

CREON

Oh no no no. You won't get at my royal temple that easily, witch. If you can really remove a kidney, then let's see your proof. Bring out the goat that was to be cooked for tonight's wedding banquet. We'll measure the risks of your medicine with some animal testing.

GLAUCE

Oh what fun. I bet she's really used to working with dirty smelly animals. I hear that in Colchis they haven't invented blankets so they sleep with their pigs and goats to stay warm instead.

MEDEA

I might remind you, my prince...

GLAUCE

Yes?

MEDEA

You're so insightful, your princeliness. Please bring me this goat so that I may demonstrate the healing magical powers of my uncultured tribe. I will show you my power by removing the beast's entire kidney with only the slightest sting of pain.

A royal servant leads a goat by a rope into the throne room and ties it to a hook. All eyes are on Medea as she begins to dance mystically around the animal. Medea uses a piece of chalk to draw a magical-looking circle around the goat. She writes rune-like symbols within the circle. She takes a sip of red wine, spits it in the goat's face, and stares hypnotically into the goat's eyes. As she holds the goat close and holds the gaze of everyone in the hall, the goat bleats in pain and Medea removes a freshly bloody kidney.

Director's note: As the actress performs this scene, she will of course need to hide her stage-work from the audience so as to appear to be doing true magic. In reality, the scene will be performed with objects hidden in the actress' robes. First, the actress will withdraw a sewing needle from her sleeve to be used to lightly prick the goat so that it bleats in surprise. The actress will then need to stealthily remove a small, fresh kidney that had been hidden in the furls of her dress.

Medea triumphantly presents the removed kidney to the audience and the court and to the king. Seeing the king's amazement, Medea throws the kidney at Jason's feet.

GLAUCE

OMG, Dad, that was like, legit amazeballs, no cap! I'm totally shooketh right now, like, I can't even! 🤪 #SlayedIt

CREON

Verily! I too am completely without cap. I'm convinced. Come here Medea and remove this wicked kidney from me immediately!

JASON

Not so fast your majesty. I've known this witch for a long time and she truly is a...well she's a witch. But the figurative kind too. I don't trust her trickery. If she can remove a kidney so easily, then surely she can do it again. How about it Medea? Or was all this witchcraft just theater?

MEDEA

You of all people would question my magic? You who's watched on as I've cast spells, brewed potions, and conjured enchantments for your selfish gain. And my most recent magic trick, turning my father's boat from our chase by the sacrifice of my baby brother.

GLAUCE

Human sacrifice? You see father, she truly is a cultureless savage.

MEDEA




But if you want proof of my powers before I rescue you once again, then let me remove yet another organ from this lucky goat.

She angrily approaches the goat again, this time speed-running the dancing and staring and wine spitting. Shielded from the audience's view once again, Medea reaches into the folds of her dress and this time removes a small, fresh testicle and throws it again at the feet of Jason. The court again explodes in celebration.

MEDEA

Behold, a testicle removed from the sacrificial beast. What use will it have of its testicles once it's been butchered.

GLAUCE

Dad, like, seriously, that's, like, the second time she's gripped it and ripped it!
   #RepeatAwesomeness #MindBlown

JASON

Hold up. I didn't get a good look at your spell that time. Let's see it one more time just to be sure you're not pulling a fast one on us.

MEDEA

I expected you might ask for such a repetitive display. As you wish.

Medea unceremoniously pounces on the goat, this time entirely skipping the magical theatrics. Hidden from the court's view, she pulls a section of small intestine from her dress and throws it at Jason's feet.

MEDEA

There it is for you. The small intestine, removed away from your view with powers you could not understand.

CREON

Enough! I've seen all I need to see. Medea you surely must possess godly blood. The healing arts you demonstrate are beyond reproach. I believe in your divine powers to heal. You must deliver me from this evil. Guards, bring her here.

Medea approaches the king, dancing mesmeritically. As she dances, she uses the chalk to draw a person on the floor in front of him. She takes a sip of wine and spits it in his face. As she dances, she caresses him from behind and quietly whispers in his ear.

MEDEA

Now, you motherfuckers smoked my goddamn husband in front of me nigga, blew his head off in front of my face...and I ain't gonna do shit? I'm coming up in here and smoke all you motherfuckers, I don't care who the fuck's out there.

Medea draws a .38 pistol from her dress and shoots the king three times in the back of the head. The king's blood and brains explode all over the hall. The king collapses dead into the chalk outline on the floor.

GLAUCE

Everybody run, the Colchian queen's got a gun!

The chamber erupts in pandemonium. Melians are running everywhere and screaming in terror. A man jumps out a window to escape. Two old men strangle each other to death. An animal handler leads a braying zebra across the stage. The guards have either fled their posts or can not reach Medea through the crowd. In the midst of the chaos, Glauce comes suddenly face to face with Medea.

GLAUCE

How could you do what you just did? Are you having a really bad period?

MEDEA

Look at me. I did this to you. Remember me.

Medea shoots Glauce point blank in the head. Glauce's soul exits the stage.

In the chaos, Jason grabs Medea and pulls her away from the hysterical crowd.

JASON

Medea, what the fuck have you done! By killing the king and the prince you've signed our death warrants and those of our children.

MEDEA

Of course you'd care about our children now. Now that you don't have the pretty prince to have a new set of heirs with.

JASON

Think what you will about my motivations, but everything that I've done since we've arrived here would have kept you and the children safe. Do you think a foreign king would welcome to their lands the usurper to the throne of Iolcus? If I hadn't sent ahead to marry Glauce, we would have been run through before we landed on the beaches. And with me as the heir to the king, you and the boys would always have been provided for. I've worked too hard to keep our boys safe, and now you've put them at risk once again. You stupid woman! Go to them now and hide them away from this turmoil. I'll come to you soon to see them and put you on a boat to your home in Colchis.

MEDEA

Colchis? My father's land? My father whose golden fleece I just stole and whose son I just murdered? There is no room for me to live in that land.

JASON

Well there's no room for you to live in this land. But you must keep the boys safe. Go to them now. Save them!

MEDEA

Why don't you go to them?

At that moment, the stage machina lowers down a great shining white portal high up in the throne room. Blinding white sunlight radiates through the portal and lights up the entire theater. Majestic heavenly trumpets blare illustrious fanfare from within. From the portal, emitting the blinding light, steps out Helios, grandfather of Medea and god of the sun. All the people in the throne room except Medea drop to the floor in worship, bowing with their faces pressed into the floor in fearful reverence.

HELIOS

My granddaughter, Medea, princess of Colchis. Behold I come, riding on the clouds, at the trumpet call.

MEDEA

Grandfather, Helios, god of the sun.

HELIOS

Though these are days of great trials, of famine and darkness and sword, still I have prepared a way for you.

A shining white staircase extends down from the portal to Medea's feet.

JASON

No Medea! Spurn the gods, stay here with me instead. I'll change!

Medea looks down on Jason and climbs the stairs up to Helios. Helios embraces her, wraps her in a glorious divine robe and shepherds her into the dazzling portal. As the portal closes, the throne room is left completely dark and silent. Jason rises and stares at the vanished portal, then at the throne, then rushes off the stage.

* * *

INTERMISSION

WITH A SURPRISE GUEST

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ACT III

WHAT BELONGS ON PIZZA

* * *

Inside of a humble peasant home. Medea's three children, Safety, Value, and Meaning, busy themselves around the single room. Safety is writing a letter at the dining room table using a piece of chalk. Value has changed from his dirty traveling clothes and sits at the dining table knitting a beautiful new scarf for himself. Meaning reclines in a high-backed chair in the corner reading a leather-bound book written by Heraclitus titled, "Fire on the River: An Atomic Romance". Safety completes his letter and takes it to the door where he hands it to a messenger.

SAFETY

OK I've ordered the pizza, it should be here in 30 minutes!

MEANING

And thank the Colchian gods, I'm starving after that long voyage.

SAFETY

Argonaut food is sufficient to keep someone alive...

MEANING

...but it's not worth much more than that. Say what you will about the Melians, but these Greeks know how to make a lean mean epicurean pizza.

VALUE

Epicurean? It seems more Spartan to me.

SAFETY

Oh boy, here we go again.

VALUE

Well what do you want? I'm right.

MEANING

What are you on about? There's nothing wrong with Melian pizza.

VALUE

Nothing wrong with it...except that it's covered in (retch) pepperoni.

MEANING

What's wrong with pepperoni? Everyone loves pepperoni.

SAFETY

Oh god, don't get him going.

VALUE

EVERYONE loves pepperoni? Spoken like a true pepperoni lover. Sure, everyone suffers through a pepperoni pizza when they have to. But that's just because it's the topping that someone somewhere sometime decided would be the default pizza topping. And now as a result everyone who loves pepperoni misunderstands that everyone else loves pepperoni like they do. After all, it's everywhere. So everyone must love it, right?

SAFETY

But everyone does love it. That's why it's popular.

VALUE

Hardly! I'd bet that only about 2% of the pizza eating world really loves pepperoni. But we all know that pepperoni is what comes on a pizza, so we all just suffer through it so that we don't seem like a pizza-hater. But the reality, if those people really search deep down in their souls, the reality is that the vast majority of us only tolerate pepperoni at best. And for most of us, the feeling is closer to a hatred. And for some of us truly honest ones, we're willing to admit out loud that pepperoni is truly disgusting.

MEANING

Nobody hates pepperoni. Pepperoni adds some much needed spice to an otherwise bland dish. What else is there in pizza? Bread and cheese? Pizza without pepperoni is like a grilled cheese sandwich for people who think mayonnaise is too spicy.

VALUE

Sawdust and epoxy! That's what most pepperoni is made of. People make such a big deal about how they need meat with every meal, but pepperoni isn't even meat mostly. There's about one pig's testicle worth of meat in every 100 pizzas worth of pepperoni. Besides that, it's all just filler like tofu and cellulose. People think they're eating valuable protein, but they're just being swindled into eating congealed anti-botulins, nitrites, and nitrates.

MEANING

Well what would you want to put on a pizza if you're such a genius?

SAFETY

Oh god no, don't ask him that.

VALUE

Well, if you must know...tomato.

MEANING

Tomato? Like slices of tomato on a pizza that already has tomato paste on it?

VALUE

You heard me. Tomato.

Safety and Meaning both run to the bathroom to dry-heave over the toilet. Safety puts his fingers in his ears and sings to himself. Meaning starts scraping his tongue with a toilet brush.

VALUE

Oh sure, pepperoni is great but I'm the freak for wanting something sweet and tangy on my pizza.

MEANING

Tangy? Sweet? Tomato is the Cleveland of the food world. Why not just put oatmeal on your pizza?

VALUE

Tomato is great. Everyone's out here arguing over pineapple on their pizza...

SAFETY

Again, nobody arguing over that one either. Pineapple is the great Satan of pizza.

VALUE

...but a nice tomato on a pizza is just the right balance of light and flavorful. And it doesn't add a colonoscopy worth of oil and sodium to an otherwise healthy dish. Tomato perfectly accents a good pizza.

MEANING

Now you are become death, destroyer of worlds.

From the street outside, Medea is heard approaching and calling to her boys.

MEDEA

Boys? Boys I'm home. Oh where is this damned threshold?

SAFETY

Oh thank god, mom's home!

MEDEA

Is this the door here? Why is it locked? Come open it up.

MEANING

Oh boy! Mom, we have a question about pepperoni we need you to settle.

VALUE

And tomato, too. You like tomato, don't you mom?

The three boys gather around the doorway as Safety unlocks the door.

MEDEA

Ah, thank you.

The door swings wide and we see Medea in her soaking-wet, tattered Colchian robes. She is draped in seaweed; drenched in seawater and blood. Dark dramatic cello music plays as the doorway slowly widens. She stands outside of the doorway as the boys huddle inside.

MEANING

We ordered pizza while you were walking up from the beach.

Medea remains outside the doorway. Her face is black under the streetlight.

MEDEA

Well? May I come in?

SAFETY

Oh yes, mother, do come in.

VALUE

Oh yes, mother.

MEANING

Come in, dry off. Change.

VALUE

Have you been to see the king yet?

MEDEA

No, not yet.

*Medea silently roams the small room. She does not explore so much as she doesn't stand still.
The children become serious.*

SAFETY

Is it true what has been rumored on the wind, mother? Is our father to be wed to the prince of Melos?

MEDEA

Yes, it's true.

MEANING

Then it's new children for him too, isn't it. New children with his new partner.

VALUE

And we're to be the dispossessed. All of us, left to rot in the slums below our father's new castle.

SAFETY

Maybe there's somewhere else we could flee to? But no, who would take a disgraced family, the murderers of a royal prince. The killers of the son of King Aeëtes. We are trapped in this little room with no exit. Waiting for the Colchians to sneak under the door and murder us. Or the Melian royals. Or the plague or starvation or scurvy.

MEANING

Our theft of the golden fleece, our emigration to Greece. All just to raise the position of a charming romantic. All that we were promised, pulled away at the first chance and handed to our unwed step-mother and unborn half-brothers.

MEDEA

It is as you say.

The four stand in silence for a while, the children looking at their mother deeply. They begin to slowly rotate around the room. Medea reaches down to the dining table and picks up the knitting needle.

MEDEA

A mother knows her son as only a son knows his mother. Safety, you will come with me first.

Medea leads Safety into the adjoining bedroom and shuts the door. Value sits down uncomfortably at the dining table and Meaning in his high-backed chair. They can hear what is spoken in the bedroom.

MEDEA

Sit here.

SAFETY

Don't let me look at you mother, stand behind me.

Blood curdling screams of pain erupt from the bedroom. The boy's death takes longer than one would hope. His lungs can be heard filling up with blood and sucking for breath. Finally, there is no sound. Medea reenters the room now with blood reaching up her sleeves and at the hem of her dress.

MEDEA

Value, you go next.

Value rises and follows Medea into the bedroom.

VALUE

Oh mother, there is Safety's body, I can't look at it.

MEDEA

I'm sorry my son. Go out and I will put him away in the closet unseen.

Value runs out of the bedroom trailing blood on his shoes. He is sobbing and wiping tears from his eyes. After some struggling and thumping sounds from the bedroom, Medea calls for him and he returns, still sobbing, to the bedroom.

MEDEA

You are my Value.

VALUE

I am your value.

We hear thudding and puncturing sounds. Value does not scream but gags and whistles. We hear Medea grunting, a sliding body, and the closet doors open and shut. Medea again emerges from the bedroom, more blood stains all the way up to her shoulders and hips, dripping and trailing on the floor like a wet mop.

MEDEA

Meaning, I'm ready for you.

Medea ushers the small boy, the youngest of the brothers, into the bedroom.

MEANING

I'm not much without my brothers.

MEDEA

You're everything to me.

Medea is heard crying within and falling to the floor.

MEANING

Don't cry mother. It doesn't mean anything. I'll be the easiest one to lose.

The floor creaks and Medea's grunting and struggling can be heard. There is no other sound from Meaning except that of pouring out. The boy is left in the chair. Medea emerges, now with blood reaching all the way to her shoulders and hips. Her face and neck and chest have been covered in thick, meaty blood and gore. She is not crying. All warmth has left her.

MEDEA

Unbound from my children's protection, the world looks much different. I have no more questions I must ask. Now untethered from Safety, Value, and Meaning,

I turn my attention to my enemies. I have a magical spell in mind that will do the job that I wish to be done. But I will need a few items. First a dress that will be received in the royal court. What do I have in the closet. Not this one, it's much too simple. This one is too hard to move in. But this one, the dark red gown will do just right. I'll lay it on high-backed chair to change into. Now what instruments of magic will I need to take with me. First some chalk; chalk is always needed for these incantations. And here is some on the dining table. I'll also need something sharp and pokey. And lo, here it is right here in my hand. The needle that now carries with it the memory of my three boys. But a good conjuring also needs a good offering. Back into the bedroom to pick up the pieces of my life with Safety, Value, and Meaning.

A piece of Safety to take with me,
for the first it must be a kidney.
A piece here drew from good Value,
a testicle will do.
A piece of Meaning who had a short time to live in,
I'll take the small intestine.

But now I need the final article for the spell that I am planning. And I don't see a suitable material. Perhaps this book on the chair that I might set things alight with Heraclitus? No, everything burns eventually, but often not fast enough. So what then, what can I use in my spell?

There is a knock on the door. Medea opens the door to a Messenger.

MESSENGER

I've got a pizza here for Safety. That's one pepperoooooh my god! Why are you covered in blood? Why are you holding someone's small intestine? Stay back, I'm armed.

The Messenger draws a .38 revolver from his tunic.

MEDEA

Calm down, calm down. I'm not going to hurt you. But how much for the gun?

* * *

ACT IV

INTO THE GRECOVERSE

* * *

Medea and Helios emerge from the radiant portal onto a sunny landscape where all the ground is clouds and all the buildings look like the Acropolis. Angelos fly around in the sky delivering messages. Gods stroll along the gold-paved paths and casually wave to Helios and Medea.

HELIOS

Sorry I haven't gotten down to Earth to see you til now. You know, god business. The sun's always gotta rise in the East, you know.

MEDEA

It's fine. This is 800BC, I consider myself lucky to ever have met my grandfather at all. But where are we?

HELIOS

Oh this is what Olympus looks like from the top. Most of us gods are off doing our own things in our own realms, but this is where all of our paths intersect. It's sort of a shared Greek universe. The Grecoverse if you will. Time also gets kind of squiggly up here, so that explains any continuity inconsistencies you notice. Apple?

Helios picks a golden apple from a golden apple tree. Medea politely declines. Helios shrugs, takes a bite, and casually throws the rest over his shoulder. It slips down between the clouds and drops to earth. As they walk, a herd of golden sheep wander by, all with fleece of gold. A messenger angel rides by on a golden bicycle carrying a pizza topped with golden pepperoni and golden tomatoes.

HELIOS

So you know, you're the granddaughter of a god. And you know that that gives you a lot more...options than a lot of other people have. And I just want to be sure that you know all your options. Because really I don't want to try and tell you what to do, I just want you to know that you have options. But really it's entirely your choice what you want to do with all of your options. I just don't want you to feel like you can't choose to do what you want to do, because you can. And I totally support you in whatever you decide you want to do.

MEDEA

Riiiiight. So options like what?

HELIOS

Well, just for example, like killing your kids. Totally fine. Not something that most people would be able to do, but then most people don't have the kind of

opportunities that people like us do. Honestly, I shouldn't even bring it up, but I just mention it as an example. Or like killing king Creon. A king? Pfff, people like us kill kings all the time. It's not even a thing. We just take them down to the Spindle of Necessity and hand them a new life. We don't even bother trying to figure out which life to give who, we just hold a lottery and see how things shake out later. Can you imagine being the king of a city like Melos and telling the Fates how crucial your reign is for keeping good relations with your neighbor city states, and the Fates are just like , yeah yeah yeah, well too bad because the new king was just picked and in his last life he was a pyromaniac child molester. Ah, Nero.

MEDEA

So I'm not in trouble?

HELIOS

Trouble? From us? Medea, you're one of us. If killing was wrong for you then that would make it bad for all of us. And you don't think it's wrong for us to kill, do you? Don't you agree that it's important for the gods to have the right to kill when it's necessary? If anyone should have a license to kill, shouldn't it be public servants like us? Who else would hold the line for humanity if we weren't here policing things?

MEDEA

Well that sounds good to me. So if we're cool, maybe I'll just get back to Melos. I still have to wrap things up with Jason.

HELIOS

Yeah yeah, definitely definitely. I tell you what, as long as you're here, how about if I introduce you to someone real quick. You guys have a similar...I don't know, story.

MEDEA

Sure, I mean, any friend of yours is a friend of mine. Always good to know more people.

HELIOS

Sure, just get his card and see if you ever need it someday.

The two enter the Parthenon. In the middle is an elaborate desk. Orestes sits at the table with a mountain of books, scrolls, and powerpoint decks laid out before him. As Helios and Medea approach and talk with him, he rises and greets them.

HELIOS

Orestes, how's it going. I was just giving Medea here a tour of the place and I thought I'd run her by here to meet you. You two have a lot in common. Both of

you are human. Both Greek. Orestes, you're a little divine, aren't you? Both of you killed royalty. You know, lots in common.

ORESTES

Pleasure. I'd really love to chat, but I've got to get this argument ready for my trial date. I've got a lot riding on this.

HELIOS

Oh yeah, I almost forgot. Orestes is working on this thing with Athena. You know Athena, right? They're working on this thing over in Athens they call a court. Big stuff, real cutting edge. Tell Medea about it, Orestes.

ORESTES

Well it's all kind of in development right now, so we're really just testing out the waters. But things are starting to come together and the way things are shaping up, we think this could be a model for other city states around the world. The elevator pitch is that it's a way for someone to receive justice when the other party is more powerful than them. Basically, the most powerful body, usually the city itself, sets up one of these court things and then if someone is wronged, then instead of seeking out justice on their own, they can appeal for that powerful body to get justice on their behalf. And the best part is, no Furies!

HELIOS

Wow, seeking justice in court. That sounds exciting, doesn't it Medea?

ORESTES

And it's not just a forum to punish the guilty, it's also an arbiter on who's innocent as well. Take my case, for example. Did I kill my mother Clytemnestra? Sure. Was she the queen regent of Mycenae? Sure. But she was also a murder herself. She killed my father Agamemnon. So my murder was really just a case of justified homicide.

HELIOS

Well gosh Medea, that might be just what you're looking for! I wonder if you could get in on this courtroom business as well? It couldn't hurt to have a judge clear your name.

MEDEA

Is that what all this is about? You think I have to clear my name? You want to frame me as a dirty goddess?

HELIOS

Not at all, not at all. I'm just asking you how I can be helpful. Things are getting pretty hot over in Melos, so why not let me fly you over to Athens for refuge? This court thing Orestes is working on might just be able to justify you in the eyes of your pursuers. What do you call it, Orestes?

ORESTES

Mitigating circumstances. It wasn't your fault you did what you did, it was just "temporary insanity". Or if that doesn't work, "environmental factors". Or barring all that, a "plan gone wrong".

HELIOS

That's right, mitigating circumstances. It's not really your fault. You didn't really do it, or at least not the real you. Killing a prince, two princes, a king, three of your own children; that can all be justified. It's natural that anyone would want to kill given your circumstances.

MEDEA

I don't want anyone to tell me that what I did was just. I don't want to hear anyone say my actions were justified or that I only did what was in my nature. I chose what I did. I made my decision.

HELIOS

Exactly! You made the only choice you could have made given your circumstances. Your environment dictated your actions.

MEDEA

Why do you stubbornly insist that anything dictated my actions? I made my decision. I didn't surrender to my nature. I didn't adapt to my environment.

HELIOS

Then you applied reason? That's fine, that's justifiable. Just say it was a failure of cognition! A miscalculation. A plan gone wrong.

MEDEA

Not nature. Not the environment. Not reason.

What is a person's nature but just a body around their soul? What can a body do but perspire and expire? What can a body do but tell me that it likes the way a strawberry tastes and that it dislikes a needle under my nail. No, my nature can like the things of nature, but it can't act.

So then what about my environment? What can an environment do but threaten and entreat me? No, the environment is noisy, but it can't act on my behalf.

Then surely reason? The constant pulls of gravity and magnetism as they apply to the mind. The recognition of underlying patterns and greater goods. But what can a mind do but make sense of disorder, like putting shoes on a shoe rack. No, my mind can order the shoes, but it can't decide which ones to put on.

HELIOS

So your body didn't fail at a moment of truth. And the world around you didn't constrain your actions. And your mind couldn't persuade you one way or another. What then is there? When we peel away the layers of the onion, what's left of you? What made your decision?

MEDEA

It is this last thing that we call a soul. You should know it Helios. The sun is made of the same stuff. The sun is made of gold, and gold is made of the soul. If you peel away a person's nature, their environment, and their mind, all that you'll find left is a tiny drop of pure gold. This gold is a tiny piece of the sun dropped down between the clouds to earth and wrapped in a human form. You, Helios are the god of the sun. You are the tiny drop of gold that remains when all else is stripped away. I am your granddaughter and I am made of the sun, of gold, of the soul.

The shining portal is lowered on the machina once again and the white staircase is once again extended to Medea. Medea climbs the stairs and crosses through. As she passes through, the stage rotates and on the other side we see Medea's small room in Melos, still covered in the blood of her children. As Medea descends the steps, she hears a commotion from the bedroom and draws her gun. Jason emerges from the bedroom, sobbing and carrying the dead and dismembered bodies of his three sons. Medea and Jason stare at each other in silence.

* * *

What happens next?

You decide!

Click on the link below to vote for how you want the play to end.
The choice that gets the most votes will be performed ad lib by the cast of Medea Kills.

[Click here!](#)

* * *

"TO ΜΕΓΑΡΟΝ"

(TO MEGARON)

CHARACTERS

- AJONIS** A young, handsome hero who is definitely from Greece and sounds normal and Greek
- CLISAGORA/"CLISA"** A deep-breasted beauty and AJONIS's betrothed
- HYMARKIOS** AJONIS's best friend
- HADENNES** AJONIS's ward, a middle-aged child
- CLAUSSANDRA** CLISA's mother, to whom no-one listens
- CHRYSUS SON OF R.** A spice merchant
- CHORUS** of lesser friends

SCENE 1

*To μέγαρον (the great hall) at AJONIS's house in Athens.
AJONIS enters with CLISAGORA who is wearing a purple tunic
and twirling the whole time.*

AJONIS

Oh, muses! Heed me now, pray grant my tongue wings, that I may honour with words fine and meet the beauty I find before me. For here is white-armed CLISA, mine own betrothed, whom I thank the Gods in Olympos for bestowing upon me these five to seven years. She is attired in Tyrian purple silk, the finest silver can buy (imported straight from Phoenicia at 500 drachmae - a titanic sum to most, but then I am a banker of means so don't worry about it). CLISA's beauty and deep-breastedness are most accentuated in this tunic, my latest gift of love. Latest of many - alas, my generosity knows no bounds! I'd wager there is nothing at all I would not do or spend, for the princess who rules over my heart and loins, which are also generous. I ween my dear CLISA would be at great advantage were there to be a beauty contest 'gainst mighty Aphrodite herself at this very moment, no doubt setting off a second Trojan war, no lesser in magnitude or bloodiness. I ween hard. Come, you may retire and repose, muses, for I daresay you have performed splendidly, and come, tongue, let us put you to more profitable use without delay.

CLISA

O prised consort, how your offering, and no less your words, please me! Methinks Harmonia and Eriphyle, of Moon Snails fame, were not more lovely in their cursed robe than I in this. And methinks as well that you are correct in comparing me to the Goddess of Beauty and declaring me victor. Let us revel upstairs!

HADENNES and CHORUS enter.

HADENNES

What ho! What do my eyes behold! Is this a vision sent by the Gods to test me? All know daylight is not purer than my heart, and yet I now begin to fear my abstinence is not inflexible. But ho, is it not CLISA, and not a voluptuous moonbeam sent by a tricky God or satyr? I wot, 'tis her! And here too is AJONIS, my legal guardian, whose regard I cherish more than anything, or so methought before this vision struck me dumb. But, peace, an idea begins to form in my boggled mind, a most promising idea!

Dearest, bewitching CLISA, and AJONIS, you who are famed far and wide for your giving spirit, the pair of you appeared to have been on the brink of passion when I first entered the megaron. I have a proposition I wot will satisfy all. What if I were to become a third party to your carnal performance, and witness at last what my heart has so long ached to witness?

AJONIS

Alas, dear ward, 'though your offer be timely and in no way creepy, I fear I must refuse. Like the fallen Tantalus, you must continue to long for the succulent fruit which you can never reach, however many times you may propose your fruit-picking schemes. 'Tis witless to be over-busy, or over-scheming. Run along now, my dear child, and make a good match of your own, for one day everything I own will be yours, meseems, and you must bring honour to the house of AJONIS, just as I have, and my father before me. He was Greek too. We were all born in Greece.

CHORUS

Indeed! All the documents confirm it:
AJONIS was born in Athens.

What will become of poor HADENNES, unhappy in love and lust? Let us pray to the Gods in Olympos he will find someone his own age, whatever that may be, and bring glory to the AJONIS house, although it already has a lot of glory attached to it.

CLISA stops twirling. AJONIS, CLISA and HADENNES exit.

SCENE 2

The megaron. CLAUSSANDRA and CLISA enter.

CLAUSSANDRA

Sweet, beautiful daughter, light of my life, I have come to meddle in your affairs and deliver much-needed advice. I am about to *release my every shaft of speech*, to unbuckle my word-bag and empty its contents all over your head. *Lend me your ear, if you love frank speaking*. You must marry AJONIS, as he is an excellent match, and the union of our two families will please the Gods to no end. More still, he is rich, and you have need for financial security. You have lived off your beauty for long, but beauty is not everlasting. *No-one is free in this world. She's chained to money, or to luck, or to beauty, or to time. Any way you look at it, she's still a slave*. And as a slave, you must obey your mother! You may think him boring (so you have often described him) - *I'll tell you how to change your mind: the richest are those who live uneventfully, day after day after day*. You shall learn to treasure boring in time. Alack, why is it that no-one will heed my words, even 'though 'tis not long till I shall cross the river Styx and be forever lost to Hades? I have visited with the physician and there is no doubt in the matter: I have bosom cancer.

CLISA

Nagging mother, I know not what it is you have been going on about, or what the reason for your visit may be, but since you are here, let me expound to you the awful trouble I'm facing. I speak of course of him they call my betrothed, whom I no longer love, and the tedious life we share together! AJONIS, with his constancy, dignity and overwhelming generosity of body and spirit, drives me to distraction with ennui! Plus he hit me! Oh, woe is me! I have *cause to moan* indeed! Is there no more to life than this? *May I not quit a life of such inglorious ease, and dip my spear in wilder blood?* Does not Aphrodite, arguably

inferior to me in beauty, sow her wild oats? Does she not commune with Gods and men alike, with whomsoever she chooses, forswearing the marital bed? Might I not do likewise? My beauty will no more be wasted! I am determined to secure a lover (if not more), and if the Gods see fit to punish me, then I shall *get done with it and die*, but not before I am *full fed with doom!*

Remark, mother, that *the wildness that you wonder at I suck'd with mother's milk*. Leave me be now, for I do not wish to confer on this topic any longer. I wish to commune with another.

CLAUSSANDRA

Sigh!

CLAUSSANDRA exits.

CHORUS

Such talk is not to be believed! This *woman-hearted* woman has surely assured her destruction at the hands of the Gods. Beautiful she may be, and she looks great in her purple tunic, but white-armed Aphrodite will not stand for such effrontery, nor will her son Love, whom CLISA so woefully disdains. Spurned Hephaestus cannot be too pleased either at the glibness of her tongue. Surely 'tis a salad of doom she is tossing, and if she piles actions on her impertinent words we shall first-hand witness her ruination yet. But halt! Could this be the instrument of her downfall, arriving so soon?

HYMARKIOS enters.

HYMARKIOS

Esteemed CLISA, I have arrived post-haste. It is unheard of for you to summon me to my dear friend's house when he is not present. Is something the matter? Where is AJONIS, my most trusted and cherished bosom friend? He and I are inseparable since the happy day our lives were intertwined, and I would not have it any other way. His love, his

confidence, and our frequent communion are like the nectar of the Gods to me, nourishing as well as delectable. Yum! I miss him even now. The Gods were certainly smiling upon you when they granted you his love and his steady hand. Will my dear friend return soon?

CLISA

Striking Hymarkios, how I have longed for your entrance! You are looking radiant and manly indeed, although that is no novelty. Fret not, all is in order, 'though AJONIS shall not return home for a while. Shall we not drink and delight in music together regardless, a special treat for a darling friend? Sit by the hearth, where it is warm and we may needs disrobe. How delicious! Oh cunning HYMARKIOS, you must guess my intent by now. I can hide it no longer. I wish to take you for a lover!

HYMARKIOS

Begone, foul temptress! Foul, inly foul, ye foulest upon earth! Did you not take heed of my words? AJONIS is the best and worthiest friend one could ask for, and I would sooner face the Labours of Heracles than betray his trust. Have you taken leave of your senses? You are to be married shortly, are you not? Such an outstanding man as he deserves much better than the treatment you tender him. I am loth to bruise your heart, but I shall never accept it. The answer is a resounding and unalterable no.

CLISA

Alas, 'tis as I most feared! I had hoped my beauty could tempt you, but I see now that you are too honourable a man to bend to such trickery. What if I unclasp my robe? Still no? Alas, a hopeless quest should not be made at all. What is to become of me? I am consumed with love for you, cherished HYMARKIOS, and I fear without yours I shall have no resort but to throw myself into Poseidon's depths, and be no more of this world! I suppose nothing that is vast like my love for you enters into the life of mortals without a curse. I can suffer nothing but what is my fate.

HYMARKIOS

Tender woman, seeing you consumed with grief and disrobed like this has altered my view on the matter altogether, and I now perceive that my love for you burns bright as the God of the smithy's roaring furnace. Come, let us not think of meeting our ends just yet, nor of any mortal who is not here right this moment. I am emerged *with a new purpose yoked to a new mood*. Let the Gods be witness to how I put up a good fight and yielded to Love.

HYMARKIOS and CLISA exit.

CHORUS

And so, these mortals seal their doom, as the Fates make taut the life-thread, ready the whetstone to prepare for the lethal snip that is sure now to come. But what is the method by which the sportive Gods in Olympos will enact their retribution? We shall discover momentarily just how much woe is in this tale.

SCENE 3

The megaron again. CLISA enters. Then AJONIS enters carrying a bouquet of red roses.

AJONIS

What an outing! Dearest beloved, no doubt you have longed for me terribly but here I am returned to you. I bring you the finest red roses, symbols of Aphrodite, whose beauty pales in comparison to yours. I purchased them for 18 obols at the most excellent flower shop in Athens, wherein I am much recognised and admired, and the favourite customer. I do, after all, buy my betrothed flowers every day. Again, I am generous to a fault!

Now that my CLISA's needs are addressed, I shall launch into a tirade about the disappointments related to my employment. Throughout my respectable career, it has been

my fortune to climb rapidly through the ranks at the bank, the bank-ranks, but have recently arrived at a wall, past which I cannot proceed. None of this is my fault, of course - as any man in Athens will tell you, I am famed for my banking skills and my ability to make bundles (an Athenian banking term) as well as my impeccable morality and dependability. Still, my enhanced efforts in recent years have met no recompense. *You might as well try to boil a stone* for all the good it's done me. Alas, alack!

CLISA

Unfortunate man, your failure to continue climbing the bank-ranks comes at no small cost to my happiness, and yet we shall press on and persevere despite this setback. I have sent for a feast of bread, artichokes, meats, exotic fruits and some but not overmuch cheese, to be had with plentiful wine, mixed with imported spirits, spices and honey, which we shall drink to Dionysus that he may bless our evening with much laughter and joy. Drink now of this overflowing cup if indeed you hold love for me still!

CHORUS

CLISA plays a dangerous balancing game. Why is she acting so? We don't intend to play psychologist, but could she be a sociopath who cannot feel love? What can become of AJONIS the great and generous banker at the hands of such a woman? *Her body shall hurl men into war and into slaughter.*

Exit AJONIS and CLISA.

SCENE 4

AJONIS's garden. HADENNES enters holding a javelin. Then CHRYSUS SON OF R. enters.

CHRYSUS SON OF R.

Hark thee, HADENNES the foolhardy patron! 'Tis I, CHRYSUS SON OF R., the spice merchant, come to lay claim to that which is rightfully mine! Too long hast thou and thine guile made benefit of the epicurean products I trade, without so much as an obol for due compensation! Where is my payment, HADENNES? Gods be damned, wherein concealest thou the sum that is by rights mine? Wherefore hast thou impeded its rightful flow from thy sly hand into mine? Thou hast cause to quiver indeed, for I will take my money, vile thief, or your life! *Thou womanish man*, see how merrily my blade shines, bidding me bring forth your *day of death and doom*. Hear how clamours the *thirsty dust* for your spill'd blood, to *suck thee dry*. *The field of recklessness yields a harvest of death*. Deliver me my money at once or I shall do thee *to utter death!*

CHORUS

Make haste! Quick as swift-footed Hermes, alert our hero AJONIS, for only he can aid HADENNES the spice-addled halfwit! We have not five minutes to spare, for then it could be too late. Not five! Before five minutes are spent the sword could fall, claiming its bloody price, or HADENNES could well *defecate in terror*. Pray come hastily, brave AJONIS, dam this *river of violence*, and bring this crooked spice vendor to justice, ere the Furies drive his arm to gory deeds.

Enter AJONIS, HYMARKIOS, CLAUSSANDRA and CLISA.

AJONIS

Back, ye base trafficker, ye foul thrill-monger, I command you to leave this place at once and return to the pit of depravity whence you indubitably sprung! I'll not have you sully my halls or terrorising my guiltless ward. Away, I say, and forswear ever to step foot here again, nor claim a fee feloniously earned. Ah! *Nothing so evil as money ever grew to be current among men*, yet I have a lot of it and I'm fine. Hark, ye brazen fool! If you will not heed me, I shall have no recourse but to *knock your eyes out!* Well then! Off we go to seek out justice for your offences.

Exit CHRYSUS SON OF R., AJONIS and HYMARKIOS.

CLAUSSANDRA

How now, wretched child! How did you arrive at this unhappy scene, a child under the heel of a lowly spice peddler such as that? How came you to be of his acquaintance? What was the fateful sum agreed upon, that he was willing to perform such atrocious acts to secure? Do you perchance not grasp the severity of your circumstance? Know you that you owe your life to brave AJONIS and his timeliness, as much as to the merciful Gods? Speak, boy! Set forth all that I would learn; speaking not in riddles, but in full simplicity, as speech is due between friends.

CLISA

Meddlesome mother, silence is the grace of woman.

CLAUSSANDRA

Sigh!

CLISA

Dearest HADENNES, whom I cherish as mine own son, how came you to lie on this couch of woe? Stretch thy speech to tell this.

HADENNES

Ah, woe is undisputedly me! Woe again! Thrice woe! Woe, woe, woe! Meseems no mortal was ever as wretched as me, nor knew such tragedy! Why does Zeus make me his target so? Ah, I will tell all, plain and true: I had urgent need for cash and so I stooped to partake in that spice broker's unscrupulous employment, 'though it rent my heart to do it, and to keep it from you, adored CLISA, and from heroic AJONIS, who has today proven beyond contest his valour and

manliness, 'fore which Achilles himself would bow. I vow I shall never more attempt such foolery, nor will I ever from this day touch - nay, not even behold - spice of any kind, for as long as I shall live! Zeus be my witness!

CHORUS

Thank the mighty Gods for their safeguarding of this craven boy, and a thousand times thanks to hero AJONIS, whose hand it was enacted justice! This was a close call, but what should come of HADENNES if AJONIS were to meet his end? It does not bear thinking, yet what power could bring down such a fine Greek, albeit mortal, man, when he is, deservedly, so beloved of the Gods?

Exit HADENNES, CLISA and CLAUSSANDRA.

SCENE 5

AJONIS's garden. HYMARKIOS enters.

HYMARKIOS

Oh, me! Oh, impetuous me! I am transformed to a villain, by my own hand - nay, at the crafty hand of a woman! *How name her, if I may not speak a curse?* Alas, for my sorrow!

Alack, alack! Shame consumes me like a blight, just as passion engulfed me that fateful hour. It lives in my heart even now. Why, Love, thus conspire against me? Why, lovely Aphrodite, from your throne in the clouds plot to doom me, I who have ever worshipped at your altar, burning countless hecatombs? Will you even now *to my prayers no pity yield?* I have betrayed my most trusted and beloved companion. My bosom friend! *Whither can I turn me now?*

Perchance the only escape for this torment is death.

Enter AJONIS.

AJONIS

O the ignominy! I never did strike her! 'Tis a falsehood, a wicked fabrication! I never assaulted my betrothed, I would not, by the Gods! Oh, HYMARKIOS. How is it you have come to be in my gardens? Your presence, 'though welcome, is unexpected.

HYMARKIOS

Dear comrade, my mind has been ruminating on a question, and I am come here to seek your wisdom, for I know you to be wise in all matters, mortal or otherwise. The problem I put to you is this: think you that the weaker sex are as inclined to treachery as is our own? Mayhap one should encase one's heart, casting aside all womankind, lest it be irrevocably broken. I have heard tale of a certain vixen whose lasciviousness was notorious, and who had no misgivings on taking a dozen lovers to her bed. On discovering this, one of them flew into a rage such as Ares might incite in a favourite warrior, an uncontrollable bloodlust, that he may slaughter all in his wake in battle; a rage such that the ill-fated vixen was obliged to visit the Temple of Aesculapius, to seek remedy for her many injuries.

AJONIS

Hah! Never was such a comic story so comically told, hilarious HYMARKIOS! In moments like these, when jubilation reigns, I am exultant to be able to name you, dear fellow, my closest and best friend. The Gods certainly bless me daily with such a faithful companion, as with my devoted and loving CLISA! Cast from your mind venomous thoughts of treachery, dear man, for as you can see in my example, Love prevails! Maychance you might endeavour to find a worthy wife, HYMARKIOS, virtuous and pure as CLISA as is the driven snow, to keep your home and hearth, and maintain such dark thoughts as you are today consumed with at bay.

In any case, how are your carnal goings-on? Do you [want laying](#)?

HYMARKIOS

Alas, how can I find a wife when I deem women impossible to fathom out? Meseems they be either exceedingly cunning or dull-witted as a rock, and too oft corrupt, *the architects of every kind of mischief*. I am no woman-expert, learned AJONIS, but I hold forth we might do best to stay away from such wretched creatures.

Indeed, I will not tell you of my venereal affairs, nor of the reason thereof. I may one day share with you the source of the inner turmoil that now afflicts me, most valued confidant, but alas! Today is not that day, and I must away. Farewell!

HYMARKIOS exits.

CHORUS

Would that we could warn innocent AJONIS of the very carnal goings-on concerning which wicked HYMARKIOS will not unseal his lips! Alas, but that the knowledge would destroy our group of friends... Nay, we shall but wait and idly observe how it all unfolds, as if we were sitting atop Mount Vesuvius waiting for it to erupt (although it has not done so yet in living history).

AJONIS exits.

SCENE 6

The megaron. CLISA and HYMARKIOS enter.

CLISA

Handsome HYMARKIOS, how it fills my heart with glee to have you be my lover. I daresay Eros and Psyche were not happier or more in love than us, nor looked as striking at one another's side. You have expressed concern at dooming your

friendship with AJONIS, felt apprehension for his future sorrow. I don't care a fig for that. My pleasure is all that matters to me now.

HYMARKIOS

Beguiling CLISA, accursed instrument of so much ruin, I find my judgement clouded once more by your feminine wiles. I am guiltless! Yet the Gods forsake me once more. So be it! I would treat you like an egg, the shell of which we remove before eating it. Let us weave the weird dance together one more time, friendship and the Gods be damned!

CHORUS

Hark! Hear who comes here, lecherous fools!
It appears the volcano of comeuppance is set to erupt.

AJONIS enters.

AJONIS

What ho! What is this ghastly sight! My betrothed and my friend, in a lovers' embrace? Have I unknowingly perished, and do I now stand in the realm of Hades, where such hellish scenes may take place? Or if I am still living, I pray, O Zeus lightning-bringer, to strike me dead even as I speak, for I do not wish to live in such a world as this, in which faithful friends turn betrayers when one leaves the room! O Justice, aid! Aid, O ye thrones of Hell! How now! How can this possibly be righted? What have you to say, HYMARKIOS, dearest and oldest of friends? What say you, my wife to be?

You are rending me in twain, CLISA!

CLISA

Methinks you are overwrought with emotion!

HYMARKIOS

Nay, peace, CLISA. 'Tis time we faced reckoning.

It is true! What you see before you is no hellish fancy, but reality! You have discovered us, and your response is dramatic yet apt. Had you furnished your betrothed with everything she had need for, she would not have sought comfort in my couch, but so it has been, for some time. And 'though at first I felt only contrition and feared the moment we would be caught out, that feeling has now wholly transformed to hate. Hate for you, my erstwhile companion!

Hate for your impeccability of character, your faultlessness. Hate for your trusting disposition, hate for your fortune, for being so beloved of the Gods when I am not. We shall have it out now, and show the Gods who is the better man when it comes to swords!

CLISA

Pray, fight not! Only reckless children would unsheathe their blades with not a second's thought to the outcome thereof. Peace! I will not be won with murder.

AJONIS

I wish not to fight you, traitorous HYMARKIOS, whose very name brings bile to my tongue. Everyone I love has betrayed me, is that not abundant pain? Must we pile ills on ills? In any case, meseems this woman's honour is not worth the price in iron.

I shall retire and leave you demons to your perfidious plots. I intend, by the only definite means I know, never again to fall prey to them.

AJONIS exits.

CHORUS

How could this be? Be it possible that guiltless AJONIS may be the only to pay for a traitorous couple's misdeeds? If he really were a favourite of the Gods, would they urge his

demise so? Alas! Light the funeral pyre for fairness dies tonight.

HADENNES enters.

HADENNES

O, alas, a thousand times alas! Alases as far as the eye can see! Alases 'till the cows come home! *On all sides sorrow pens me in.*

CLISA

What is the meaning of this, dear child? Unleash your lips now and let fly your speech as 'twere winged! What fresh calamity ails you?

HADENNES

'Tis a dark day indeed when a hero falls! But why did it have to be this hero? My friend, my father, my mentor and life coach, you whom I would follow to the ends of Hades to retrieve. Alack, but that I am craven and weak! Would that I could honour you as you deserve, dearest of guardians! But the whole world has let you down, no less me. *O much and vainly hast thou toiled and borne! In what a hopeless sea of misery heaven hath plunged thee! Would I could die with thee!*

HYPARKIOS

Could it really be?! Speak you of our common friend?

HADENNES

Alas, 'tis so, I speak of AJONIS the wise banker - he is no more! He flung himself upon his keen blade, maddened by anguish, and suffered an unheroic demise. He has by his own hand succumbed to Hades and now dwells there, with his

Greek ancestors. The funeral rites are being arranged as we speak. If only I could take his place in the blaze!

HYMARKIOS

O, profound woe! O, deep-rooted sorrow! Now that he is gone, driven to a most unnatural act by ours, my mind is transformed once more, to love and regret! Would that I could undo all that I have done!

CLISA

Ah, woe indeed! Woe and despair! I am snowed under an avalanche of grief, for he is forever lost to us. Tears flow over my face as 'twere a torrent over fields of supple moss.

But pray, HYMMARKIOS my beloved, mean you really to say that, given the choice, you would unlive the time we have together enjoyed? Without AJONIS's obstruction, we are now free to be together for as long as we desire. We are yet in love! Is that not some small consolation, dear one?

HYMARKIOS

Together? In love?! Your very sight is abhorrent to me now! It evokes in my loins from this day only limp death. The veil is lifted and I behold you as the vile creature you truly are! I never had love for you, I was merely under your sensual spell! Out! A curse upon your kin, and begone, terrible beast, and let me not lay eyes upon you again, or it will mean your life!

CLISA

Alack and alack once more! Now do I well and truly feel the stab of doom pierce my heart... I have lost all!

HADENNES

O indescribable anguish! Let us not quarrel, friends, for enough dread has been borne by all, and we must honour the dead.

CHORUS

A great Greek man has been lost this day to vanity and treachery. We, his true friends, shall honour him by the proper rites that he may find safe passage to the underworld.

We pray to the Gods that no such tragedy befall again mortal man. Let us pray, especially, that this be the last time this awful tale is told.

All exit.

TO ΤΕΛΟΣ (THE END)