MEDEA “I can cure you of sterility” scene

(1 Man, 1 Woman)

AEGEUS (EE-JUS)

Medea (MIH-DEE-UH)

[Enter Aegeus, king of Athens.]

AEGEUS

I wish you all happiness, Medea.  
There’s no better way to greet one’s friends.

MEDEA

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

AEGEUS

I’ve just left Apollo’s ancient oracle.

MEDEA

The prophetic centre of the earth?  
What business took you there?

AEGEUS

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

MEDEA

In the gods’ name, have you lived so long  
without ever having any children?

AEGEUS

Not one. Some god is doing this to me.

MEDEA

Do you have a wife? Or have you stayed unmarried?

AEGEUS

No, I’m married. My wife shares my bed.

MEDEA

So what did Apollo say about it?

AEGEUS

Words too wise for human understanding.

MEDEA

It is appropriate for me to learn them?

AEGEUS

Of course. They need a clever mind like yours.

MEDEA

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

AEGEUS

He told me this:  
“Don’t untie the wineskin’s foot. . .”

MEDEA

Until when?  
Until you do what or reach what country?

AEGEUS

“. . . until you come back to your hearth and home.”

MEDEA

What were you looking for when you sailed here?

AEGEUS

A man called Pittheus, king of Troezen.

MEDEA

He’s Pelops’ son. They say he’s a very holy man.

AEGEUS

I want to share the god’s prophecy with him.

MEDEA

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

AEGEUS

And the friendliest of all my allies.

MEDEA

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

AEGEUS

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

MEDEA

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

AEGEUS

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

MEDEA

Jason’s abusing me. I’ve done him no harm.

AEGEUS

What has he done? Give me more details.

MEDEA

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

AEGEUS

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

MEDEA

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

AEGEUS

Is this a new love affair,  
or did he get fed up with you in bed?

MEDEA

A new love match—he’s betrayed his family.

AEGEUS

Leave him, then, since, as you say, he’s worthless.

MEDEA

His passion is to marry royalty.

AEGEUS

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

MEDEA

Creon, who rules this land of Corinth.

AEGEUS

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

MEDEA

I’m done for, finished.  
I’m being banished from this country

AEGEUS

By whom? You’re speaking now of some new trouble.

MEDEA

Creon is driving me into exile,  
forcing me out, away from Corinth.

AEGEUS

With Jason’s full consent? I find that disgraceful.

MEDEA

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

AEGEUS

Lady, I’d like to grant this favour to you,  
for many reasons. First, there’s the gods.            
Then, for the children you say I’ll produce.  
For there I’ve lost all sense of what to try.  
Here’s what I’ll do. If you get to my country,  
I’ll strive to treat you as a foreign guest—  
that’s the proper thing for me to do.    
But, Medea, I’ll give you fair warning:  
I won’t plot to get you out of Corinth.  
If you can reach my household on your own,  
you may stay there in safety. Rest assured—  
I won’t surrender you to anyone.  
But you must make your own escape from here.  
I don’t want my hosts finding fault with me.

MEDEA

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

AEGEUS

Don’t you trust me? What in this still bothers you?

MEDEA

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

AEGEUS

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

MEDEA

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

AEGEUS

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

MEDEA

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

AEGEUS

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

MEDEA

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

AEGEUS

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

MEDEA

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

[Exit Aegeus.]