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Samuel French Acting Edition

Medea

Freely adapted from
Euripides' *Medea*

by Robinson Jeffers



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Freely adapted from the "Medea" of Euripides by Robinson Jeffers; staged by John Gielgud; settings by Ben Edwards; costumes by Castillo; lighting by Peggy Clark; original music and scoring by Tibor Serly; presented by Robert Whitehead and Oliver Rea at the National Theatre Monday evening, October 20, 1947.

THE CAST

THE NURSE.....	<i>Florence Reed</i>
THE TUTOR.....	<i>Don McHenry</i>
THE CHILDREN.....	<i>Gene Lee, Peter Moss</i>
FIRST WOMAN OF CORINTH.....	<i>Grace Mills</i>
SECOND WOMAN OF CORINTH.....	<i>Kathryn Grill</i>
THIRD WOMAN OF CORINTH.....	<i>Leone Wilson</i>
MEDEA.....	<i>Judith Anderson</i>
CREON.....	<i>Albert Hecht</i>
JASON.....	<i>John Gielgud</i>
ÆGEUS.....	<i>Hugh Franklin</i>
JASON'S SLAVE.....	<i>Richard Hylton</i>
ATTENDANTS TO MEDEA.....	<i>Martha Downes, Marian Seldes</i>
SOLDIERS.....	<i>Ben Morse, Jon Dawson, Richard Boone, Dennis McCarthy</i>

SYNOPSIS

The entire action of the play occurs before Medea's house in Corinth.

MEDEA

DESCRIPTION OF CHARACTERS

THE NURSE: *An old slave-woman, Medea's nurse in childhood, now her devoted servant.*

THE TUTOR: *An old man, a slave, tutor to Medea's children.*

THE CHILDREN: *Two little boys.*

CHORUS: *Corinthian women of various types.*

MEDEA

CREON: *A man of fifty, perhaps; the ruler of Corinth.*

JASON: *Famous hero and explorer, now settling toward middle age.*

ÆGEUS (E'GEUS—accent on first syllable): *ruler of Athens, visiting Corinth. A kindly person, a little older than Creon.*

A YOUNG MAN: *A slave of Jason's.*

Also men in attendance on Creon, Jason, Ægeus, and serving women belonging to Medea.

Medea

ACT ONE

HOUSE LIGHTS UP

CURTAIN

LIGHT CUE #1 UP

LIGHT CUE #1 DOWN

SCRIM at front of scene. MUSIC, LIGHT CUE #2,
SEA EFFECT (all together).

*The NURSE comes from the door Left toward the
front of the stage, as soon as SCRIM is fully drawn.*

LIGHT CUE #3

SEA EFFECT STOPS

THE NURSE. (*Reaches up stage Right position, then
speaks*)

I wish the long ship Argo had never passed that peri-
lous channel between the Symplegades,

I wish the pines that made her mast and her oars still
waved in the wind on Mount Pelion, and the gray
fishhawk

Still nested in them, the great adventurers had never
voyaged

Into the Asian sunrise to the shores of morning for
the Golden Fleece

(LIGHT CUE #4.)

(*Crosses up to 3rd step, Center.*)

For then my mistress Medea

Would never have seen Jason, nor loved and saved him,
nor cut herself off from home to come with him

Into this country of the smiling chattering Greeks and
the roofs of Corinth: over which I see evil

Hang like a cloud. For she is not meek but fierce, and the daughter of a king.

Yet at first all went well.

The folk of Corinth were kind to her, they were proud of her beauty, and Jason loved her. Happy is the house

Where the man and the woman love and are faithful.

(Sits on 3rd step)

Now all is changed; all is black hatred. For Jason has turned from her; he calls the old bond a barbarian mating, not a Greek marriage; he has cast her off

And wedded the yellow-haired child of Creon, the ruler here. He wants worldly advantage, fine friends,

And a high place in Corinth. For these he is willing to cast Medea like a harlot, and betray the children

That she has borne him. He is not wise, I think

(LIGHT CUE #5)

But Medea

Lies in the house, broken with pain and rage; she will neither eat nor drink, except her own tears,

She turns her face toward the earth, remembering her father's house and her native land, which she abandoned

For the love of this man: who now despises her.

And if I try to speak comfort to her she only stares at me, great eyes like stones. She is like a stone on the shore

Or a wave of the sea, and I think she hates

Even her children.

(Rises and crosses to rock down Right)

She is learning what it is to be a foreigner, cast out, alone and despised.

She will never learn to be humble, she will never learn to drink insult

Like harmless water. O I'm in terror of her: whether she'll thread a knife through her own heart,

Or whether she'll hunt the bridegroom and his new

bride, or what more dreadful evil stalks in the forest

Of her dark mind. I know that Jason would have been wiser to tempt a lioness, or naked-handed

Steal the whelps of a tiger.

(From up Right she sees MEDEA'S BOYS coming with their TUTOR, ELDER BOY first with sea-shell, YOUNGER BOY on TUTOR's back.)

Here comes the happy

children. Little they know

Of their mother's grief. *(LIGHT CUE #6)*

(During this speech TUTOR lets Boy off his back. BOYS go up and sit up Right corner of house. TUTOR crosses down Center to Left of NURSE.)

THE TUTOR.

Old servant of my lady, why do you stand out here, keeping watch in solitude With those grim eyes? Is it some trouble of your own that you are lamenting? I should think Medea Would need your care.

THE NURSE.

It is all one to Medea, whether I am there or here. Yes, it is mine, My trouble. My lady's grief is my grief. And it has hurt me So that I had to come out and speak it to the earth and sky.

THE TUTOR.

Is she still in that deep despair?

THE NURSE.

You are lucky,

Old watchdog of Jason's boys. I envy you, You do not see her. This evil is not declining, it is just at dawn. I dread the lion-eyed Glare of its noon.

THE TUTOR.

Is she so wrought? Yet neither you nor Medea

Knows the latest and worst.

THE NURSE. (*Rises from rock*)

What? What?

THE TUTOR. (*Crosses to Center*)

I shouldn't

have spoken.

THE NURSE. (*She follows him to Left Center. As she does this BOYS cross down to rock. One sits on rock and other sits on ground at his feet*)

Tell me the truth, old man. You and

I are two slaves, we can trust each other,
We can keep secrets.

THE TUTOR

I heard them saying—when we
walked beside the holy fountain Peirene,
Where the old men sit in the sun on the stone benches
—they were saying that Creon, the lord of this
land,
Intends to drive out Medea and the children with her,
these innocent boys, out of this house
And out of Corinth, and they must wander through the
wild world
Homeless and helpless.

THE NURSE.

I don't believe it. Ah, no! Jason
may hate the mother, but he would hardly
Let his sons be cast out.

THE TUTOR.

Well—he has made a new
alliance.
He is not a friend of this house.

THE NURSE. (*She crosses below TUTOR to Left*)
If this were true!—

MEDEA. (*Within house. She is Asiatic and laments loudly*)
Death.

THE NURSE.

Listen! I hear her voice

MEDEA. (*Within*)

Death. Death is my wish. For myself, my enemies, my children. Destruction.

THE NURSE.

Take the children away, keep them away from her.
Take them to the other door. Quickly.

(During "Deaths" YOUNGER BOY rises from rock. TUTOR crosses, picks him up and exits Left, followed by ELDER BOY. They go out, toward rear door of the house. THE NURSE looks after them, wringing her hands.)

MEDEA.

That's the word. Grind, crush, burn. Destruction. Ai—
Ai—

THE NURSE. *(Wringing her hands)*

This is my terror:

To hear her always harking back to the children, like
a fierce hound at fault. O unhappy one,
They're not to blame.

(Sits step Right of pillar down Left.)

(LIGHT CUE #7)

MEDEA. *(Within)*

If any god hears me: let me die.

Ah, rotten, rotten, rotten: death is the only
Water to wash this dirt.

(FIRST and SECOND WOMAN are coming in up Right, but the NURSE does not yet notice them. She is intent on MEDEA's cries and her own thoughts.)

THE NURSE.

Oh, it's a bad thing

(LIGHT CUE #8)

To be born of high race, and brought up wilful and
powerful in a great house, unruled.

And ruling many: for then if misfortune comes it is
unendurable, it drives you mad. I say that poor
people

Are happier: the little commoners and humble people,
the poor in spirit: they can lie low
Under the wind and live:

*(Enter THIRD WOMAN; joins FIRST and
SECOND up Right Center.)*

while the tall oaks and cloud-
raking mountain pines go mad in the storm,
Writhe, groan and crash.

MEDEA.

Ai!

THE NURSE.

This is the wild and terrible justice of God: it brings
on great persons
The great disasters.

MEDEA.

Ai!!!

THE NURSE. *(Becomes aware of the WOMEN who
have come in, and is startled from her reverie. FIRST
WOMAN crosses down Center)*

What do you want?

FIRST WOMAN.

I hear her crying again: it

is dreadful.

SECOND WOMAN. *(Crosses down to Right of FIRST
WOMAN)*

Her lamentation.

She is beautiful and deep in grief: we couldn't help
coming.

THIRD WOMAN. *(Crosses down to Right of SECOND
WOMAN)*

We are friends of this house and its trouble hurts us.

THE NURSE.

You are right, friends; it is not a home. It is broken.

A house of grief and of weeping.

MEDEA. *(Within)*

Hear me, God, let me
die. What I need: all dead, all dead, all dead

(THIRD WOMAN crosses down Right of rock.)

Under the great cold stones. For a year and a thousand

years and another thousand: cold as the stones,
cold,
But noble again, proud, straight and silent, crimson-
cloaked
In the blood of our wounds.

(FIRST WOMAN crosses to 3rd step, Center.)

FIRST WOMAN.

O shining sky, divine earth,
Harken not to the song that this woman sings.
It is not her mind's music; her mind is not here.
She does not know what she prays for.
Pain and wrath are the singers.

SECOND WOMAN. (*Crosses to second step, facing door*).

Unhappy one,
(LIGHT CUE #9)

Never pray for death, never pray for death,
He is here all too soon.
He strikes from the clear sky like a hawk,
He hides behind green leaves, or he waits
Around the corner of the wall.
O never pray for death, never pray for death—
Because that prayer will be answered.

MEDEA. (*The rise and fall of her voice indicate that she is prowling back and forth beyond the main doorway, like a caged animal*)

I know poisons. I know the bright teeth of steel. I
know fire. But I will not be mocked by my enemies,
(THIRD WOMAN crosses up Right of rock to
Right Center.)

And I will not endure pity. Pity and contempt are
sister and brother, twin-born. I will not die tamely.
I will not allow blubber-eyed pity, nor contempt either,
to snivel over the stones of my tomb.
I am not a Greek woman.

THIRD WOMAN. (*Crosses to step Center*)

No, a barbarian woman from
savage Colchis, at the bitter end

Of the Black Sea. Does she boast of that?

SECOND WOMAN.

She doesn't

know what she is saying.

MEDEA. (*Within*)

Poisons. Death-magic. The sharp sword. The hemp rope. Death-magic.

Death—

SECOND WOMAN. (*Crosses down Right of rock.*

THIRD WOMAN *joins her*)

I hate Jason, who made this sorrow.

FIRST WOMAN. (*Crosses to NURSE in front of doors*)

Old and honored servant of a great house, do you think it is wise

To leave your lady alone in there, except perhaps a few slaves, building that terrible acropolis

Of deadly thoughts? We Greeks believe that solitude is very dangerous, great passions grow into monsters

In the dark of the mind; but if you share them with loving friends they remain human, they can be endured.

MEDEA. (*Within*)

Ai!

FIRST WOMAN.

I think you ought to persuade Medea to come from the dark dwelling, and speak with us, before her heart breaks,

Or she does harm to herself. She has lived among us, we've learned to love her, we'd gladly tell her so.

It might comfort her spirit. (*LIGHT CUE #10.*)

THE NURSE.

Do you think so? She

wouldn't listen

(*Door BOLT is heard. NURSE rises. FIRST WOMAN crosses down Right, joining other two WOMEN, and sits on rock*)

—Oh, oh, she is coming!

Speak carefully to her: make your words a soft music.

(MEDEA comes through the doorway, propping herself against one of the pillars, and stands staring.)

THE NURSE.

Oh, my dear, my poor child.

(NURSE sits.)

SECOND WOMAN. (*Whispering*)

They say she is dangerous. Look at her eyes.

FIRST WOMAN.

She is a witch, but not evil. She can make old men young again: she did it for Jason's father.

THIRD WOMAN.

All the people of her country are witches. They know about drugs and magic. They are savages, but they have a wild wisdom.

SECOND WOMAN.

Poor soul, it hasn't helped this one much.

MEDEA. (*She does not see the gaping and whispering WOMEN*)

I will look at the light of the sun, this last time. I wish from that blue sky the white wolf of lightning

Would leap, and burst my skull and my brain, and like a burning babe cling to these breasts—Ai!—Ai!

(*She checks and looks fiercely at the WOMEN below*)

Someone is here?

(*Her hostile eyes range back and forth; she sees the WOMEN clearly now, and assumes full self-control. Her voice is cautious and insincere*)

I did not know I had visitors.—Women of Corinth:

If anything has been spoken too loudly here, consider That I believed I was alone; and I have some provocation. You've come—let me suppose

With love and sympathy—to peer at my sorrow. I understand well enough

That nothing is ever private in a Greek city; whoever withholds anything

Is thought sullen or proud—

(With irony)

undemocratic

I think you call it. This is not always just, but we know
that justice, at least on earth,

Is a name, not a fact; and as for me, I wish to avoid
any appearance

Of being—proud. Of what? Of affliction? I will show
you my naked heart.

(The THREE WOMEN rise; cross to Center.)

You know that my lord Jason

Has left me and made a second marriage, with the
bright-haired child

Of wealth and power. I too was a child of power, but
not in this country; and I spent my power

For love of Jason. I poured it out before him like water,
I made him drink it like wine. I gave him

Success and fame; I saved him his precious life; not
once, many times. You may have heard what I did
for him:

I betrayed my father for him, I killed my brother to
save him; I made my own land to hate me forever;

And I fled west with Jason in the Greek ship, under the
thunder of the sail, weeping and laughing,

That huge journey through the Black Sea and the
Bosphorus, where the rocks clang together,
through the Sea of Marmora,

And through Hellespont,

(LIGHT CUE #11)

watched by the spearmen of

wealthy Troy, and home to Greek water: his home,
my exile,

My endless exile.

(Crosses to pillar Left of house)

And here I have loved him and borne
him sons; and this—man—

Has left me and taken Creon's daughter, to enjoy her
fortune, and put aside her soft yellow hair

And kiss her young mouth.

(MEDEA stands rigid, struggling for self-control.)

FIRST WOMAN.

She is terrible. Stone with stone eyes.

SECOND WOMAN.

Look: the foam-flake on her lip, that flickers with her breathing.

THIRD WOMAN.

She is pitiable: she is under great injuries.

MEDEA. (*Low-voiced*)

I do not know what other woman—I do not know how much a Greek woman

Will endure. The people of my race are somewhat rash and intemperate. As for me, I want simply to die.

(*She sits at pillar Left*)

But Jason is not to smile at his bride over my grave, nor that great man Creon

Hang wreaths and make a feast-day in Corinth. Or let the wreaths be bright blinding fire, and the songs a high wailing,

And the wine, blood.

FIRST WOMAN. (*Crosses to Center*)

Daughter of sorrow, beware.

(*LIGHT CUE #12*)

It is dangerous to dream of wine; it is worse

To speak of wailing or blood:

For the images that the mind makes

Find a way out, they work into life.

MEDEA.

Let them work into life!

FIRST WOMAN.

There are evils that cannot be cured by evil.

Patience remains, and the gods watch all.

MEDEA. (*Dully, without hope*)

Let them watch my enemies go down in blood.

(*First TRUMPET off up Right is heard. The THREE WOMEN cross up Right.*)

SECOND WOMAN.

Medea, beware!

Some great person is coming.—

(Second TRUMPET is heard)

It is Creon himself.

(Third TRUMPET)

THIRD WOMAN.

Creon is coming.

(The THREE WOMEN cross down stage of rock Right.)

THE NURSE.

He is dark with anger. O my lady—
my child—bend in this wind,
And not be broken!

(MEDEA rises. CREON comes in up Right with MEN attending him. The WOMEN move to one side. He speaks to MEDEA, with an angry gesture toward WOMEN.)

CREON. *(At Center)*

You have admirers, I see. Abate your pride: these people will not be with you where you are going.

(A pause. MEDEA does not answer. CREON brings his wrath under control and crosses up to second step to Right of MEDEA)

Medea, woman of the stone forehead and hate-filled eyes: I have made my decision. I have decided That you must leave this land at once and go into banishment

THREE WOMEN.

Oohh!

CREON.

with your children.

THREE WOMEN.

Oohh.

CREON.

I intend to remove

A root of disturbance out of the soil of Corinth. I am
here to see to it. I will not return home
Until it is done.

(The THREE WOMEN sit.)

MEDEA.

You mean—banishment?

CREON.

Exile: banishment:
go where you may, Medea, but here
You abide no more.

MEDEA.

—I with my children?

CREON.

I will not

take them away from you.

MEDEA.

The children, my lord—
(Her lips move angrily, but the voice is not heard.)

CREON.

What are you muttering?

MEDEA.

Nothing—I am praying to my gods for wisdom,
And you for mercy. My sons are still very young,
tender and helpless. You know, my lord,
What exile means—to wander with fear and famine
for guide and driver, through all the wild winter
storms
And the rage of the sun; and beg a bread-crust and be
derided; pelted with stones in the villages,
Held a little lower than the scavenger dogs, kicked,
scorned and slaved—the children, my lord,
Are Jason's children. Your chosen friend, I believe,
and now
Even closer bound. And as for me, your servant, O
master of Corinth, what have I done? Why
Must I be cast?

CREON.

I will tell you frankly: because you
nourish rancorous ill will toward persons
Whom I intend to protect: I send you out before you've
time to do harm here. And you are notorious
For occult knowledge: sorcery, poisons, magic. Men
say you can even sing down the moon from heaven,
And make the holy stars to falter and run backward,
against the purpose
And current of nature. Ha? As to that I know not: I
know you are dangerous. You threaten my daughter:
you have to go.

MEDEA.

But I wish her well, my lord! I wish her all happiness.
I hope that Jason may be as kind to her
As—to me.

CREON.

That is your wish?

MEDEA.

I misspoke. I thought of
old days—
(*She seems to weep.*)

CREON.

I acknowledge, Medea,
That you have some cause for grief. I all the more
must guard against your dark wisdom and bitter
heart.

MEDEA.

You misjudge me cruelly. It is true that I have some
knowledge of drugs and medicines: I can some-
times cure sickness.

Is that a crime? These dark rumors, my lord,
Are only the noise of popular gratitude.

(*Crosses down to one step above him*)

You must have observed

it often: if any person

Knows a little more than the common man, the people
suspect him. If he brings a new talent,
How promptly the hateful whispers begin. But you

are not a common man, lord of Corinth; you
Will not fear knowledge. (LIGHT CUE #13)

CREON.

No. Nor change my decision.

I am here to see you leave this house and the city:
And not much time. Move quickly, gather your things
and go. I pity you, Medea,
But you must go.

(He crosses off steps, with back to her down
Right Center.)

MEDEA.

You pity me? You—pity me?

(She comes close to him, wild with rage)

I will endure a dog's pity or a wart-grown toad's. May
God who hears me— We shall see in the end
Who's to be pitied.

(NURSE rises, crosses in to steps. MEDEA
crosses down Left, then up Right between
pillar and edge of house, then back to NURSE in
her arms.)

CREON.

Yes, and I'll keep her safe of your
female hatred: therefore I send you
Out of this land.

(NURSE resumes her sitting position down
Left.)

MEDEA.

It is not true, I am not jealous. I
never hated her.
Jealous for the sake of Jason? I am far past wanting
Jason, my lord. You took him and gave him to her,
And I will say you did well, perhaps wisely. Your
daughter is loved by all: she is beautiful: if I were
near her
I would soon love her.

CREON.

You can speak sweetly enough,
you can make honey in your mouth like a brown
bee

When it serves your turn.

MEDEA.

Not honey: the truth.

CREON.

Trust

you or not, you are going out of this country,
Medea.

What I decide is fixed:

(MEDEA crosses away from him to Center.)

it is like the firm rocks of Acro-
corinth, which neither earthquake can move
Nor a flood of tears melt. Make ready quickly: I have
a guest in my house. I should return to him.

THE NURSE. (*Comes to Left of MEDEA and speaks to her*)

What guest? O my lady, ask him

Who is the guest? If powerful and friendly

He might be a refuge for us—

MEDEA. (*Pays no attention to her. Crosses; kneels; to CREON*)

I know that your will is granite. But even on the harsh
face of a granite mountain some flowers of mercy
May grow in season. Have mercy on my little sons,
Creon.

Though there is none for me.

(She reaches to embrace his knees. He steps backward from her.)

CREON.

How long, woman? This is decided; done; finished.

(NURSE crosses back Left and sits down.)

MEDEA. (*Rising from her knees, turns half away from him*)

I am not a beggar.

I will not trouble you. I shall not live long.

(*Crosses two steps to Left; turns to him again*)

Sire: grant me a few hours yet, one day to prepare in,
one little day

Before I go out of Corinth forever.

CREON.

What? No! I told

you. The day is today, Medea, this day.

And the hour is now.

MEDEA.

There are no flowers on this
mountain: not one violet, not one anemone.

Your face, my lord, is like flint.—If I could find the
right words, if some god would lend me a touch of
eloquence,

I'd show you my heart.

(*Crosses to CREON*)

I'd lift it out of my breast and
turn it over in my hands; you'd see how pure it is
Of any harm or malice toward you or your household.

(*She holds out her hands to him*)

Look at it: not a speck: look, my lord. They call mercy
The jewel of kings. I am praying

To you as to one of the gods: destroy us not utterly.

To go out with no refuge, nothing prepared,
Is plain death: I would rather kill myself quickly and
here. If I had time but to ask the slaves

And strolling beggars where to go, how to live: and I
must gather some means: one or two jewels

And small gold things I have,

(*Crosses away from CREON to Left*)

to trade them for bread

and goat's milk.

(*Crosses up steps to Center of doorway*)

Wretched, wretched, wretched I am,
I and my boys.

(She kneels again)

I beseech you, Creon,
By the soft yellow hair and cool smooth forehead and
the white knees
Of that young girl who is now Jason's bride: lend me
this inch of time: one day—half a day.
For this one is now half gone—and I will go my sad
course and vanish in the morning quietly as dew
That drops on the stones at dawn and is dry at sunrise.
You will never again be troubled by any word
Or act of mine. And this I pray you for your dear
child's sake. Oh Creon, what is half a day
In all the rich years of Corinth?

CREON.

I will think of it. I am

no tyrant.

I have been merciful to my own hurt, many times.

Even to myself I seem to be foolish

If I grant you this thing— No, Medea,

I will not grant it.

*(THREE WOMEN rise, cross down Right of
CREON, imploringly)*

Well— We shall watch you: as a
hawk does a viper. What harm could she do
In the tail of one day? A ruler ought to be ruthless,
but I am not. I am a fool

In my own eyes, whatever the world may think. I
can be gruff with warriors; a woman weeping

(MEDEA weeps.)

Floods me off course.—Take it, then. Make your
preparations.

But if tomorrow's sun shines on you here—Medea,
you die—

*(MEDEA and WOMEN make a gesture of
thanks.)*

Enough words. Thank me not. I want
my hands

Washed of this business.

*(He departs quickly up Right, followed by
his MEN. MEDEA rises from her knees.)*

MEDEA

I will thank you.
And the whole world will hear of it.

(MEDEA crosses around to Right of house on top step; makes a violent gesture after him, then sits at pillar Right.)

FIRST WOMAN. (*Crosses up Center watching him out then turns to other WOMEN*)
I have seen this man's arrogance, I watched and heard him.

I am of Corinth, and I say that Corinth
Is not well ruled.

SECOND WOMAN. (*Crosses up Center.* THREE WOMEN *join hands at Center on end of this speech*)
The city where even a woman, even a foreigner,
Suffers unjustly the rods of power
Is not well ruled.

(THREE WOMEN *take a step* to MEDEA.)

FIRST WOMAN.
Unhappy Medea, what haven, what sanctuary, where
will you wander?
Which of the gods, Medea,
Drives you through waves of woe, the mooring broken,
the hawsers and the anchor-head,
Hopeless from harbor?

MEDEA.

—This man—this barking dog
—this gulled fool—
(MEDEA rises)

gods of my father's country,
 You saw me low on my knees before the great dog of
 Corinth; humble, holding my heart in my hands
 For a dog to bite—break this dog's teeth!

(LIGHT CUE #14)
(WOMEN cross down stage of rock Right.)

Women: it is

a bitter thing to be a woman.
A woman is weak for warfare, she must use cunning.

Men boast their battles: I tell you this, and we know it:

(Starts down steps Center)

It is easier to stand in battle three times, in the front line, in the stabbing fury, than to bear one child. And a woman, they say, can do no good but in childbirth. It may be so. She can do evil;

(WOMEN make pleading gesture to her)

she can do evil.

(She snarls at them and they turn away)

I wept before that tall dog, I wept my tears before him, I degraded my knees to him, I gulled and flattered him.

O triple fool, he has given me

(She crosses up Right Center. FIRST WOMAN sits on rock Right)

all that I needed: a little time, a

space of time.

(Crosses back to Left Center)

Death is dearer to me

Than what I am now; and if today by sunset the world has not turned, and turned sharp too—let your dog Creon

Send two or three slaves to kill me and a cord to strangle me: I will stretch out

My throat to it. But I have a bitter hope, women. I begin to see light

Through the dark wood, between the monstrous trunks of the trees, at the end of the tangled forest an eyehole,

A pin-point of light:

(LIGHT CUE #15)

I shall not die perhaps

As a pigeon dies. Nor like an innocent lamb, that feels a hand on its head and looks up from the knife

To the man's face and dies.—No, like some yellow-eyed beast that has killed its hunters let me lie down

On the hounds' bodies and the broken spears.—Then

how to strike them? What means to use? There are so many Doors through which painful death may glide in and catch— Which one, which one?

(She stands meditating down Left. The NURSE comes from behind her and speaks to the FIRST WOMAN.)

THE NURSE

Tell me: do you

know what guest
Is in Creon's house?

FIRST WOMAN.

What?—Oh. An Athenian ship
came from the north last night: it is Ægeus.
The lord of Athens.

THE NURSE

Ægeus! My lady knows him: I
believe he will help us. Some god has brought him
here,
Some savior god.

FIRST WOMAN.

He is leaving, I think, today.

THE NURSE *(Hobbling back toward MEDEA)*

My lady!

Lord Ægeus
Is here in Corinth, Creon's guest. Ægeus of Athens.
(MEDEA looks at her silently, without attention.)

If you will see him and speak him fairly,
We have a refuge.

MEDEA.

I have things in my hand to do. Be
quiet.

THE NURSE

Oh, listen to me!
You are driven out of Corinth; you must find shelter.
Ægeus of Athens is here.

(MEDEA turns from her. The NURSE catches

at her clothing, servile but eager, slave and mother at the same time.)

MEDEA. (*Angrily turning on her*)
What's that to me? (*LIGHT CUE #16*)

THE NURSE. (*Kneels at her feet*)
I lifted you in my arms when you were—this long. I gave you milk from these breasts, that are now dead leaves.

I saw the little beautiful body straighten and grow tall: Oh—child—almost my child—how can I Not try to save you? Life is better than death—

MEDEA.

Not now.

THE NURSE.

Time's running out!

MEDEA.

I have time. Oh, I have time.
It would be good to stand here a thousand years and think of nothing
But the deaths of three persons.

THE NURSE.

Ai! There's no hope then.
Ai, child, if you could do this red thing you dream of, all Corinth
Would pour against you.

MEDEA.

After my enemies are punished
and I have heard the last broken moan—Corinth?
What's that? I'll sleep. I'll sleep well. I am alone
against all: and so weary
That it is pitiful. (*TRUMPET is heard off Right.*)

(*MEDEA sits. NURSE rises, wringing her hands. On trumpet call the THREE WOMEN cross up Right.*)

FIRST WOMAN.

Look: who is coming? I see the
sunlight glitter on lanceheads.

SECOND WOMAN.

Oh, it is Jason!

THIRD WOMAN.

Jason's Medea's worst enemy, who should have been
Her dearest protector.

(MEDEA leans wearily against one of the pillars of the doorway, her back to the stage, unconscious of what they are saying. JASON enters in haste up Right, followed by armed ATTENDANTS, and speaks angrily.)

JASON. *(Crossing to Center on 2nd step)*

What business have you here,

you women

Clustered like buzzing bees at the hive-door?

Where is Medea?

(They do not answer for a moment, but look involuntarily toward MEDEA, and JASON sees her. She jerks and stiffens at the sound of his voice, but does not turn.)

FIRST WOMAN. *(Pointing)*

There: mourning for what you have
done.

(NURSE takes a step above MEDEA, disclosing her to JASON.)

JASON.

Ha? What she has done.

Not I. Not by my will she and my sons are exiled.

MEDEA. *(Slowly turns and faces him, her head high, rigid with inner violence)*

Is there another dog here?

(THREE WOMEN sit on steps up Right Center.)

JASON.

So, Medea,
You have once more affronted and insulted the head
of Corinth. This is not the first time
I've seen what a fool anger is. You might have lived
here happily, secure and honored—I hoped you
would—

By being just a little decently respectful toward those
in power. Instead you had to go mad with anger
And talk yourself into exile. To me it matters little
what you say about me, but rulers are sensitive.
Time and again I've smoothed down Creon's indigna-
tion, then you like a madwoman, like a possessed
imbecile,

Wag your head and let the words flow again; you
never cease

From speaking evil against him and his family. So
now— Call yourself lucky, Medea,

Not to get worse than exile.

(Crosses a few steps to MEDEA on 2nd step)

In spite of all this, I have
your interest at heart and am here to help you.
Exile's a bitter business. I want to make some pro-
vision for you. I wish you no harm,
Although you hate me.

*(He waits for her to speak, but she is silent.
He continues)*

And in particular the children,
my sons; our sons.—You might have been decent
enough

To have thought of our sons.

MEDEA. *(Slowly)*

Did you consider them

When you betrayed this house?

JASON.

Certainly I considered
them. It was my hope that they would grow up
here,
And I, having married power, could protect and favor
them. And if perhaps, after many years, I become

Dynast of Corinth—for that is Creon's desire, to make me his heir—our sons

Would have been a king's sons— I hope to help them wherever they go: but now of course must look forward

To younger children.

(Steps down off steps and turns from her.)

MEDEA. *(Trembling)*

Ah—it's enough. Something might happen. It is—likely that—something might happen To the bride and the marriage.

JASON.

I'll guard against it. But evidently Creon is right to be rid of you.

(He crosses as if to go off Right. She stops him when he is up Right Center. He gives helmet to SLAVE; crosses down Right.)

MEDEA. *(Rises and crosses to Center)*

Have you finished now? I thought I would let you speak on and spread out your shamlessness

Before these women: the way a Tyrian trader unrolls his rare fabrics: "Do you like it, ladies?"

(LIGHT CUE #17)

It is the Dog's daughter's husband. It is a brave person: it has finally got up its courage—with a guard of spears—

To come and look me in the face.

(JASON turns away from her. MEDEA makes gestures as if to take him in her arms, then stops)

O Jason: how have you

pulled me down

To this hell of vile thoughts? I did not use to talk like a common woman. I loved you once:

And I am ashamed of it:

(JASON sits rock Right. She crosses two steps Left)

but there are some things
That ought to be remembered by you and me. That
blue day when we drove through the Hellespont
Into Greek sea, and the great-shouldered heroes were
singing at the oars, and those birds flying
Through the blown foam: that day was too fine I suppose

For Creon's daughter's man to remember

(*JASON rises as if to leave.*)

—but you might remember
Whether I cheated my father for you and tamed the
fire-breathing

Brazen-hoofed bulls; and whether I saved your life in
the field of the teeth; and you might remember

Whether I poisoned the great serpent and got you the
Golden Fleece; and fled with you, and killed my
brother

When he pursued us, making myself abominable
In my own home; and then in yours I got your enemy
Pelias hacked to death

By his own daughter's hands—whatever these fine
Corinthian friends of yours

May say against my rapid and tricky wisdom: you it
has served,

You it has served well:

(*JASON starts to speak.*)

here are five times, if I counted
right—and all's not counted—

That your adventure would have been dusty death

If I'd not saved you—but now you think that your
adventures are over; you are safe and high placed
in Corinth,

And will need me no more.

It is a bit of a dog, isn't it,
women? It is well qualified
To sleep with the dog's daughter.

(*JASON makes a gesture of wrath.*)

But for me, Jason, me
driven by the hairy snouts from the quadruped
marriage-bed,

What refuge does your prudent kindness advise? Shall
I fly home to Colchis—

To put my neck in the coil of a knotted rope, for the
crimes

I served you with? Or shall I go and kneel to the
daughter of Pelias? They would indeed be happy
To lay their hands on my head: holding the very knives
and the cleavers

That carved their sire. The world is a little closed to me,
eh?

By the things I have done for you

(LIGHT CUE #18)

(Crosses away from him to down Center.)

THE NURSE.

I'll go to the palace

And seek Ægeus. There is no other hope.

(She hurries out door Left.)

JASON. *(Slowly crossing to Center to Right of
MEDEA)*

I see, Medea,

You have been a very careful merchant of benefits.

You forget none, you keep a strict reckoning.

But—

Some little things that I on my side have done for you
Ought to be in the books too: as, for example, that I
carried you

Out of the dirt and superstition of Asiatic Colchis into
the rational

Sunlight of Greece, and the marble music of the Greek
temples: is that no benefit? And I have brought
you

To meet the first minds of our time, and to speak as
an equal with the great heroes and the rulers of
cities:

Is that no benefit? And now—this grievous thing that
you hate me for:

That I have married Creon's young daughter, little
Creusa:

(MEDEA sits and step.)

do you think I did it like a boy or a woman,

Out of blind passion? I did it to achieve power here;
and I'd have used that power to protect
You and our sons, but your jealous madness has
muddled everything. And finally:

*(NURSE appears behind house and exits up
Right. JASON crosses above MEDEA to top
step)*

As to those acts of service you so loudly boast—whom
do I thank for them? I thank divine Venus, the
goddess

Who makes girls fall in love. You did them because
you had to do them; Venus compelled you; I
Enjoyed her favor.

(Crosses down two steps to her Left)

A man dares things, you know; he
makes his adventure

In the cold eye of death; and if the gods care for him
They appoint an instrument to save him; if not, he dies.
You were that instrument.

MEDEA.

Here it is: the lowest.

The obscene dregs; the slime and the loathing; the
muddy bottom of a mouthed cup: when a scoundrel
begins

To invoke the gods

JASON.

Ha!

MEDEA.

You had better go, Jason. Vulgarly
Is a contagious disease; and in a moment what could I
do but spit at you like a peasant, or curse you
Like a drunken slave? You had better take yourself
back to

"Little Creusa."

JASON.

I came to help you and save you if
possible.

(Reaches down and touches her arm.)

MEDEA.

Your help

Is not wanted. Go. Go.

JASON. (*Crosses below her to Right Center, then stops*)

If I could see my boys—

MEDEA.

Go

quickly.

JASON.

Yours the regret then.

(*LIGHT CUE #19*)

(*Exits up Right. Watching him go, MEDEA strokes her wrist and hand to the tips of the spread fingers, as if she were scraping off slime.*)

MEDEA.

This is it. I did not surely know it: loathing is all. This flesh

He has touched and fouled. These hands that wrought for him, these knees

That ran his errands. This body that took his—what they call love, and made children of it. If I could peel off

The flesh, the children, the memory—

(*Again she scarifies one hand with the other. She looks at her hand*)

Poor misused

hand; poor defiled arm; your bones

Are not unshapely. If I could tear off the flesh and be bones; naked bones;

Salt-scoured bones on the shore

At home in Colchis.

FIRST WOMAN. (*Rises and crosses down Right*)

God keep me from fire and the hunger of the sword,
Save me from the hateful sea and the jagged lightning,
And the violence of love.

SECOND WOMAN. (*Joins FIRST WOMAN*)

A little love is a joy in the house,

A little fire is a jewel against frost and darkness.

(*During these two speeches THIRD WOMAN*

*goes up Right Center, then returns to
WOMEN down Right.)*

FIRST WOMAN.

A great love is a fire
That burns the beams of the roof.
The doorposts are flaming and the house falls.

(THIRD WOMAN kneels.)

A great love is a lion in the cattle-pen,
The herd goes mad, the heifers run bawling
And the claws are in their flanks.
Too much love is an armed robber in the treasury.
He has killed the guards and he walks in blood.

SECOND WOMAN.

And now I see the black end,
The end of great love, and God save me from it:
The unburied horror, the unbridled hatred,
The vultures tearing a corpse!
God keep me clean of those evil beaks.

THIRD WOMAN.

What is she doing, that woman,
Staring like stone, staring?

(MEDEA looks up.)

Oh, she has moved now.

MEDEA.

Annihilation. The word is pure music: annihilation. To
annihilate the past—

Is not possible: but its fruit in the present—
Can be nipped off. Am I to look in my sons' eyes
And see Jason's forever? How could I endure the end-
less defilement, those lives
That mix Jason and me? Better to be clean
Bones on the shore. Bones have no eyes at all, how
could they weep? White bones
On the Black Sea shore—

Oh, but that's far. Not yet.

Corinth must howl first.

FIRST WOMAN.

The holy fountains flow up from the earth,
The smoke of sacrifice flows up from the earth,

The eagle and the wild swan fly up from the earth,
Righteousness also
Has flown up from the earth to the feet of God.
It is not here, but up there; peace and pity are departed;

Hatred is here; hatred is heavy, it clings to the earth.
Love blows away, hatred remains.

SECOND WOMAN.

Women hate war, but men will wage it again.
Women may hate their husbands, and sons their fathers,

But women will never hate their own children.

FIRST WOMAN.

But as for me, I will do good to my husband,
I will love my sons and daughters, and adore the gods.

MEDEA.

If I should go into the house with a sharp knife
To the man and his bride—

(MEDEA rises. THIRD WOMAN rises.)

Or if I could fire the room they sleep in, and hear them
Wake in the white of the fire, and cry to each other,
and howl like dogs.

THREE WOMEN.

Oh!!!

(Cringe together.)

MEDEA.

And howl and die—

But I might fail; I might be cut down first;
The knife might turn in my hand, or the fire not burn,
and my enemies could laugh at me.

No: I have subtler means, and more deadly cruel; I
have my dark art

That fools call witchcraft. Not for nothing I have
worshipped the wild gray goddess that walks in
the dark, the wise one,

The terrible one, the sweet huntress, flower of night,
Hecate,

In my house at my hearth.

(She crosses up to pillar Right and sits.)

(LIGHT CUE #20)

THE NURSE. (*Hurries in toward MEDEA, to her Right*)

My lady: he was leaving Creon's
door: he is coming.

(MEDEA *pays no attention.*)

Ægeus is coming?

The power of Athens.

MEDEA. (*Prays*)

Ancient Goddess to whom I and my people
Make the sacrifice of black lambs and black female
hounds,

Holy one, haunter of cross-roads, queen of night,
Hecate,

Help me now: to remember in my mind the use of the
venomous fire, the magic song

'And the sharp gems. (*LIGHT CUE #21*)

(*She sits in deep thought. ÆGEUS comes in up
Right.*)

THE NURSE.

He is here, my lady,

Athens is here.

(MEDEA *pays no attention.* THREE WOMEN
*curtsy, then resume their original positions at
rock.* FIRST WOMAN *sits.*)

ÆGEUS. (*Crosses down Left and up steps to top
step, Left of MEDEA*)

Medea, rejoice! There is no fairer
greeting from friend to friend.

(*She ignores him. He speaks more loudly*)

Hail and rejoice! Medea.

MEDEA. (*Lifts her head and stares at him*)

"Rejoice?" It may be so. It

may be I shall—rejoice

Before the sun sets.

ÆGEUS.

What has happened to you?

Your

eyes are cavernous!

And your mouth twitches.

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