Medea
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For Christina and Julian. Your undying belief in me has kept me centered and focused in a chaotic world.

Cast of Characters
(In order of appearance:)

MEDEA, mid-30s, Jason's former wife, daughter of King Aeetes of savage Colchis

GREEK CHORUS, represents society's value and mores

MEDEA's SAVAGE CHORUS, represents Medea's thoughts / Medea's attendants

NURSE, Medea's constant companion and former nurse

MEDEA's CHORUS LEADER

GLAUCE, Jason's new wife, daughter of Creon

GREEK CHORUS LEADER

JASON, leader of the Argonauts; heir apparent to Corinth

AEGEUS, King of Athens, former Argonaut; friend to both Jason and Medea

SOLDIERS

CHILDREN

Creative substitutes for the children should be explored if the director does not wish to use children in the show.

Setting

Medea's home.

Author Notes

I wrote this piece specifically for my students as a venue for one-act play contest, and as we rehearsed it became a living breathing entity. It would be easy to misconstrue the piece and play Medea as a woman scorned—seeking revenge and nothing else. It is important to understand how all the different aspects of Medea's inner nature, her culture, and her experiences drive and motivate her to commit acts of atrocity. The goal of the director is to ensure that while the audience might not agree with her decision to murder her children or Jason's second wife, they can at least understand her decision and feel great compassion for her in the end. For while she "triumphs" in her plans, the irony is that she ends up just like Jason—"alone and forsaken." No one wins.

The savage chorus was assigned a different personality based on the inner psyche of Medea. For instance, one played the savage warrior wanting vengeance for the betrayal heaped upon her. Another enacted her cunning self—the one connected to the dark arts. Another savage chorus member reflected her sensual self and her connection to Jason, while the last one reflected the love she felt for her children. These women were costumed in rich colors and patterns that reflected the land of Colchis—her homeland. They carried staffs, danced, sang, chanted, and in essence were the living, breathing emotions uniting in Medea. They are a powerful vehicle for actresses.

All the songs and music used in the piece were original and specifically created. Everything was sung in Greek.

The Greek chorus, as expected, represented the accepted role of women. I assigned each chorus member a different stage of a woman's life. The principal Greek chorus member was assigned the role of a pregnant woman. She is the soul of motherhood. She's beautiful, fully aware of what men are and do to women. She has learned to accept what she cannot change and has made for herself a life she can deal with. Our "pregnant" chorus member was given a 6 month belly. In the confrontation with Medea (where she threatens to tell of her plan), Medea moves behind her, grabs her belly and gently squeezes it to reinforce the idea of the precariousness of motherhood. Our second chorus member was an old woman who had experienced all life had to offer. She is a widow. The youngest

member of the chorus is the "new bride". The idea of "happily ever after" is alive and well in her psyche. The other two women are gently exposing her to the truth about life and hope to help her avoid the mistakes they and Medea have made in their own relationships.

We used life-sized dolls for the young children. They were wrapped in a deep scarlet silk material when they were finally brought out. The dolls had dark hair (which could be seen by the audience) which swung when the savage chorus carried them in and laid them down.

This piece also offers a voice to Jason's new wife. In the traditional Medea, she never appears and her father takes care of all her problems. In this piece, we see a highly intelligent woman who knows what she wants out of life and how to get it. We see her ruthlessness in her pursuit of her own needs.

Jason and Medea's relationship should be explored. This is not a simple case of love dying. In fact, Medea still loves Jason while hating him. We need to see how conflicted she is. Jason, on the other hand, loves her as much as he can love anyone. He is a man who loves himself and his ambition above all else. Directors should explore and look for nuances to this couple as they work with their scenes.

Above all, directors should pursue the real tragedy of this piece—no one walks away unscathed when love is shattered.

Acknowledgments

UIL Awards, District 31-3A Advancing Play (March 31, 2005)

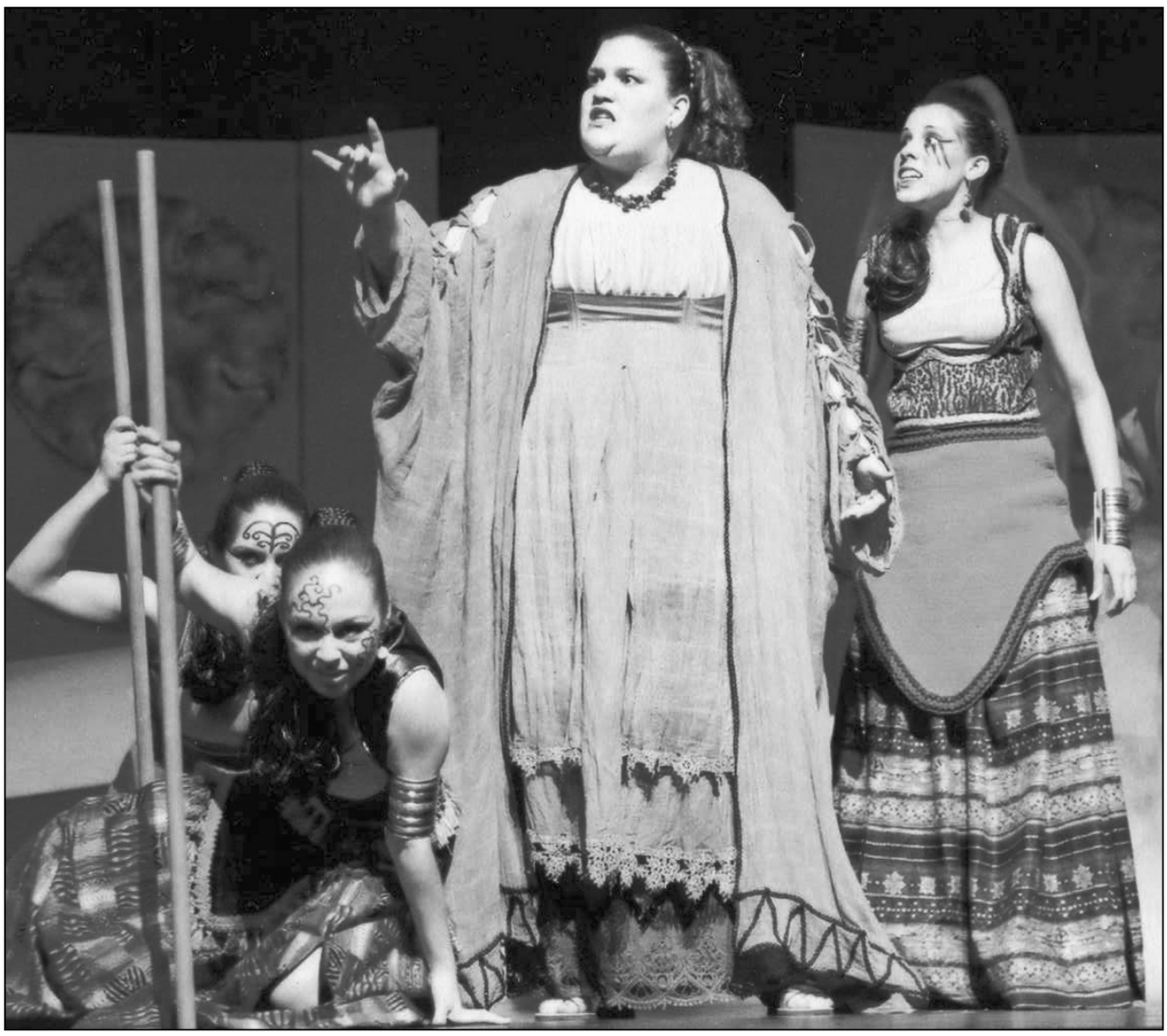
NURSE..... Cynthia Gutierrez (Best Actress)
MEDEA.....Christina I. Garcia (All-Star Cast)
MEDEA'S
SAVAGE CHORUS.....Linda Jauregui,
Amanda Martin, Roxy Tobias,
Alma Garza (All-Star Cast)
JASON .....Alejandro Regalado (Honorable Mention)

UIL Awards, Area 3 Advancing Play (April 8, 2005)

MEDEA.....Christina I. Garcia (Best Actress)
MEDEA'S
SAVAGE CHORUS.....Linda Jauregui,
Amanda Martin, Roxy Tobias,
Alma Garza (All-Star Cast)
GREEK
CHORUS LEADER .....Celina Martinez (All-Star Cast)
NURSE..... Cynthia Gutierrez (All-Star Cast)
AEGEUS ..... Joe Almaraz (Honorable Mention)
JASON ..... Alec Regalado (Honorable Mention)

UIL Awards, Region 4, Area 3 State Alternate Play (April 21, 2005)

MEDEA'S
SAVAGE CHORUS.....Linda Jauregui,
Amanda Martin, Roxy Tobias,
Alma Garza (All-Star Cast)
MEDEA.....Christina I. Garcia (Honorable Mention)
NURSE.....Cynthia Gutierrez (Honorable Mention)



Medea, Zapata High School, Zapata, Texas (2005).

MEDEA
adapted by Nelly E. Cuellar-Garcia

FROM THE PLAY BY EURIPIDES

Scene 1

(The curtain slowly opens to reveal Medea's home bathed in blue light and covered in low-lying mist. Female guttural song [sung in her home language] is heard. Stage center, we see MEDEA *on her haunches looking down, her* SAVAGE CHORUS *surrounds her in various poses of deep introspection. Slowly, she rises.)*

MEDEA. Ghosts…spirits of a world that once was fill my mind with visions of the past. Echoes…echoes flit though my memory of a brother's laughing face and a father's loving embrace. Visions of home fill me… Night brings no relief for as I look up at the stars I hear the song of my people…

(The NURSE *begins to sing as she spreads healing incense in the air. The* SAVAGE CHORUS *adds their voice to her wordless tune…)*

And remember what it meant once to worship Gods who protected us from evil.

(The WOMEN *flow and move to the beats of their own staff movement and choral chants.* MEDEA *makes her way into the tableau. The singing/chanting [foreign language] reaches a crescendo. The* SAVAGE CHORUS *beats their staffs against the floor and creates a prison for* MEDEA. *Suddenly all freeze and silence reigns.* MEDEA's *ragged breathing is heard. She is majestic in this chaos. She carries herself with the assurance of a woman who has always commanded.)*

MEDEA. All is lost. I am left alone with my thoughts and these Greek women who come to peer at me with pity. How I wish the long ship Argo had never come to our shores. For then I would have never met Jason, nor loved him. You see he came to Colchis seeking the Golden Fleece. And I, using my knowledge of the dark arts, assisted him. For love of him, I betrayed my father, murdered my brother, and became an outcast.

MEDEA'S CHORUS. At first all went well. Jason loved her and was proud of her beauty. Happy is the house where the man and woman love and are faithful.

MEDEA'S CHORUS LEADER. Now all is changed. He calls the old bond a barbarian marriage. He has cast her off, like a common whore, and married the daughter of Creon—the ruler of this land.

MEDEA'S CHORUS. *(Encircling* MEDEA*:)* Jason is free. Mocking laughter flits across his face.

MEDEA'S CHORUS LEADER. While you are left to bear the burden of our pain.

MEDEA. To weep for a man who would throw me away for naught would dishonor me and betray all that has been my life. From now till the end of time, no regrets…

(She hands the Golden Fleece to her CHORUS *and moves away.)*

ALL WOMEN. *(Follow her with their gaze:)* Jason would have been wiser to tempt a lioness. *(Face forward:)* He is not wise I think.

(One beat of the staff on floor.)

*(*MEDEA'S CHORUS *retreats with* MEDEA *to Olive tree.)*

Scene 2

NURSE. Oh it's a bad thing to be born wealthy and of noble blood. For when misfortune strikes, it becomes unendurable and drives you mad. I say poor people are happier. They are used to misfortune and know to lie low in its wake so that they may survive.

(Enter GREEK CHORUS. GREEK CHORUS LEADER *is visibly pregnant. She represents fertility, accompanied by an old woman [*2ND CHORUS MEMBER*], and a young woman barely wed [*3RD CHORUS MEMBER*].)*

GREEK CHORUS LEADER. Old servant of Medea, what are you doing out here all alone? Shouldn't you be inside with your mistress?

NURSE. I needed a moment of solace out in the clean crisp air away from the grief.

GREEK CHORUS LEADER. Then Medea's grief hasn't diminished?

NURSE. No. Her mood has blackened even more.

GREEK CHORUS LEADER. You must prevail upon Medea to stop crying. She has worse news to endure.

NURSE. What do you mean?

GREEK CHORUS LEADER. I have heard rumors that Creon intends to harm Medea.

NURSE. How?

GREEK CHORUS LEADER. I do not know. A group of old men were talking about it, but when they saw that I listened, they became silent.

NURSE. Then we must try and keep our wits about us and protect her until she is able to come to her senses and help herself.

(We hear horns.)

GREEK CHORUS. Jason's new wife approaches.

MEDEA / MEDEA'S CHORUS. She dares to come here?

NURSE. This is her domain. She can do as she pleases. Be wary, Medea.

*(*GLAUCE *appears with her* SOLDIER ESCORT.*)*

MEDEA'S CHORUS LEADER. She is as you were…

MEDEA. Princess…what an honor

SAVAGE CHORUS LEADER. Notice her taught skin…

MEDEA. How gracious of you to come to my humble home…

SAVAGE CHORUS LEADER. Her shining hair…her pouting lips…

MEDEA. May I offer you some refreshment?

GLAUCE. Swallow your pride, Medea. I will tell you frankly why I am here. Reports have reached me that you have uttered threats of vengeance against Jason and myself, and since you are famous for your powerful magic and your knowledge of the dark arts, I have decided to take fate in my own hands and keep my family safe from your hatred.

NURSE. This is her domain. She can do as she pleases. Be wary, Medea.

MEDEA'S CHORUS LEADER. She is as you were Medea—fifteen years ago. Notice her taut skin…her shining hair…her pouting lips. It is a bitter draught you drink.

MEDEA. How touching. But you are mistaken. The rumors are lies. In fact, I wish you well. I hope Jason is as kind to you as he was to me.

GLAUCE. That is your wish? Do you curse me?

MEDEA. You dare to stand there and accuse me of sorcery when it is you who has stolen my husband?

GLAUCE. There was no stealing. He came willingly.

MEDEA / MEDEA'S CHORUS. All men sniff after beasts in heat.

GLAUCE. *(Controlling herself:)* I am a civilized woman of Corinth; therefore, I will not stand here and argue with a savage barbarian from a foreign land. I accept, Medea that you have some cause for your grief, and in your moment of weakness I pity you.

> *(*MEDEA's *face contorts, but she catches herself before* GLAUCE *sees her.)*

That is why I am here to tell you personally that I have asked my father to banish you.

MEDEA. Banish? You know what exile means to a woman of my birth and rank. We would be held in lower esteem than the dogs in the street. My children are Jason's who is now bound to you by marriage. Why must we be banished?

GLAUCE. You are dangerous to me and mine. Jason must forget his past in order to proceed with his future. Accept what cannot be changed, Medea, for all our sakes. Farewell.

MEDEA. Princess? In the middle of the night, when Jason awakes with terrors, rub his back and kiss the tender spot on his neck. Always remember…

MEDEA / SAVAGE CHORUS. I had him first.

GLAUCE. You have what is left of the day to pack, Medea. Don't waste your time with taunts.

(Exit.)

Scene 3

*(*MEDEA'S CHORUS *becomes agitated and chaotic thought. Their staffs begin to twirl is frenzied patterns as they surround* MEDEA.*)*

MEDEA. I am alone… Forsaken… Am I to abide by the dictates of others, or do I defend my honor?

MEDEA'S CHORUS. We must. No one else will do so in our stead.

MEDEA / MEDEA'S CHORUS. Think before we run out of time.

MEDEA. Time is relative. It would be good to stand here for a thousand years and think of nothing but the death of three people.

MEDEA. I have in mind so many paths that I don't know which one to choose from.

(Staff beat.)

MEDEA'S CHORUS. Should you set fire to the house and burn the burial chamber?

(One beat from staffs.)

MEDEA. Or maybe creep up on their bed and drive a sharp knife through their guts?

(Beat. Beat.)

(Loud bang from MEDEA'S CHORUS' *staffs, then stillness.)*

MEDEA / MEDEA'S CHORUS. I might fail. I might be caught and cut down first.

Scene 4

GREEK CHORUS / GREEK CHORUS LEADER. Stop, Medea, think of your children.

MEDEA. Is it possible to annihilate the past without nipping its fruit in the present? Am I to look into my children's eyes forever and see Jason laughing back at me?

GREEK CHORUS LEADER. Medea, your thoughts are unnatural. It is the thoughts of *men* that are deceitful. Women must learn to bear the burden and move on, or else their bitterness will destroy them.

MEDEA. I do not know how much misery a Greek woman will endure, but the people of my race are more impetuous.

GREEK CHORUS. Learn the Greek way, Medea. Reason over passion is always best.

MEDEA. We will see.

(Enters home.)

Scene 5

(Horns are heard. JASON *and his* HONOR GUARD *enter.)*

JASON. Where is Medea?

NURSE. *(Pointing towards house:)* There. Mourning for what you have done.

JASON. Not I. It is what she has done. It is not by my will—but rather through hers *(*MEDEA *enters unnoticed by* JASON.*)* that she and my sons are to be exiled.

MEDEA. Do I hear a dog?

JASON. So, Medea, you could not keep from making threats against the head of Corinth. You had to tell every one of your anger

and my so-called injustices. You could have lived here happily—secure and honored—but instead you had to go mad with anger and talk yourself into exile. You might have been decent enough to think of the children.

MEDEA. Did you consider them when you chose to betray this house?

JASON. Certainly I considered them. This grievous thing you hate me for; do you think I did it out of boyish fantasies of love or passion? *(*MEDEA *begins to respond.)* No. Keep quiet, Medea. You will listen. It was not, as you resentfully assume, that I found your attractions wearisome, nor do I especially want to raise another family, but by marrying Creon's daughter, I become his dynast and thus ensure that we should live well and not be poor.

MEDEA. You're shameless. If you were honest, you ought to have first won me over, not got married behind my back. Jason, where am I to go? To my father's side? Or perhaps to Pelias' daughters? What a fine welcome they would prepare for me who murdered their father! It would have been better if I'd let you die. I poured my magic out for you Jason, you drank it like wine, and then betrayed me.

JASON. A man dares many things in his adventures. If the gods care for him, they appoint an instrument to help him. You were that instrument…let's stop this, Medea. Show some sense, woman! Control your passions and come to your reason. If I would have mentioned it, would you have helped me? No. Your sex-jealousy would not have allowed me to continue. How I long for the days when you, thinking rationally and without bed-jealousy, would approve.

MEDEA. You'd better go, Jason.

JASON. I came to help and save you if possible. I can provide to meet the needs of you and the children. Tell me. I will gladly give you whatever you desire.

MEDEA. Your help is not wanted. Go home to your…wife.

JASON. Medea, listen to me. To refuse such help is madness. You have everything to gain if you give up this rage. Medea? What is it

to be? I have a guest in my house and must return to the state's business.

MEDEA. Then leave, Jason.

JASON. Yours the regret then.

MEDEA / MEDEA'S CHORUS. *(Watching him leave,* MEDEA'S CHORUS *reaching out for him in different ways:)* If I could peel off his memory as easily as he has mine.

MEDEA. I hate who I've become. I no longer remember who I am.

(Moves off by herself.)

NURSE. *(To* GREEK CHORUS*:)* Who is Jason's guest?

GREEK CHORUS LEADER. Aegeus. King of Athens.

NURSE. My lady knows him. Perhaps he can help us.

GREEK CHORUS LEADER. King Aegeus leaves for his home today. If he is to help, you must catch him before he sails. Go, old woman. Life is always better than death.

*(*NURSE *hobbles out as quickly as she can.)*

Scene 6

GREEK CHORUS. Our hearts beat with compassion for our friend. But why can she not accept what is?

GREEK CHORUS LEADER. Medea was raised as a savage and allows her passion to sway her. She doesn't understand that a woman's fate was molded by Zeus himself. Zeus created us to serve, so that from birth we are trained with only one eye: the pleasing of a husband. As such, our first duty is that of lover. *(Taking* YOUNG CHORUS MEMBER's *face with the palms of her hands:)* We give men our flesh, and they take our bodies and make children of it. Then, we become mothers, and our duty *(Holding her belly lightly and lovingly:)* is to bear and protect the children that will shape our future. Lastly, when we have reached our final years, *(Putting her arm around the* OLD WOMAN*:)* we become providers of comfort for husbands who seek peace.

GREEK CHORUS. We must help Medea understand this.

GREEK CHORUS LEADER. That may not be possible. Medea is caught in an ancient world that no loner exits. Set in her ways. It's not easy to make an enemy of her and come off best.

Scene 7

NURSE. My lady! Medea, Lord Aegeus is here as Creon's guest. Athens is an old friend of yours. I have asked him to come see you. Tell him truthfully of our plight. I am sure he will grant us refuge.

MEDEA. I have things to do. Be quiet.

NURSE. Listen to me. You have been banished from here. We must find shelter.

MEDEA. I am not interested at the moment. Leave me in peace.

NURSE. No. I held you in my arms when you were a newborn babe. I gave you milk from these breasts that are now dead as leaves. How can I not try and save you? Medea, life is better than death. Help me save us.

MEDEA. I am so weary.

(She moves away.)

NURSE. Time has a way of settling all our troubles. Find peace, Medea. Find peace.

*(*NURSE *softly sings the song she sang at the beginning, but now it has the quality of a lullaby. A lone tear falls from* MEDEA's *face for a land that is lost.)*

GREEK CHORUS. Sunlight bounces off the brass of spearheads. Aegeus approaches.

*(*MEDEA *wipes her face and puts on a brave almost artificial look.)*

AEGEUS. Medea, I rejoice at seeing you. I hope you do not mind that I have shown up unannounced, but your nurse assured me of a warm welcome.

MEDEA. Aegeus, my friend, many a year has passed since we last met.

AEGEUS. How times change us. You look wan and pale. What ails thee?

MEDEA. Nothing is wrong. I am quite well. Fools bother me, that is all. Where are you traveling?

AEGEUS. I come from Delphi. I went to consult the oracle about the begetting of sons.

(Picks up one of the boys' toy horses.)

MEDEA. I had not realized that you had no heirs. Perhaps it is better, Aegeus. *(Taking the horse from his hand:)* Sometimes when misfortune strikes, Aegeus; it is bitter to have children around us.

AEGEUS. But when death comes, Medea, it is utter despair for a man to know that his bloodline will not continue. One's children are our gift to immortality.

MEDEA. Do you feel it so? Then, if you had an… *(Searching for a term:)* enemy…you wished to destroy, you'd…kill…the children…first?

AEGEUS. I have no enemy I hate enough to inflict such vengeance on. Outliving all your children would be horrific torture.

NURSE. My lady, please…

MEDEA. Stop… *(Giving her the horse:)* I would not hurt my children. Their father hurts them.

AEGEUS. Jason? What do you mean? Medea, look at me. What has Jason done?

MEDEA. He has allowed Creon to banish me and the children.

AEGEUS. That cannot be. I was lead to understand that your separation was amicable and that all was well between you. What will you do?

NURSE. King Aegeus, my lady is bewildered with grief; if not she would ask refuge of you.

MEDEA. She's right. Aegeus, will you offer me shelter in Athens? I would repay your kindness tenfold. *(Lightly caresses him:)* I know of certain remedies that would help you overcome your sterility.

AEGEUS. *(Stilling her hand:)* You tempt a man to madness, Medea. You offer me all my hopes, *(Slightly suspicious:)* but at what true price?

MEDEA. *(Innocently:)* Protection from my enemies is all I ask of you in return.

AEGEUS. Medea, if you can help me beget a son, I will shelter you in Athens against all. However, you must reach my lands on your own. I want no quarrel with Corinth.

> *(*MEDEA *nods and moves away in thought. The* NURSE *steps in and covers up her lack of etiquette.)*

NURSE. If Medea were not preoccupied, she would gladly thank you for your generosity. We will see you soon, Lord Aegeus. May your journey home be a safe one.

AEGEUS. Farewell.

Scene 8

GREEK CHORUS. We hear you travel to Athens, Medea. May your voyage be fair to this new land.

GREEK CHORUS LEADER. You see, Medea? Life is beautiful and holds infinite possibilities. How can one think of death at this moment? To be alive and to experience the sun's warmth on our skin is beautiful.

MEDEA. As you say, what a marvelous privilege it is to be merely alive. How foolish it is to spend the one day of life that remains to me in this city full of tears and hatred. Rather, I should reconcile with my enemies. The time has come when reason must overcome passion.

GREEK CHORUS LEADER. Yes. You have found the path to peace. Forgiveness is always best. But how will you convince Creon and Jason that you have had a change of heart?

MEDEA. *(Thinking:)* I can appease them with gold. They say that gold will buy you anything from friendship to love. So I shall buy theirs. Go to Jason, all of you. Tell him I wish to make…peace…and that I wish to send his…wife some gifts as a measure of my contrition. *(*GREEK CHORUS *starts to exit.)* Tell him also that he may see his children. Go quickly.

NURSE. Medea, what are you planning? I fear this turn of events.

MEDEA. Dear nurse, all is well. You will see. Go quickly. Accompany the women to Jason.

*(*NURSE *exits.)*

(Ancient drums begin. MEDEA *goes to 4' pylon. She takes out her bowl, her knife, her oils, and her herbs. She mixes these as* SAVAGE CHORUS *speaks.)*

MEDEA'S CHORUS. Hatred is here and is heavy to bear; for when love blows away…only hatred remains.

MEDEA'S CHORUS LEADER. Sometimes it is a bitter thing to be a woman. First, an excess of wealth is required for us to buy our husbands. Then they take our bodies and become masters of that.

MEDEA'S CHORUS. The Great question follows. Will the man we get be bad or good?

MEDEA'S CHORUS #2. If the man is good, our life is enviable; but if he's bad, death is preferable.

MEDEA'S CHORUS. How do we avenge our betrayal? We cannot command armies.

MEDEA'S CHORUS LEADER. A woman is weak for warfare; therefore; she must use cunning. A plan…a scheme…

(Pulling snake from the basket that lays at the foot of the pylon and handing it to MEDEA *who wraps it around her wrist and forearm.)*

MEDEA'S CHORUS. Remember who you once were.

MEDEA. I still am who I was…

MEDEA / MEDEA'S CHORUS. I am Medea.

MEDEA. The bearer of magic

MEDEA'S CHORUS LEADER. Find a means to pay my husband back for what he has done to me.

MEDEA. The best way is the direct way. The one I know best. The dark arts will deliver my enemy. *(Cuts her palm and drips it blood into the bowl; takes snakes body and cradles it from one hand to the other.)* That and poison.

(Beat.)

(Lights fade. Lights go up on stage left.)

Scene 9

(Two men are practicing sword play. JASON *is intense, aggressive, and troubled. It is evident that he is using physical exercise to dispel his mood.)*

AEGEUS. Easy my friend. If I didn't know better, I'd swear you were out for blood.

(They trade final blows and separate.)

JASON. My apologies, old friend. Personal matters should be left out of the practice field. My mind is elsewhere.

*(*JASON *pours water into a bowl and washed face and chest.* AEGEUS *sits easily and waits his turn.)*

AEGEUS. I went to see Medea.

JASON. Did she publicly denounce my faults to you?

AEGEUS. She didn't have to. We've been friends a long time.

JASON. Why can she not see the advantages of my plan? *(Toweling off and exchanging places with* AEGEUS. JASON *continues to dress:)* Medea will not allow herself to see past her jealousy. Women! They judge all by their sex-life. If that goes wrong, the best and noblest of women turn to gall. If only children could be got some other way without the female sex! *(Straps on his sword:)* If women didn't exist, human life would be rid of all its miseries.

AEGEUS. Jason, hear me. *(Putting towel down and moving toward his clothes:)* You and Medea have been my friends and companions

THIS PLAY IS NOT OVER!



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