MEDEA

Euripides’ tragedy adapted for radio

By Graham Ley
CAST

NURSE (Gorgo) - Twenty-five
TUTOR (Theron) - Ageing
CHORUS 1 - Late middle-age
CHORUS 2 - Early middle-age
CHORUS 3 - Young
MEDEA - Twenty-five, black
CREON - Late middle-age, unpleasant
JASON - About thirty; not very bright
AEGEUS - Firmly middle-aged; the slightest trace of a North American accent

WOMAN, MAN (the Messenger), the TWO BOYS, the SMITH.

WOMEN’S VOICES

Scene - Corinth, in ancient Greece
(A sound of rapid flowing water, splashes, and the thump of wet clothes, pummelled on the rocks. Laughter, women's voices, the occasional shout of a child. The washhouse by the stream, in the early morning.)

NURSE (she is working) Argus built the ship. Helped by Athene. The goddess Athene. They called it The Argo. And a fine-looking ship it was. A sea-going vessel. Still... I wish it had never gone.

WOMAN (likewise) Never gone where?

NURSE To Colchis. Or was it Phasis? You know. Up behind the Bosporus.

(A donkey bursts into song, and stops as abruptly.)

WOMAN Never heard of it. What's he like then?

NURSE Who, Jason? Oh, he's like they all are.

WOMAN And Medea, his wife?

NURSE Could be worse.

WOMAN I heard she wasn't well.

NURSE Could be.

WOMAN In fact... he's left her, hasn't he?

NURSE If you say so.
WOMAN Come off it Gorgo. You ought to know. Has he or has he not...

NURSE Yes.

WOMAN Yes what?

NURSE Yes, he's left her.

WOMAN (satisfied) Thought so. Kids, aren't there? Two of them? Lovely boys. Curly hair, dark... ish, that sort of thing.

NURSE That's right. Curly hair.

WOMAN Thought so. Seen them about. (Abruptly) So who's the other woman?

NURSE (heated) If you knew! If you only knew! She sits at home, day after day, face set firm, and flames behind the eyes. She won't touch her food. Just stares into space. There's nothing I can do. (She drops her voice) Creon's daughter, that's the other woman.

WOMAN Sorry I spoke. (Re-assuring) She'll be all right. Give her time. She'll get over it.

NURSE (again) She won't! You don't know her. It's been nine years! She won't forget what Jason's done. She'll never forget him. She scares me.

(Shouts of children, and splashes. The stream. Fade out.)

(Street. Rattle of carts. Horses, people, men and women, going everywhere, doing what they will.)
(shouting) Theron! TUTOR Gorgo!

NURSE (warmly) My boys! BOYS We've been...


NURSE (affectionately) Don't argue with the learned man.

TUTOR (Peace.) So what's new?

NURSE Not a lot. You?

TUTOR Nothing much. Washing, the usual round. Some chat. Some I could have done without. (Amused) They didn't listen, did they?

NURSE They never do. Grammar tomorrow, and they can't even spell. (A pause) How is she, Gorgo?

TUTOR Not good. Bad. (She considers) No. Very bad.

NURSE There's worse to come.

(Silence. A cart goes by.)

TUTOR Well?

NURSE She's got to go, Gorgo. The boys too. He's made up his mind. Creon. He won't have her here. Not any longer, not for the wedding. There's too much at stake.

NURSE So who's going to tell her? And where's she going to go?

TUTOR Creon's going to tell her.

NURSE Theron.

TUTOR What?

NURSE The boys.
TUTOR  Never mind the boys. What about us? What are we going to do?

NURSE  Those boys, Theron. She mustn't get near them. She's had too much. And now this on top of everything. We must keep them away from her. Come on. They must be nearly home. (Moving off.) Run, can't you?

TUTOR  (miserable) Oh my God.

(Another street. In the distance, knocking at a door, followed by a greeting. Faintly, a woman sings. Otherwise quiet.)

NURSE  (arriving out of breath) Now... ah, there you are. Tesia, come here. There's a good lad. No, come here. That's right. Now where's your brother. Let's look for him. Quietly, now. What about...? (She disappears, and emerges.) There we are. Now all we have to do... and here he comes.

TUTOR  (breathless) You've got them, then.

NURSE  I have. And you told me you used to be an athlete.

TUTOR  (still) That was years ago.

NURSE  So we see. Go on. Take them away. Anywhere you like. But make it a long way. Quickly now. And don't fuss. (They shuffle off.)

NURSE  (to herself) Not far enough.

MEDEA  (inside) Gorgo!

NURSE  Here we go.
MEDEA (emerging, and throwing herself on the NURSE. From the depths) Gorgo!

NURSE (brightly) There you are, sweetheart! Now don't you mind a thing. Inside now, there's a good girl. That's right, in you go. (Returning; a deep breath) How long, Gorgo? Just how long? She'll turn, I know she will. She's taken too much. But where will she turn? I wish I was out of this. If it was anger... but it's not. What is it, then? (Frustration) You don't know, do you? You just don't know. The wound goes bad, and you just sit there and watch it swell, you hopeless, silly woman, you...

MEDEA (inside) Gorgo, my boys! My boys, Gorgo! Where are my boys?

NURSE Here we go again.

MEDEA I'll curse them, I will. The father and his boys. Gorgo! Where are you, Gorgo? Can't you hear me? (Furious) Gorgo!! (Sobbing) Help me, Gorgo, help me, helpless, hopeless pain...

NURSE (quietly) Oh, lord. (With irony, to herself) So tell me, mother, what would you have done? I thought I knew all the answers. Gave birth, suckled kids, had a man... Even suckled hers. (She laughs.) Black sheep, the darlings. But what does she want with them? Had the man first, of course. (Chuckles.) Getting confused. (The sobbing has stopped) I thought I'd get old like this. Happy home, if not
mine, nothing out of the ordinary. There was her, yes, that was true. But what moved her was always her concern. She wouldn't be ruled. That much was certain. (A dog barks behind her.) You'd hardly believe it. I used to like it here. Nothing out of the ordinary. (The dog barks again; a chain rattles) Leave them alone, Medea. If only for me. They never did you any harm. Not like him, Jason, you... Jason, there's a word for you.

(The CHORUS speak around her, in quick succession.)

CHORUS 1   And what might that be?
CHORUS 2   We heard voices.
CHORUS 3   More like a cry.
CHORUS 1   Or crying, should we say?
CHORUS 2   Shouts, you know. (The dog again.)
CHORUS 1   Rather out of the ordinary...

NURSE   (To the CHORUS.) The dog, not you. Bite you, did he? Any gaping wounds?

CHORUS 1   (not amused) We're neighbours, Gorgo.

CHORUS 2   We heard a shout.

NURSE   Did you now? Just one? Or was it two?

CHORUS 1   (sternly) What's the matter, Gorgo? What's going on?

NURSE   Nothing's going on. It's all over already. That's just the problem.
CHORUS 3    And Medea?

CHORUS 1    Yes, Medea. (Pointedly) Your mistress.

CHORUS 2    (tentatively) Is she at home?

NURSE    Home? (She bursts into laughter) Home? You call this home? (Abruptly calm) No more home.

CHORUS 1    Come along, Gorgo. This is hardly the way...

NURSE    Jason has gone. Off to another bed. And she's left here, going out of her mind, with only me to talk to, when she isn't talking to herself.

CHORUS 1    Now there's no need...

MEDEA    (inside, wretched) Why can't I die? Anything, a flash 'of lightning, a stroke... (She sobs) There's nothing left. (A chair hits the wall. Screaming) Nothing! (Sobbing) Nothing... to live... for... Only death.

CHORUS 3    I see.

NURSE    Follow me. The kitchen. And mind that dog.

(Who growls, considerately. Rustles, and footsteps. Doors creak. Cicadas briefly, and then a latch lifts. The crackle of a fire.)

NURSE    (brusquely) Get those girls off those seats. (Chairs pushed back) Myrrhine, the fire. And then out. Both of you.

GIRLS    Yes, Gorgo. (The ring of iron. The fire crackles and blazes.)
NURSE    Kalisto, some figs and some wine. A cup of wine, ladies?

CHORUS 2  Well...

CHORUS 1   (firmly) We mustn't be long.

NURSE    But ladies, the shock. Consider your health. Your well being.

CHORUS 1  (relenting, graciously) If you insist...

NURSE    Here we are. (She pours,) Here's to tomorrow. Zeus knows best... (she drinks) and Hera knows Zeus. The soup. (A spoon in the pot.) Lentils, barley, greens... (The spoon clangs loudly. Annoyed) The greens, Kalistol Where is that girl? (To the CHORUS) Make yourselves comfortable. I'll be back.

(Disappearing) Kalisto!

(Silence. The fire.)

CHORUS 1   Well, what a display!

CHORUS 2   (mouth full) Who? Gorgo?

CHORUS 1   (irritated) No! Medea! She ought to know better. He's only a man.

CHORUS 2   (suppressing a giggle) Yes, only a man.

CHORUS 3   And what would you have him be?

(Fade out.)
(Inside. Almost total silence,)

**MEDEA**

(low, in the background) Themis, lady Artemis, you see what I suffer. Big oaths broken down, oaths to bind him broken down, biggest I knew, biggest and best. Lady Artemis, he shall be broken, him and his bride, broken down together, snapped. Because he hurt me. My father speaks to me. He tells me this is so. He and my brother. My dead, unburied brother, my own home.

**NURSE**

(close up, and quietly) Oh, lord. Artemis and oaths. (Outside a baby cries) It won't end silently. I know it. Not this time.

**CHORUS 2**

(a whisper) Can we see her?

**NURSE**

Shh! (The baby cries)

**CHORUS 1**

(too loud, as usual) Someone ought to talk to her. (A whisper) Neighbours ought to rally round. (The baby again.)

**CHORUS 2**

That's my baby.

**CHORUS 3**

We'll be outside.

**CHORUS 1**

Bring her out, Gorgo. (A whisper) She must see someone. It'll do her good.

**NURSE**

Yes, yes. I'll do my best. Now if you don't mind...

**CHORUS 1**

We're on our way...

(A rustle, and silence. The baby cries and stops. Silence.)
NURSE (to herself) I'm frightened. That's what it is. Just plain frightened. She's like a lioness with cubs. A word's enough to set her off. (A sudden change of tack.) I don't understand it. These men. They've been at it for years. Singing songs, composing. All that, all that music, and not one thing that takes the sting out of sorrow. What's the use, I ask you? What's it all for? I mean sorrow, real sadness, is the worst thing there is. What use is a song when you're happy? They ought to cure sadness first. Then they'd have something to sing about. (Pause) Time to move, Gorgo. Let's see how she's doing.

(Outside. A cart goes by. Women's voices, babies, a lot of noise.)

CHORUS 1 (with authority) She's coming out. She won't be long.

CHORUS 2 (to a companion) She was shouting and screaming...

CHORUS 1 She came across the sea, you know. She's not a local girl.

CHORUS 2 It must be very difficult...

CHORUS 1 ...being foreign...

CHORUS 2 ...here.

CHORUS 1 The Bosporus, I believe.

CHORUS J (firmly, but quietly) Phasis... I think.

MEDEA (emerging) Ladies, you mock me! (Cries of "No!") You mention me, then. (Dim protests.) And why would this
be? (Dead silence~ You are cruel. If I am to myself, 
by myself largely, this is as woman. We women are 
apart. Alone and apart. (Murmurs.) And what do you 
know? Of me, in particular? Nothing. Not a thing. 
And so you come to see me. Kindly. And I come to 
you. (A sob) To bear my heart to you. (Murmurs, 
"Poor thing", etc... Loudly) My man has left me, 
ladies. Such sorrow inwardly. Sympathy is called 
for. And then home. All of us. We don't want to 
cause a scene. That wouldn't be nice, would it? Not 
nice at all. But pity me, first. Not belonging, no 
home. Not much to turn to. No father present, 
brother gone. (Significantly) Quite, quite gone. (A 
change of tone.) These men. They have us, don't 
they? From top to toe, and in between. And we? What 
do we get? Not a lot. A good man, perhaps. But, 
perhaps, not good. Could be bad. And then, ladies? 
Then what? (Murmurs~ You know. Misery. (Tuts, some 
reservations.) He goes out, and we sit silently, 
sombre and sad. Not a very good deal. They make the 
rules. One man, and one alone. We give birth. They 
fight, sometimes run away. We give birth. They kill. 
We give birth. They say they fight for us. We say: 
"You are lucky. We give birth. Some hard labour. Not 
impressed by battles. Think of another one."
(Murmurs. Brightly) But ladies, I wander. I worry 
you. Too much. So look at me, smiling. Medea
manages. Not to worry then. Off to home, happily.

Such a lot to do. And such kindness, ladies. Some
kind sympathy. Gorgo! Goodbye, ladies. Such a lot to
do. (Sweetly) Excuse us if the door shuts. Goodbye
now.

(The door bangs heavily, and a bar shoots home.
Silence.)

CHORUS 1   Well... (a buzz of conversation, sympathy and
'tuts') she hasn't changed.

CHORUS 3   We don't very much, do we?

CHORUS 1   Some of us do. (Drily) As we get older. (Horses and
harness, coming closer.) Hello, here's excitement.
Creon, I think. (Clipped commands, excited murmurs.)
Yes, Creon himself.

CHORUS 2   (impressed) Ooh, look, it's Creon! CREON Ladies.

CHORUS 1   (boldly) I hope so.

CREON   You'll forgive me, of course. (He bangs the door
sharply, with the end of his cane. The bolt slides,
the latch lifts)

(Inside. The dog growls)

CREON   Where is she, Gorgo?

NURSE   First right.

CREON   Thank you. (Footsteps. A sharp tap. A door creaks
slightly.) There you are, Medea. Still scowling, I

MEDEA But what have I done? You must tell me that. I will have that! (Anger) What is it I have done?

CREON You frighten me. That's enough. A number of things dictate this move. You're clever - that's a bad start - and you're not past dabbling in a lot of mumbo-jumbo. You have that reputation. Pointless, of course, but nasty. Thoroughly nasty. Anyway, a slighted woman, a deserted wife... You've been making threats, I hear. Against me, my daughter, and your husband. Her husband to be. So, I'm taking precautions. That says it all, I think.

MEDEA (more or less controlled; but only just) They call me clever, and so you make me suffer for it. For their jealousy. People talk to you and tell you I am bad. Well I say this. And you listen, Creon. Each new thought, each little step, seems like stupidity to those who are stupid. So you tell that to the bright boys, those clever counsellors. I know this and that. Medea is no fool. But I'm not bad. Not now or before. Or ever shall be. So there. You know now. And remember.
CREON  I don't trust you Medea. Clever, or not, you've got
to go. Now do you understand me? (Raising his voice)
Or shall I tell you again?

MEDEA  (quietly) Don't shout, Creon. Keep your cool. Think
about it, Creon. Who owns this house? Who owns this
street, this town, this country? You do, Creon. You
own them all. Not me. I am nothing. I have nothing.
Leave me alone. What are you afraid of? What can I
do? (Desperate) Why should I care if your daughter
takes my husband? What is that to me? I hate him. I
do now. Why should I care? Don't hurt me, Creon. I
wouldn't hurt you.

CREON  Out.

MEDEA  I'm a mother, Creon. I have two little boys. Pity
them, poor boys.

CREON  I do. Out.

MEDEA  Where can they go? Where can I go?

CREON  That's your problem.

MEDEA  You are a family man...

CREON  Medea, you're wasting your time. And don't touch me.
I can't stand that kind of thing.

MEDEA  One day, that's all I ask. My sons need settling.
Somewhere. They can't come with me. One day, Creon.
No more.

CREON  A practical point. You have my permission. I'd hate
to be thought unreasonable. Twenty-four hours, then.
Until tomorrow morning.
(He moves to the door.) Good-bye, Medea.

(The door creaks.)

MEDEA  (quietly) Good-bye, Creon.

(Outside the horses stamp. Harness and hooves. Admiring murmurs.)

MEDEA  I don't need a day. A little something for the bride. A slight twist of the yoke. And as for him... I'll make a mess of him. Oh, yes. I don't doubt that. A knife would have done. Just now. Too clean. A general conflagration? All of them, together? (She laughs) Some flame of passion. A burning bride, blessed by her father... No. Careful, Medea. Don't get caught. That would be stupid. Not like you. Not your kind of... killing. Poison, I think. Oh, yes. A little sickness in the joints, or, even, the touch of something on the skin. And stay well clear. Somewhere to go. Some hiding place, some salvation. Some sweet man, perhaps. A knife would do, of course. In extremity. (She moves across the room, and clinks her jars) Hecate's my help. Queen of night. This dark body I dedicate to her. (A fierce whisper.) Hurt me if you can, you cruel men. You hurt me, and I will cut you off. Just like that. You look for a wedding, and I give you a funeral. (She sighs) And so, there we are. I show my blood. Daughter of a magic-man, granddaughter of the sun, a
burning calculation, here inside, some dire danger
to manhood in mischief.

(The door creaks. Footsteps, and a rustle. Whispers)

MEDEA (sharply) Who's there?

CHORUS 1 We are.
CHORUS 2 We heard a bit.
CHORUS 3 Not a lot.

MEDEA (very cool) What did you hear?

CHORUS 1 (resolute) Quite enough. Enough to gain our
sympathy.

MEDEA (relieved) Come through ladies. Through to the
garden.

(Rustle, and doors creak. Cicadas and hens. A girl
sings in the kitchen, to the accompaniment of pots
clattering and utensils.)

CHORUS 1 There has to be a change. It can't go on like this.

MEDEA What can't?

CHORUS 1 The abuse of women. It simply must be stopped. The
poets could help.

CHORUS 3 In what way?

CHORUS 1 Stop telling lies.

CHORUS 2 What lies?
CHORUS 1 Lies about women. About infidelity, in particular.
They always put the blame on us.

CHORUS 3 Perhaps with time...

CHORUS 1 Perhaps, perhaps...

CHORUS 3 No, I mean, perhaps with time there may be women poets. Then they could tell the truth.

CHORUS 2 No good.

CHORUS 1 Why not?

CHORUS 2 No-one would listen.

CHORUS 3 Ah. I hadn't thought of that.

MEDEA They should do it, anyway.

CHORUS 1 (comforting) Of course they should. My dear, I think I speak for all of us when I say how much we sympathise with you in your position. You left everything behind you and now... you've had everything taken away.

(A flurry; a chicken scampers)

NURSE (breathless) Jason.

MEDEA What? Where?

NURSE Behind you.

JASON (also breathless, and indulging, rather ineffectually, in indignation) Well, Medea, what have you done now? You couldn't keep your mouth shut, could you? Had to have an audience. Blabbing and blubbering, blubbering and blabbing. Bunch of
witless fools. Chatter, chatter, chatter! Well, you've had it now, haven't you? Heard it from the horse's mouth. Hard luck. Serves you right for sounding off at me. (He snorts.) A catalogue of crimes~ You can talk. I tried, mind you, I tried. I told them you were... (he fumbles) excitable, but... (he sighs) there you are. Off tomorrow. (Pause.) If you'll spare me a moment... (No answer.) Do I smell soup? (Still no word. Angry) Well, do I

MEDEA (barely audible) Yes.

JASON Good. The kitchen in that case. !! you'll spare me a moment. (A rustle) Thank you.

(Inside. The fire crackles.)

JASON (quietly) Now look, I want to see that you don't go empty-handed. (The jingle of coins, and a thud on the table) There you are. I'm not hard-hearted. You may hate me...

MEDEA (the same voice) I do.

JASON But I'm doing it for the children.

MEDEA I hate you more now.

JASON Now don't start that...

MEDEA You are a most cowardly man. A mask of honesty and the best intentions, shuddering in your shame, to look me in the face. You offer me money...

JASON Not you. The children.
I should have guessed. I knew you once. Simple story
soon told. You sailed swiftly, soon arrived, some
with you, one lost, apparently -Heracles, a man,
they say. Phasis, oh, Phasis, fire-breathing
snorting bulls, a serpent saving glinting gold in
fleece of the golden ram, steed of Phrixus, sacred
symbol, source of wealth. Saved, you were, by me, by
Medea, this one, this small girl, lost in love for
lover's charms, golden Jason's glancing eyes and
such sweet limbs, subtle, persuasive. To leave a
father, lost, behind, to kill for love, in love's
strong innocence, not once but twice, persuaded by
passion. And passion prompted to take you in, in
daytime ecstasy and swelling night delight. Of this,
two sons. Two bouncing boys, black, curly-haired.
These of you, who laughed and left. These hands you
held, these knees you held, pleaded for help, gained
a body, gained your end and then left.
You dazzle with your lies. (She picks up the purse,
and bounces it on her hand) This you leave me. One
purse. And I go away. Get lost, quietly. Not be
seen. Not heard. Well, where do I go? You tell me
Jason. Shall I go home? To my dead brother? Or back
to Iolcus, to bury another? Both of these we killed.
Some hope, Jason. No home for the hated. Too much
harm. Too much blood on the blade. But here? No
home, no house. Instead, derision, contempt, cast-
out woman, unwanted, used, second-hand, with
evidence. Two small boys, of doubtful complexion.

Come and hold my hand, Jason. Comfort me with more
lies. Drink your soup. Make your bastards beggars.

JASON

Now you listen to me. When I came to Phasis, you
didn't have to help me. You just fell for me. You
couldn't contain yourself. (He stirs the pot.) So
don't blame me. Anyway, look what you gained. I gave
you the modern world. (He pours himself a cup.)

Greece. You ought to be grateful. The rule of law
{he slurps), justice for brutality, the opportunity
to live in relative security, and be respected.

(Again) And what have you done? You've thrown it all
away, by a refusal to compromise. So don't let me
hear any more about the voyage of the Argo. That's
over and done with. Past. Finished. (He puts down
the cup.) That was very good. (He yawns.) Oh, dear.

I've been on the go since dawn. Now, where was I?

MEDEA (quietly) You'd finished with the Argo.

JASON That's right. Now look. The children and this
marriage. Try and look at it calmly. If it had gone
as I planned, we'd have all been better off. Creon's
a wealthy man. We had nothing. Nothing left, anyway.
And as for the children... marvellous, splendid. All
the advantages of association with the best, and
possibly some new brothers, maybe a sister. But
you... you have to take it the wrong way. Accent all
on jealousy. And when children are involved, that makes me spit. It really does.

(Silence briefly. The cicadas, dimly.)

MEDEA   (angry) Jason, you think you can get away with everything. I don't think so. You aren't very clever, Jason. You don't convince me. You could have told me this, given your reasons a long time ago. But you kept quiet. You are a liar.

JASON   Not true. I didn't tell you. That doesn't make me a liar. And, anyway, how ~ I have told you? You'd never have stood for it. So there you are.

MEDEA   (more anger) You are a liar. You wanted her. Very much you wanted her. I know. I saw you. I see it now.

JASON   (raising his voice) You see nothing, except what you imagine. I chose Creon's daughter to give my sons security. If you think otherwise, you're wrong, and that's that!

MEDEA   (throwing the coins) Is this your security? Go on! Pick it up! Take it back with you! I don't want it!

JASON   Now that was foolish. Like cursing Creon. You never learn. I could give you contacts...

MEDEA   (furious) I don't want your contacts! Get out of my sight! Go to your woman! And your bed!

JASON   It's the children that suffer. That's the worst of it. (To MEDEA)
As for you... I've nothing left to say. You can only blame yourself.

MEDEA  (shouting) Go away! (Footsteps. Outside the birds are singing. Quiet clucking. Quietly) Off you go.

One thing on your mind. As always, as you were. But you won't enjoy her. Oh, no. Because I am Medea.

(The market. Busy, bright, and raucously confident. Fish fruit and vegetables)

CHORUS 2  I shouldn't, if I were you. They're not ripe.
CHORUS 1  Perhaps you're right. No, I was lucky. I was spared that when I was young.
CHORUS 2  Oh, don't say that. You must have had...
CHORUS 1  No, never. Not like that. I kept well clear.
CHORUS 2  Radishes, and lettuce.
CHORUS 1  Up the other end.
CHORUS 2  We've done what we can. That's all she can ask. And as for him...
CHORUS 1  Some small fish. That's what you said.
CHORUS 2  So I did. I'd almost forgotten. No, I'd rather not have his conscience.
CHORUS 1  She's got nowhere to go, you know...

(Fade out.)

(The house. Garden and cicadas in the background. Dimly, a shout or two from the road. MEDEA is
humming. The clicking sounds of a shuttle. A tap at
the open door.)

**AEGEUS**  May I come in?

**MEDEA**  (a rush and an embrace) Aegeus!!

**AEGEUS**  Good to see you. And you can't say better than that.

**MEDEA**  Aegeus, Aegeus! What brings you here?

**AEGEUS**  Hey, steady on. (Gently) I could do with a seat.

**MEDEA**  Of course you could. How selfish. There. Sit down. Gorgo! You must be tired. Where are you going? Or where have you come from? Let me get you something. Gorgo...!

**NURSE**  I'm here.

**MEDEA**  (pleased) So you are. Some wine, for Aegeus...

**AEGEUS**  (flustered) Oh, no, no. Not for me. Really. Thanks a lot.

**NURSE.**  Sure?

**AEGEUS**  (embarrassed) Oh, yes. Quite sure. Really. I'm... not thirsty.

**NURSE**  Fine. You?

**MEDEA**  Just a drop. (To AEGEUS) Is it serious? The business, that brings you here? (Kindly) Tell me, Aegeus. I'd like to know.

**AEGEUS**  Well, yes, it's serious, as things go. (A pause.) I've been to Delphi for advice.

**MEDEA**  I see.

**AEGEUS**  I... went... to ask the god about children.

**MEDEA**  So your wife is...?
AEGEUS  (quickly) Yes. She is still. Or I am. Or both. (He
laughs shortly.) Who knows?

MEDEA   And?

AEGEUS   Well... he said a bit. The god. Apollo. Or rather,
his priests did. Not a lot. But a bit.

MEDEA   Tell me.

AEGEUS   I will, I will. In fact, that's why I came, partly
at least...

To see if you...

MEDEA   ...could explain. I know. I can. It is my skill.
Tell me.

AEGEUS   Right. Here we go. Ready? Now. (Deadly serious)
"Make sure to keep the wineskin tightly bound..."
(MEDEA splutters into her wine, and then checks
herself) "... until once again your homeland you
have found." (MEDEA snorts again, chokes, and bursts
into laughter.) I don't see what's so funny.

MEDEA   (laughing aloud) No, forgive me, Aegeus, it's
just... (she controls herself) ...you always had
this literal mind. I think he meant something else,
this god. Other bags. Skin. Another tap... You see?
"Keep the wineskin tightly..." AB-STIN-ENCE.

AEGEUS   Oh.

MEDEA   And have you?

AEGEUS   Oh, yes. That's fine. (Slight pause) Could I have a
cup, then?
MEDEA   Of course you may. (She pours.) There. A free man now. (A stifled snort.) In some respects.

AEGEUS   Indeed. Quite. Thank you. (He drinks, and recovers himself.) So how are the children? And Jason? How's he? Fine, I hope.

MEDEA   Oh, he's fine, I think. The children are fine. (Pause) You see, the truth is, Aegeus, he has left me.

AEGEUS   What, Jason?

MEDEA   Oh, yes, Jason.

AEGEUS   For... another woman?

MEDEA   Oh, yes. Most permanently.

AEGEUS   I'm sorry. I'm really very sorry. (Pause) So what are you going to do?

MEDEA   (firmly) Go. Medea must go. (Bitterly) Medea has to go. They are insisting. All of them.

AEGEUS   But that's...

MEDEA   I know it is. It is most cruel. (She sniffs) I am hopeless, Aegeus. They are so cruel to me... (she sobbs) I have no friends. (Sobbing and crying) I have nowhere to go. Nowhere at all!

AEGEUS   Here, hold on... (The scrape of a chair)
MEDEA (sobbing wildly) He doesn't care...! He says so himself! Oh, help me, Aegeus, please help me!
(Urgently) Take me with you~ I'll help you! I will! I've got drugs! For you or your wife! I'll help you!
Please, please Aegeus... (wildly) please help me!

AEGEUS (gently) Dry your eyes. Sit down. (Pause. With careful consideration) I'll help you, Medea. But I won't take you with me. Not now. You must come on your own. It must be your decision - and be seen to be so. As for the drugs... Well, thank you. You'll be remembered, if you give me a son.

(Pause. The sobbing stops.)

MEDEA Aegeus?

AEGEUS Yes, my love.

MEDEA You must swear.

AEGEUS Swear to what?

MEDEA Swear that you'll take me in.

AEGEUS Don't you trust me?

MEDEA Yes, I do. I do trust you. But they may follow me, and ask you to give me up. They might do that. They all hate me. They'd kill me if they could.

AEGEUS (puzzled) Who would?
MEDEA Creon... might. Or Jason. Or... the daughters. Or Pelias.

AEGEUS (more puzzled) The daughters of who?

MEDEA Of Pelias. At Iolcus. I killed him. Indirectly.

AEGEUS How indirectly?

MEDEA Boiled, by his daughters. I tricked them.

AEGEUS And you won't trick me?

MEDEA No. Why should I?

AEGEUS No reason. Name your gods. I'll swear.

MEDEA Earth first. And the Sun, the father of all. Then the other gods. In company.

AEGEUS The wording?

MEDEA That "I shall never expel Medea, the daughter of Aeetes, from my city of Athens, nor shall any man or woman against her will take her away. This to hold while I have breath. So help me."

AEGEUS So help me, as you have said. By Earth, and the Sun, and all the Gods in company.

MEDEA (a kiss) Bless you, Aegeus. My sweet man. (Serious) What happens if you break your word?

AEGEUS Ooh... unspeakable. Don't you think so?

MEDEA Oh, I dare say that. Never mind. You won't.

AEGEUS No. (He moves to the door.)

MEDEA Good-bye.
AEGEUS Good luck. (He stops) Oh, how soon?
MEDEA Quite soon. See you.
AEGEUS Yes.

(Outside.)

CHORUS 1 (impressed) Athens!
AEGEUS That's right. You've heard of it?
CHORUS 2 Oh, yes.
AEGEUS Bye, then. (Horse.)
CHORUS 2 Bye, bye. (Horse moves off.) Nice man.
CHORUS 3 Seems so.

(The garden. Cicadas. Hens, clucking furiously. MEDEA is feeding them.)

MEDEA (to the hens) Come along, come along. Last time.
(Calling)
(A bird chirps loudly. She claps her hands.) Go away, bird. No annoyance. Not now. That young lady. First send for Jason. "Come to see Medea. With speed. Immediately." He won't like that. And then, a little word, a short chat, about how happy I am
about this marriage, and that he should have her, she him, bla-bla, how sensible, wise man, well-thought out, well planned, uggh. Yes. Fine. Good. Then... that the children must stay. Must be allowed. Not that they will, of course. I shouldn't let them. But they will trap her. I'll send them to her, to plead on their little knees. Yes! Excellent. Gorgo!

NURSE Yes.

MEDEA Good girl. Now listen. The boys go with gifts to this lady, a dress, soft, a silk dress, with... a circlet, for her head, yes, a circlet of gold. Beaten gold. I have it. And then... she will die. Horribly. Are you listening, Gorgo?

NURSE (expressionless) How will you do it?

MEDEA Foolish, foolish Gorgo! Poison, of course. An ointment. One of mine.

NURSE (same) How was I to know?

MEDEA You might have guessed. And then... ah, yes. The nasty bit. Do you love me, Gorgo?

NURSE I don't know.

MEDEA I hope you do. You'd better. I'm going to kill my children. (Silence) Both of them. (Still.) What do you say, Gorgo? (Silence) Gorgo, my love? (Still no word) Well, I am. And that's that. You too, if you betray me. You know that, don't you?

NURSE (barely audible) I expect so.
MEDEA  Good. You see, they can't come with me, and he won't have them.

So there we are. He'll suffer most. And that's what matters. Poor Gorgo. You're so very fond of them. Anyway, you have your own. Love them instead. I won't be laughed at. Not by him. So, no children for him, no young bride. No nothing. Serves him right.

Never trust a Greek.

NURSE  You can't do this.

MEDEA  I can. You would, if you were me.

NURSE  You are their mother.

MEDEA  True. But he is their father. Only half mine, if at all, they say. Still, he has destroyed them, not me. Fetch him, Gorgo. And don't be long. I want to trust you. (Footsteps move away. The bird sings merrily again. Fade.)

(The sound of milk, squirted in a pan. From time to time the goat finds voice. Otherwise it munches.)

CHORUS 1  (expansively) The people of Athens - hold still! - trace their line all the way back to Erechtheus. They boast of a wealthy land, sacrosanct, inviolate, and abounding in clever men. That's what they tell me. They also say that the sun shines all the time in a bright-blue sky, and that Harmony, the daughter of Ares, inspired by the Muses, has never yet been
known to leave. (The squirts stop...) You asked. And that's what I know. (... and start again)

CHORUS 3
There's a little more than that... (The squirts stop.) I think. Aphrodite visits them. She brings them breezes, so mild they touch your face. Eros comes with her, and he and his brothers bring them Wisdom. That's why they do so well.

(Pause.)

CHORUS 2
Heaven knows what they'll make of Medea.

CHORUS 1
(resuming) That's their problem.

CHORUS 2
Are you sure that's what he said?

CHORUS 1
You were there. You heard him. "There's no cause for concern. Not any more. She's coming to Athens."
That's what he said. (Fading out.) Those were his very words...

(A stream flows. Sheep in the extreme distance)

NURSE
Athens. A town. Just like any other. (She has been crying, and still is.) Medea. A killer. With blood on her hands. (Anger.) Did he know that? Did he, I wonder? About the children? Did she tell him that? (Bitterly) Oh, no, not Aegeus. Not her. She keeps that for my ears. Good old Gorgo. Good for anything. (An outburst) Why am I such a coward? (She stops,
firmly, or tries to, with reasonable success.)

There's no answer to that. You're just like all the rest. You won't stop her. You're scared. That's what it is. And with reason. You won't interfere. You haven't got the nerve. (Anger again, and frustration) I wish I could understand! Why am I so stupid? Understand, Gorgo. Give birth, watch them grow up, hold them in your hands... She must be hurt in some way that I don't understand. Can't understand. Not even hurt. Torn open, cut open, bare, to the bone. (Calm. A sniff.) And I loved her. Me, Gorgo. I did that, too. (The sheep bleat.)

(Liquid pouring. The sound of glass on glass. A cough.)

JASON   They told me to come.

MEDEA   They?

JASON   She. Gorgo.

MEDEA   Ah, yes. (Warmly) Jason, I want to apologise. For all the things I said.

JASON   All of them?

MEDEA   That's right. You must forgive me. You know what I'm like. I get excited and then, afterwards, I said to myself "Medea. You are a very stupid person. These people. These people want to help you and you won't let them. Not advisable. Not very sensible. Not for
a dependant. Not for you." That's what I said. So, I am sorry. Sorry for what I said before. You go on, go ahead. Marry that pretty girl. Get some more sons. Brothers for the boys. A good thing. All the more the merrier. (Pause.) You see, I am foolish. I go off the top. But just now I say: "Jason is a wise man. He **thinks**. He is good to you. He looks after you. He thinks **ahead**. Help him. Help him to help you. Make it all easier. Help at the wedding. Arrange the flowers. (A sigh.) We are what we are, we women. Not like you. We are jealous. But you mustn't mind us. Not at all. There. Come and see the boys. Your boys. Where are you, boys? I had them brought back. Especially for you. That old teacher man is quite some fool. He'd taken them away. Far, far away. But we brought them back, didn't we, boys?

BOYS  Theron said... / Gorgo...

MEDEA  Yes, yes, not now. Just kiss your father. Hold his hands. There, what a picture! How we shall miss you... (Sob.)

JASON  (quickly) Now that's enough of that. There's no need to distress yourself. (To the BOYS, a whisper) You can let go now. (To MEDEA) I'm glad you've changed your mind. It's bound to make things easier. And as for you young men -you've got a future in front of you! Shoulder to shoulder with the first men in Corinth! I'll see to that.
MEDEA  (urgently) Will you, Jason? Will you see to that? Will they stay? Please, speak to Creon! Speak to his daughter!

JASON  (thoughtful) Yes, she might persuade him. (Confidently) Leave it to me. I'll see what I can do.

MEDEA  (with swift and overbearing enthusiasm) Take the boys with you! Let her see them! They can give her presents. (She rushes about.) I have them here. A gown, a silk gown, and a golden circlet. Here in the box. No, don't open it. See them later. The children will carry them. I had them from my father, who had them from his. His father was the sun. Helios, the sun. So. Very valuable. Very old. But new, too. Shining new. Old and new. There you are. Hold the casket carefully. (Sharply) Boys! (A squabble has started) Take it in turns. There. Now, remember. Give it to the lady. Into her hands. (Firmly) No-one else.

JASON  Well, I don't know...

MEDEA  (quickly) Oh, yes, of course you do. They're better than words. And even the gods like a gift. Come along, boys. One on each side. Take your father's hand. That's right. Now off you go.

JASON  (disappearing) If you really think this is necessary... (Dimly, to the BOYS) No, not now!!
MEDEA    Hmh. I wonder... (A fountain. A large single jet, not ornamental. Laughing and splashing. Children and their mothers standing around. The NURSE at the edge.)

NURSE   No hope now. Not any more. Not after that. Not with them on their way. (Bitterly) She thinks of everything. She can't change her mind now. Not now they're involved. (An unusually loud splash, and equally loud laughter) Kids! (A threat) Do that again, and I'll... (To herself) I hope they didn't see me. Look at this! Soaked right through. I've had enough. I really have. (Pause.) So, what happens? A dress and a chaplet. They arrive, and she puts them on, and I suppose it works. Sooner or later. Yes, it'll work. And Jason? Maybe he'll go with her, maybe not. Better for him if he did. (A deep breath) So where does that leave us? God knows. I'm lost. But she's still there, and she's stupid enough to kill. Sickening, isn't it? Still (she swamps her face, and blows through the water)...I've had enough. I'm going home.

(The garden. MEDEA is humming)

TUTOR    (subdued) The boys are back.

MEDEA    And the gifts?

TUTOR    They've been delivered.
MEDEA  (getting up) So... where are these boys?

TUTOR  They're in the bath. As you said.

MEDEA  Good. Fetch some more hot water. (Moving off.) And Theron... Tidy their room.

(Fade to silence. Splashing, shouts, the start of a quarrel.)

MEDEA  That's enough of that. Just mind where you put your feet. There's hot water coming. Much more. Nice. (Pensively) Two short futures. Not as I thought. No pride for me, in seeing sons in happiness, bedded down with brides. Shining, smart sons, men from my womb, of my blood, born in blood... Painful, too. Stabbing, distended, splitting even at the last. There was an expectation, that too I thought, that you would look after me. In my old age. (She chuckles) Medea, creaking. Smooth white face, and skin stretched tight. Smiling, perhaps. Laid to rest. (She laughs, shortly) Some small hope. Ah. (Excited cries.) The water. Careful, old man! (More cries.) There, that's pleased you. Look at those smiles. Yes, I see you! The room, old man. As I said. (The door creaks. Quietly, above the bath sounds.) Why smile at me, you foolish boys? Another one would help you more. (Lost) He used to smile. Sun on shutters glancing in. This cold crack of mine. Sometime possessed. Warm, then, and smiling
too. Touched to eternity, or so I thought. Foolish child. Looking back, so brief. (Then) That in place of admitting you take their lives. Two lives, and his pain. Yours, probably, twice as much. (Firm.) This price must be paid. There is no other rule than not to be laughed at. To let them go free... No. He has hurt me. They have hurt me. And I... ooh... I... (pain this time) Some air, I think. Ooh (she catches her breath), yes, air. (The garden. Cicadas. A sound of retching, a cough, spitting, gasps. And then tears. She tries to laugh through it all) Morning sickness... (she coughs) in the afternoon. (Breaking down.) Oh, have pity, Medea! Where has pity gone? Vanished, shrivelled in the womb. Take them to Athens, hide them away... (She stops, with an effort) From a truth too terrible to say. I have forsaken myself, as he has forsaken me. And they are condemned. It is complete. All done already. The dress has eaten her, the circlet cut her skull, most probably in two. She is dead, and they must die. Oh, how I love them, the sweetness of their breath, noses against the cheek! (Finally) Some small sweetness, this afternoon, in this garden of sorrow, where a woman is wrecked, whatever her will.

(Pause. Cicadas. Slow fade.)
(Bellows and a blaze. An extended sequence. Male voices in the background, laughing, exchanging jokes. Beating, and the ring of hammer on bronze.)

CHORUS 1 (above the noise) You know, I'm not at all sure that those that never have them don't do better. Better than the rest of us.

CHORUS 2 (to CHORUS 3) What did she say?

CHORUS 3 I didn't hear.

CHORUS 1 (raising her voice) Children. What I said was (hammer blows) that (more hammer blows) ... (Calmly, and quite resigned) Never mind.

(A long, loud sizzle, and then total silence. The dragging foot-steps of the smith.)

SMITH There you are, lady. One pot, as good as new.

CHORUS 1 (delighted) And why buy a new one, when the old one will do?

(Fade out. The garden, briefly. A knife is being sharpened.)

MEDEA I hadn't thought to wait so long.

MAN (inside the house) Medea! Medea! (Desperate) Where are you?

MEDEA (aloud) In the garden. (To herself) Jason's man, I think.

MAN (emerging) Medea!
MEDEA  Yes.

MAN    (breathless) How could you?

MEDEA   (calmly) What? What have I done?

MAN    What have you done? You've killed them. Both of
       them. They're both dead.

MEDEA   Both dead? Jason too?

MAN    No! Not Jason. Much worse. Creon, and his daughter.

MEDEA   Ah. Surprise. Tell me. Sit down.

MAN    How can I sit down? I shouldn't be here.

MEDEA   (comforting) Of course not. Tell me. I know about
       the boys.

MAN    Well, I stayed. After they left. Jason told me to.
       He went for a bath. So I stayed and...

MEDEA   (excited) She put on the dress? No. Wrong. Not in
       front of you.

MAN    No. She just wrapped it round her. She had some
       girls there, women too, old women. She showed it
       off. Well, you know... She was pleased.

MEDEA   And'?

MAN    Well, she... just changed colour. Face, first, and
       then her toes. Her hands. She keeled right over. She
       had this froth coming from her mouth and... it was
       horrible. Really revolting. Rolling about. Then this
       old woman, right next to me, started to moan. Well,
       I couldn't stand that. It was all too much. I went
for Creon. Found him, of course. Hardly surprising. What with the moaning... He was too late, of course.

MEDEA I know.

MAN That thing round her head, the...

MEDEA Circlet?

MAN That's right. Burning, biting in...

MEDEA And Creon?

MAN Well, he just holds her. To his chest. Comes in and holds her. In his arms. Pathetic.

MEDEA And then, he dies?

MAN No. I was coming to that. Not first thing. He holds her. It sticks to him. And then he...

MEDEA Yes?

MAN He speaks. He says...

MEDEA Go on.

MAN (an imitation, serious) "My daughter, my darling."

(Embarrassed.) You know how it is. "My daughter, my darling. Don't leave me alone. Don't die." And then your name, twice. He tried to get up, but it stuck to his skin. And that was the end of it. I didn't stay after that. I came here. (Dazed, and tired) I don't know why.

MEDEA You did very well.

MAN (dreamily) I had to tell someone. I ran all the way.

MEDEA (sympathetically) I know.

MAN (still dazed) I don't know why I came.
(Footsteps. He moves away, slowly.)


(She does. Fade out cicadas. A long pause.)

(Outside. The street)

NURSE (battering on the door) Medea!

(The dog whines, howls, and scratches)

NURSE Don't do it, Medea!

(The dog whines. Fade.)
(The garden. In the background women's voices. Whispers. Someone is crying.)

MEDEA  (a dislocated voice) Jason!

JASON  (sulking) Go away!

MEDEA  (hovering) Jason! It's me! You are not to be rid of me just like that. I have things to say.

JASON  (exasperated) You have things to say! Well, where are you, then?

MEDEA  I'm here... and here. More or less. (A chuckle) You see?

JASON  (furious) No, I don't see, you... abomination. (Calming down.) So. You've killed them. It's my fault. I brought you here. I must have been mad. First your brother, cut into pieces. And then that poor old man...

MEDEA  (interrupting) Your enemy.

JASON  ...back in Iolcus, boiled away to nothing. I should have known. You deserted your father.

MEDEA  (again) And all for you, Jason.

JASON  Walked out on him. Your own father!

MEDEA  With you.

JASON  And now this! Your own sons. Simple sexual jealousy. That's the motive. Nothing more. It had to be a foreigner. Someone like you. No Greek would have done it. Only a barbarian, a savage. And what's
more, you don't care! So what can I say? I'm the loser. I've lost everything.

MEDEA No-one laughs at me. Not you, nor that girl you wanted. You so wanted. (In his ear.) Still do, don't you? Not any more, perhaps. A nasty mess. Savage, perhaps. But touching your heart a little, I think. Serves you right.

JASON Zeus in his heaven...

MEDEA ...knows the balance between us. Plum down and back again. Up now, on my side. Down for you, badly. Serve you right.

JASON You bitch. (Shouting) Call yourself a mother?

MEDEA As much as you a father. And much more.

JASON (with heavy irony) I suppose I killed them.

MEDEA Ah. No. But you didn't let them live.

JASON I hate you.

MEDEA Probably. Be quiet. Listen now. Those boys must be buried...

JASON (the irony again) You don't say!

MEDEA But not by you. You must not touch them. This is decreed. That little girl will get them ready. The clever one. Prompted, strangely. Who can tell? Then they will go to the temple of Hera, and there will be a sacrifice. Festivities, an annual event, (proudly) instituted by me, by Medea.

JASON (a snort) Monstrous.
MEDEA (sharply, in his ear) Listen, you. A sacrifice, you hear me, solemn and appropriate, to expiate the spilt blood. Poor little boys. While I (pleased) go to Athens, a very fine town, the town of Aegeus, who is my friend. That leaves you.

JASON (bitterly) Thank you very much.

MEDEA You will be killed.

JASON (horrified) What?

MEDEA (quickly) Not by me. No. By a... (she giggles) plank. A plank from the Argo. Your ship. (Another giggle.) The Argo. Most ignominious. Serve you right.

JASON (losing his temper) You... (He rushes around) Where are you? If I could get my hands on you...

MEDEA (hovering) But you won't.

JASON I will!

MEDEA No you won't.

JASON (exasperated) Yes I will! Where are you?

MEDEA (hovering) Here and there. (Pause) Up in the air. (A long pause) Gone now, Jason. Quite, quite gone.

(Fade out. End.)