

M E D E A

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 Bosphorus.

(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.)

NURSE (shouting) Theron! TUTOR Gorgo!

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

TUTOR Silence, and home. (Protests.) You heard what I said. Home. Now.

NURSE (affectionately) Don't argue with the learned man. Go on, get out of it. (Peace.) So what's new?

TUTOR Not a lot. You?

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

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

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

TUTOR There's worse to come.

(Silence. A cart goes by.)

NURSE Well?

TUTOR 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, Kalisto! 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 Bosphorus, 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

see. Get your bags, woman. And your children. Over the border, within twenty-four hours. No, too long. Before tomorrow morning. Get packing. I'll provide an escort. In fact, I'll take you now.

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 11

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.

MEDEA

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 (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)

Don't miss it, you. There we are. No, you've had  
enough. There we are. Finished. So. Well. Obstacle  
removed. Road clear. Hmh. Athens. I wonder what it's  
like? Hmh. Never mind. (With great care.) Pal-las  
Athe-ne. What's she for a goddess? Like Hecate? Who  
knows? She'll do. Now. First that young lady.

(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, ugh. 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.)

MEDEA

That's right. Off you go. Now where did I put that knife? Ow. Quite sharp. (Two more strokes) Little boys now. And then, Athens, no backward looks. How shall I travel? No problem, not for me. I'll fly, if I want. (Firmly) When I choose. Now. Young boys. They will die, after all, after this. Accomplices, as they say, after the fact. And a most unpleasant fact. Most unpleasant. Two deaths. Who better to kill them? I gave them birth. They are mine, I think, must be, if anyone's. His pleasure, my labour. Another fact. Others may argue. I act. That is my strength. Or so I think. There. Hand on the knife. A deep breath. (She does) There. Ready now. Yes. Ready. Cutting short a short life. That seems it. Happy though, like the calf. Tomorrow I'll remember them. And cry. (A sob.) Oh, yes. But now... (Sniffs. Breathes again. Silence) I have forgotten. In now.

(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.)