

MEDEA OF THE LAUNDROMAT
OR
THE STARS MAY UNDERSTAND
H. M. Koutoukas

A Tragical Camp
Dedicated to Mary Frances Robel and Charles James¹

*Medea is traditionally played by a young man resembling
Clint Eastwood, with the sensitivity of Montgomery Clift.*

SCENE: A self-service laundromat. As the overture ends, the curtains rise, and this play *must* be done in a theatre with curtains. It is dawn and the NURSE, kneeling, rises with a baby in her arms.

NURSE: (*Demented.*)

WOMEN OF CORINTH, LAY DOWN YOUR LAUNDRY:

The great-grandson of the SUN sleeps —
The son of a demi-goddess dreams,
Of glories he will never see,
Honors he will never be paid.

(Rocks the child in her arms, then lays it in a clothes basket.)

(Viper-like. Hissing.)

Must you always gather like maggots
At tragedy's door —
Or do you free yourself from guilt
By coming here to bleach your clothes.

Would you erase King Creon's guilt
Disconnect yourself by cleanliness
From the unholy lights you've chosen
To guide your lives.

¹ Property of: H. M. Koutoukas, 87 Christopher Street, New York, NY 10014. Originally produced at the Caffe Cino under the title, *Medea or Maybe the Stars Will Understand or Veiled Strangers.*

Your whole land — has brought about this day,
 Creon is but the voice you chose
 To represent the filth that no soap
 Nor bleach can remove from
 Corinth the evil of these days
 Or show more to all time than
 The evil *you* call *Greece!*

(Pointing at child.)

Each of you share in what has happened here
 Each of you are sums of the total horror
 And responsible for what HAS *(Pause.)*
 And what WILL happen!

(Softly.)

Prepare for night
 For you have insulted
 None other than . . . MEDEA —
 MEDEA the Sun's granddaughter
 MEDEA the Crown Princess of Colchis
 MEDEA daughter to a thousand Kings
 MEDEA — the opposite of all your logic
 MEDEA — priestess to the Code you've forgotten
 MEDEA — who's been named "terror" and witch.

(Sneers.)

By your DEAD, King Creon,
 Your mighty King *(a bit of a sneer here)*
 who could not even save his daughter
 From Medea's wrath.

She comes soon to this place —
 Brings history to this dreary land;
 Do you think she will stop in her fury,
 Without the notices of your sins too —
 ALL will suffer as do their chosen Kings.

(Sound: Drums of funeral procession. Wailing voices. General terror.)

(Leans against machine.)

No wedding will take place today —
 Instead the burial and result
 Of dignity outraged, of love defiled . . .
 Courage turned to HATE is honored here in Corinth.

(With fury and fire.)

Medea has avenged
 All the blasphemies Jason has hurled at her.

She is the ocean's rage,
The fire's pangs.

WOMEN OF CORINTH,
Expect only the impossible today
For Medea has been outraged!

(Pause. She looks at the child.)

Her son will know no honor,
Sans throne and glory
He will follow unknowing
A Queen's wake, that has been destroyed by its going,
All that might have been
Or what was dreamt of.

(Huskiness.)

Go to your home and weep
For Medea has no home or land
Go to your home and pound your breasts
For this is your sin,
All Corinth shall fulfill
Medea's fury!

(Picks up child.)

(Sound and lights: Crash of many cymbals. Single spot up on NURSE.)

(Lullaby to child and make circle.)

Sleep . . . sleep . . . dear Prince without a land.
Dream of all that might have been
Had your mother *not* loved a vile Greek!
Hush — hush — Nanny sings — no worries
Still — Still — there's little silence
Know it well before your mother comes.

The deck has been stacked — stacked deck of pestered passions
By slow shufflings of the cards in Destiny's hands —
Yet LOVE was chosen over duty by Medea
And fulfilled with action — by Medea!
All that the Gods would have . . . has turned opposite.

(Huskily.)

All odds have faced Medea now.
Homeless, free from all discretion,
In her fury affirming the most dreadful accusations
Hurled against . . . her and her father's house.

Sleep fill your night — sleep, sleep . . .
No sleep for Nanny for she stands over
Revealing you to the stars alone.

Sleep, sweet infant Prince —
 That you could sleep forever!
 But no — there is more to come —
 And I am weary from just watching
 What has happened — yet made sleepless all these nights —
 At what MAY come!

(Kneels.)

(MEDEA enters, silently. Her arm covers her whole face except for her eyes. The drape of her sleeve veils her whole body and facial features.)

(Sound and lights: MEDEA's theme up. Intense violet light upon MEDEA. Spot on NURSE begins to fade.)

NURSE: *(Masks the child.)*

Who are you, strange woman —
 Why have you not left with the others
 To mourn your wretched King and his dreary daughter?
 Go from this place —
 Medea comes to this place this night . . .

(Darkly.)

Preceded by her myth!

MEDEA: *(Groans.)*

Oh, wretched
 Wretching — wrecking myth —!

NURSE:

Strange woman — you do not intrigue *us!*
 Go from here — do not wake Medea's child
(Focus on MEDEA.)
 For he is all she now possesses.
 She will not tolerate your veiled ways!

MEDEA: *(Revealing herself.)*

Medea's myth precedes and terrifies even MEDEA!

NURSE: *(Throwing herself at MEDEA's feet.)*

Oh, Mistress — the full night was wretched from your absence.

MEDEA: *(Paying no attention.)*

(Screams.) Where is *MY* son. What fate has —

NURSE:

No fate — he lies safe in my scarf. Sleeping as all babes should.
(NURSE clears MEDEA's scarf. MEDEA comes to crib. NURSE picks up veil.)

MEDEA: *(Tender.)*

He knows no difference
 In his tiny rest
 Then golden castles

Near green-held rests
 With clouds and amber depth he sleeps
 A touch can clear his terror
 And a tit can solve his pain.

(Bitter.)

Only to grow to unheralded manhood
 Only to know life as a gypsy waif
 Here is a prince — never to know kingdom
 Here is the blood of a God and a Greek!
 Never to know the glamour of kingdom
 Never the brilliance of power and wealth

(Softly.)

Warrior unshielded, dusk without dawn,
 Unwritten music by poets long dead.

Sleep, sleep son of Medea —
 Mother protects you . . . FROM KNOWING YOUR FATHER.

(NURSE comes down.)

NURSE: *(Takes her arm.)* Come, come let him rest and you rest also.

MEDEA:

Rest — Medea rest? — Without home,
 Empty of power and wealth — you would have Medea rest . . .
 Never — NEVER — the circle must be completed or I curse the Gods
 Who have drawn it! No rest for Medea until her name and heart
 And HATE are cleansed. Cleansed with the horror of these vile Greeks!
 BEFORE THIS NIGHT IS THROUGH THE SCREAMS OF ALL GREECE WILL
 INTERRUPT THE GODS THEMSELVES IN THEIR ETERNAL DIALOGUE.

NURSE:

What, Medea?

MEDEA:

Yes — you heard. Perhaps your ears closed at the fear of it.
 Medea and Medea alone revenges all nature and will send
 Greece screaming from its vile logic, from its agoras, from
 Its chattering imitations of its cheap clever Gods.

(Softly.)

MEDEA WILL REMIND THE GODS OF WHAT FURY MEANS.

(Smiles.)

She will shake the foundations of their laws, rape open
 The fears of their young, quake up a thousand fears and
 Force them down Corinth's throat.

(Softly, as if pronouncing a judgement — Cobra gesture.)

All Greece will remember Medea and shriek out
At the memory of her glamour.

NURSE:

Rest — I pray — our journey will be long —

MEDEA:

Yes —
Our whole life will be journey
Without land or joy in sight —
Preceded constantly by our myth
We shall wander damned unsleeping
Wandering our life away . . .

NURSE:

Don't think of it!

MEDEA: (*Wailing.*)

I had lost my style
(*Come down; lose style for a minute.*)
I could not find my way.
(*Come back up.*)
Then fury married hate
Making the road clear
And mauve remembrance
Grew furious at present thoughts.

NURSE:

You did only what you had to do.

MEDEA:

NO! No force molded my actions save my own choice of hate
To armor up and save my wrecked grace. The deeds I did
Were deeds the Gods should have done. So then as always
The end is never near enough, the moment in between is
Always the reminder that no dream is full till it finds its form.

NURSE:

Dreams come true and nightmares too!

MEDEA: (*Threat.*)

Before the sun rises on this morning . . .
MEDEA will be whole again.
(*Rebirth. Touch of joy.*)
No longer will her features be confused with Jason's. No longer
Will her desires have an open space. The splinters
Of love will be full removed, turned to daggers
With which to scorch Jason's eyes.

NURSE:

Medea — the child is present.

MEDEA:

Then let him too know — for he will grow to manhood . . .
That his mother taught all men a lesson that they can
Never fully learn!

I am the rage
I am the scourge
The heart and tenderness and hurt
Of all things that have been left to die —
Wasted on the shores of useless love.
Features lost and confused in another image —
Medea draws her portrait anew . . .
Medea draws her features strong, alone,
In fire, madness and with bloody soil.
No one, no thing, no God
Dare deny Medea the rightness
Of her insanity . . .

NURSE:

You are not mad, Medea — just foreign to this country!

MEDEA: (*Smile.*)

Not mad — watch this day closely Nurse — and you will
Learn again what the full moon is all about.

NURSE:

Ancient Greece protect us from our seldom truths —

MEDEA:

Truth be damned! (*Turn from her.*) What's Truth — a food for pigs and
cowards. A reason for dreary bacchanals — (*Over shoulder.*) Do they have
you believing in truth now, old woman . . .

NURSE:

In Colchis we believed in Truth —
(*Hand on machine.*)
As we did in honor and in courage.

MEDEA: (*Sadly.*)

Truth of Colchis is another thing! It was the truth of autumn and the har-
vest, truth of spring and fountains that never had gone dry from lack of rain.
Truth in Colchis was of a nobler kind, of earth and lust and passion woven
in a warm lovers' embrace by the seaside on the sandy shore. Not like this
Greek truth that confuses everything to nothing, not like this vile beauty
that the people of Corinth confuse with their Gods. In their temples, even
lies abound in symmetry, not one thing out of place — not one muscle lost.

In Colchis the Parthenon would have been a urinal — and beauty would never have been made servant to truth.

(Sound: Child crying.)

NURSE:

The infant prince!

MEDEA:

I will go to him, I am STILL his mother, in fact little else than his mother . . . leave us. *(Smiles.)* Go watch Creon's funeral, go see Corinth honor the mighty monarch of their land, go see if tears may prevent skin from rot!

NURSE:

Should we not leave —

MEDEA:

Trailing our curses behind us? No — soon enough. Medea will not be stabbed in the back as she cowers to some hideous mountain cave — my heritage is ancient, my glamour undeniable, I have many stunning landscapes to paint across Greece before I leave. I would be alone. My child calls for me!

(Wait until NURSE exits.)

(Sound: Child crying.)

(NURSE hesitates, then leaves.)

MEDEA: *(Lifts infant.)*

Do you weep at dreams or morning sweet young becoming
That knows nothing but the first of things.

(Rocks child in her arms.)

Weep not, weep not — your Mother still has strength
Enough to protect her sweetest jewel. If that were all —
If loving and caring were all that the Gods demanded,
What a soft, tender mother, Medea would be.

(Bitterness.)

But no, Medea must be the panther mother,
doing all the things for her cub but
Unable to be always gentle — rage has scorched out my breasts.

(Rises.)

There is no longer sustenance for love. Sweet child a-meshing
So many moments when everything was good.

Everything was so good *(Steel-edged.)* once — or was it being young
With an overflow of giving that made it seem so? Would
Any arms have brought me to my powers and needs and
Lusts so quickly. *(Pause.)*

(Noticing child's smallness.)

Medea was so young once,
 And innocent of men as stars are innocent of men.
 Then she was touched and brought to flower — her
 Lacks were made evident in one night and burned a space
 Within her that only (*Work for erotic tone.*) lust encased in love could fill.
 Lust comes so quickly and love is so tender — nights
 Once so empty find too soon their reason, which passion
 Burns, leaving nothing of all reason save burnt embers
 Of what might have been.

(Almost bistrionically.)

I have wept till my eyes no longer see the reason. I have
 Screamed out with pain that made music seem inconsequential —
 Yet always there . . . deep within me like some gnawing thing
 There always remained the remembrances of dreams and of
 What might have been — had Medea loved not so wantonly,
 Had Medea not needed so desperately.

Then all was given — nothing left but Medea's hollow screams
 Upon the echo of her own desires — clawing, screaming, sobbing,
 Then in silence realizing that something had been taken that
 Could never be returned — something resembling the haunting
 Dreams of childhood summers by the sea.

(Sobbing, holding child close.)

Dreams can never be.

(Falls to knees.)

Dreams can never be. Dreams can never be.
 Weep for the lost hopes of innocence — spring shall not come
 Again nor childish fancies of rainbows and moonbeams. Sooner
 Or later it becomes either gold or mud and everything boils
 Into scorching generality.

Yet passion chose to come to this land of logic — a priestess
 Of the ancient cult and princess descended from the sun chose
 Through her lover to deny all that gave root to her and sustenance.
 So valuable — so valuable a young girl's dreams — that whole
 Futures have been wretched to protect hope from despair.

(Kisses baby, puts it in basket.)

I would be tender,
 I would be so soft,
 I would you have more
 Than all the things of earth
 But look even though you cannot know,
 The man who took all from your Mother
 And traced his features through me upon your countenance

(Slowly, tenderness turns to rejection.)

Denies all that was sacred.
Shattering dreams for lies
Turning love to hate for its own posterity.

(Pause.)

(Single spot on MEDEA as she goes center for invocation.)

Gods of the ancients
Dark deities of old
Why have you allowed Medea
Descendant of the sun
Herself a demi-goddess
To find herself betrayed
In this cruel place where logic
Runs haywire and is revered afore the heart?
Have all the Heavens denied Medea life and love
Do they join Jason in betrayal of a young girl's dream?

Gods of cobra
Gods of the dark
Gods of the ocean
Gods long forgotten
For painted tinsel marbled perfection.
Of distorted Athenian Grace
Listen — Medea speaks.

(Two beat pauses.)

Princess,
Demi-Goddess
Witch and enchantress too
Invokes pre-cosmic forces
Residuals of the most ancient sands
To rise up and defend her grace
Save dignity and wreak vengeance on this vile race!

(Screaming.)

If any God or force or creature
Dare deny Medea
They will meet the volcano force
Of love turned to hate and vengeance
They will feel fire itself and cold cold winter
If they dare stand between her (*Beat pause . . .*) and what she must do.
None shall deny Medea
Her right to grace
No force in Heaven or Hades
Will destroy her dream of what might have been.

Had she not come to this wretched place
Had she not loved a cursed prince from a cursed land.

With or without
In terror or in plenty
Medea WILL do what needs to be done
To close the circle her dreams once opened!

(Sound: MEDEA's theme up.)

Medea has become deadly
So beware all men and elements
Havoc is my last friend
Tragedy mine only firmament!

I'll rip open the heavens
Rather than deny my pride
I'll rage up the sea
Rather than do injury to my honor.

I have begged on my knees
Only to drop my enemies to theirs
Alone — hopeless — in a foreign land
With no attention paid my tears
I returned to the ancient knowledge
That these Greek fools put themselves
In disdain toward and wove disaster
With bitterness and mine own hands.

One more deed must be done
Before the sun rises
Before I leave this wretched land.

I will cause mountains to tremble
And waters to be still.
Medea who was so young once
Now sacrifices her full illusion
To her ancient Gods.
God of the cobra
God of the night
She begs forgiveness
And will with her own hands
Tear her name into the horror of this place.
To prove that she has not left the ancient cult of passion
To show her return to all that she once loathed
Destroyed, and fled from.

The Gods have not shown Medea justice
So Medea must BECOME justice

Raging these moments through
Till all that has been done
Will find itself undone.

(Sound: Infant crying.)

Yes, you too will be cast upon the scale
For justice has been forced into Medea's hands
Your mother wears no blindfold and sees
The faint hint of Jason on your tiny features.

(Her eyes become inflamed.)

All that was Jason's by and from Medea
Must be erased as Medea's love was itself destroyed.
Yet it was not remembered that love does not die —
It merely waits, turning sour upon the heart, into hate.

No more — no more the willow walks
With windswept forgiveness 'neath mountain pine
Jason has turned my flesh to stone my fires to pitch,
And as such, they return to him.

(Picks up child.)

You would be cursed
If you grew into manhood
Exiled you would never
Have had the dreams of life.
What more can a mother give
Than new hope, refurbished faith —
And when unable, what greater gift
Than protection from the tortures
Of life without meaning.

(With tenderness.)

Sleep — sleep — son of Jason,
In your new bed — your last bed —
No silk sheets, no tiny shoes, no tutors.

(With hate.)

Just sleep — you will not spread Jason's seeds
Into another.

(Places child in washing machine.)

Jason — Medea's final gift —
More horrid than Crayola's golden gown
Which destroyed Creon too.

(Laughs.)

I remove you from history
As you stole me from my maiden dreams and hopes.
I kill that young becoming

That was both of us combined.
 Removing all traces
 Of our being for now and all eternity!

(Pause.)

If you would hurt a man —
 Then hurt his only son.

(Warmly.)

Son, Son, the gods know well your mother's horror,
 They will make you prince in a land that no one knows of.
 This is far better than starving on a gypsy road —
 Your Mother's last kind act to you —
 And last revenge.

(She closes the door.)

(Slowly, she puts a coin in.)

(Sound: chaotic music up.)

(Screams.)

Oh wretched fate — damned destiny
 That such love should turn to THIS.
 Medea is no longer human
 No longer woman
 No longer or evermore will she be loved.
 Weep for the deeds
 That needed doing
 Weep for the love
 That turned upon itself.
 MEDEA IS DEADLY YET STILL SHE WEEPS FOR LIFE.

(NURSE enters.)

NURSE:

Medea —

MEDEA: *(Demented.)*

Remove these vile robes of Greece from Medea —
 No longer will she remain trapped
 And victim to a cowardly race —
 Quick — quick — woman —
 My jewels and all the worn ritual
 Of the ancient cults of dear Colchis
 Land of my youth that I betrayed
 And whose honor I now do justice to.

(She tears off her clothes and dresses in the golden temple gowns of Colchis.)

(Music up full: MEDEA begins a temple dance.)

NURSE:

The child, Madam —

(Pause. She looks in crib.)

The beautiful prince, fruit of your womb?

(She sees the child in washing machine.)

Strange woman —

Fury and hate have done this —

Strange woman —

Only the Gods now may understand

The result of your deadly passions.

(MEDEA pays no attention, keeps dancing in a frenzy.)

(Looking out door.)

Madam, Jason approaches —

(MEDEA pays no attention. she dances for the gods and in her ecstasy grows strong.)

(JASON enters.)

JASON: *(Screams.)*

MEDEA —

Witch —

Hear me or you will DIE!

(Brings out knife slowly.)

MEDEA:

Medea has known a thousand deaths

And still lives — cowards cannot kill.

Remember Jason — I saved your life several times —

But never once could you or did you try to save mine.

I have no fear — you've taught me the strength

Of my own power — I am more armored than you.

JASON:

Why Medea — why —

MEDEA: *(Still dancing.)*

Because love couldn't, Jason —

Because the gods couldn't, Jason —

JASON:

Wretched woman destroyer of all you cannot have!

MEDEA:

You FORGET, Jason, I brought you HONOR,

With the fleece — I made you immortal

With my own name — killing all I loved

For your love — which in turn tried to
Slay me —

JASON:
Witch!

MEDEA:
Thank all the Gods for that, with double thanks.

JASON:
Where is my son —

MEDEA:
He has joined our love, Jason.
(JASON screams, upon seeing the child in the washer. He goes toward it. But MEDEA steps in his way. He lifts his sword but she throws Clorox in his eyes. He screams, backs up, draws his sword — which MEDEA picks up. He gropes in wrong direction for washer with child.)

MEDEA:
Your son is lost to you, Jason, as your love for
Medea was lost —

JASON:
The horror of your deeds breaks out beyond all belief.

MEDEA: *(Gently.)*
The stars may understand.
(Pause.)
As we once thought
We understood the beauty of our yearnings. The sea
May recognize in rage, the wind in fury —

JASON: *(Starts to rise.)*
You are not human —

MEDEA:
I was once TOO human, but you destroyed that, Jason.
(He grabs in her direction.)
I have your sword . . . beware *(Laughs.)* husband.
Beware — Beware — Beware . . .

JASON:
Let me touch my son — just once — or a lock
Of his hair before his memory is lost forever.

MEDEA:
Nothing Jason. Nothing of your son, or Medea . . .
You sought to destroy me in this vile land and
Now you learn that your hate returns — did you

Believe that Medea would really like some feathered Creature — did you really think she would?

JASON:

Wretched woman — you have destroyed everything,
Everything —

MEDEA:

No Jason, not everything, just all the traces of
My love.
Now Jason, the circle turns complete — except for the
Fires that will soon envelop this place —

JASON:

Fire —

MEDEA:

You would not have me leave your son —

JASON:

You will not bury the child —

MEDEA:

Neither the child
(Pause.)
Nor you, Jason —
Your taste of Hell comes now — Medea's kind
She gives her real fire — a kinder Hell than
You gave her.

NURSE:

Medea, this must all end — the Gods!

MEDEA:

The Gods know exactly what I'm doing.
They are the only ones. Nurse, torch up this place —
(Tosses gasoline on JASON.)
Set fires that the dead may meet the dying. Weep not,
For things are as they should be, Medea knows.
(NURSE lights torch.)

JASON:

Medea — please — remember — forgive —

MEDEA:

You taught me the lies in all those words, Jason. You taught too well and
now learn your own lessons.

JASON:

You are forever damned —

MEDEA:

Perhaps among mortals who love
 And who are loved back (*Sigh.*)
 Perhaps among the innocent and undemented
 Perhaps where joy is the common meter —
 But you, Jason, led me from those places —
 To somewhere near the Gods and stars.
 Perhaps the Gods will forgive
 Perhaps the stars will understand . . .
 I hesitate Jason,
 I will not put words
 Into the mouth of omnipotence
 Yet I will defend honor
 Where omnipotence fails.

(JASON blindly tries to find way out.)

(NURSE burls torch at JASON.)

JASON: (*Shrieking.*)

Medea, forgive me — forgive me . . .

MEDEA:

Jason, there's no such thing —
 Crawl down to the cracked mirrors in your unused wedding chamber
 And make love to your pretensions

(Pause.)

Caress your preconceptions.
 Touch your sail's rotting mask and remember
 The miracles my love performed —
 Then weep, Jason, for having known
 What love was, and at having destroyed it.

JASON:

Aahhh —

NURSE:

Madam, hurry, the flames —

(The set slides back into the distance. MEDEA and NURSE are in a wooded place. We see the flames in the distance with JASON burning alive. We hear his screams.)

(Sound: MEDEA's theme up.)

NURSE:

Now, Madam — what now?

JASON:

Medea —

(MEDEA winces briefly.)

MEDEA: *(Fury.)*

My shade will meet you at the final crossing, Jason. Beware Jason —
 For death is not too far from life
 And no matter where you are tortures wait.
 My shade will meet you at my crossing.
 Exile — punishment — terrors of the homeless
 Of the ever-constant legion of living dead
 Await us —

NURSE:

No, Medea —
 For it is written that only the stars can understand —
(Magical lights as MEDEA ascends to the constellation Virgo.)
 So you join the godly bodies
 In eternal transcendence
 As symbol of Justice's terror
 And Honor's sweet revenge.
 No man or God may judge a deed like this
 It is as infinite as space itself and yearning.
 Farewell, descendent of the sun —
 Princess of Colchis journey well through eternity
 You've marked God's eternal conversations with your screams —
 All ages and all men will be in awe of you.
(Drums, rolling with trumpets in salute.)
 Constant reminder of all past passions
 And misspent desires — veiled strangeness
 Will forever remind men of their duty
 In welcoming strangers
 And doing fulfillment to their vows.
 Maidens will weep,
 For what young men have taken —
 You are reflected in each love gone bitter.
 Medea! The Gods now do you the honor
 That all of Greece could not learn!

**TRIUMPHANT MUSIC
 CURTAIN**