

Celebrating Australian Playwriting



Australian Script Centre



Jocasta

by Stella Kent

EXTRACT

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CHARACTERS

WOMAN 1 WOMAN 2 WOMAN 3	Attendants to Queen Jocasta, who gradually transform into the Furies
QUEEN JOCASTA	Sixteen years old, and mid to late 30s
KING LAIUS	
CREON	Jocasta's brother
TEIRESIAS	Blind old prophet
THE SPHINX	
OEDIPUS	Eighteen years old

SETTING

The action takes place inside and outside
the palace of Thebes.

The royal bed is permanently on stage.

MUSIC

A production of *Jocasta* ideally requires music - as character motifs, to intensify mood, or to suggest the lyre on which Oedipus sings. Any original score should attempt to capture the modern but timeless quality for which the language also strives (and best of all, could be played live onstage), but music could also be chosen from the established recorded repertoire.

SCENE 1

THE STAGE IS DIMLY LIT. A SOUND STARTS, INDICIPHERABLE AT FIRST, BUT AS THE STAGE BECOMES LIGHTER, THE SOUND BECOMES THE REPEATED WORD 'CHRYSIPPUS' . THE SOUND IS TAKEN UP BY THE MUSIC WHICH AT THIS POINT IS SCARCELY MORE THAN A THROB. THE WORD 'CHRYSIPPUS' IS NOW BECOMING INSISTENT, LOUDER, THE MUSICAL SOUNDS MORE COMPLEX AND DISTURBING.

ONTO THE STAGE RUN THE WOMEN WHO ARE THE ONES SPEAKING THE WORD. THEY ARE IN DISARRAY, THEIR SWIRLING BODIES PART OF THE SOUND. LIGHT BRIGHTENS.

SOUND AND MOVEMENT BUILD TO A FRENZY WHICH SUDDENLY STOPS WITH THE APPEARANCE OF THE YOUNG QUEEN JOCASTA.

JOCASTA: What is this noise! Desist at once!

WOMAN 1: Oh Queen Jocasta! Grieve!

JOCASTA: The morning's sweet. The birds' trill soft.
The breezes stroke the leaves. But you -

WOMAN 2: My lady, oh my queen!
A dreadful act, you must be told -

JOCASTA: I MUST be told!
You are my slaves -
I bought you, every one.

WOMAN 3: Chyrisippus... Chyrisippus...

JOCASTA: Your noise would poison death itself.
Desist I say!
Your wail and howl will wake the King.

WOMAN 1: Chyrisippus -

WOMAN 2: Chyrisippus -

WOMAN 3: Chyrisippus lies dead.

JOCASTA: Chyrisippus?

WOMAN 1: Lord Chyrisippus. He fell -
He fell upon his sword.

JOCASTA: It cannot be! He is too young -
Like me - a mere sixteen.
But why?
You lie!
The day is sweet. The birds' trill soft.
The gods would not allow it.
Your falsehoods pierce the peaceful day.
Go, slaves, and do your work!

THEY ARE ABOUT TO GO.

No stay! Tell me. Tell me all.
He was my friend - my dearest friend.
Say you are tricking me.

WOMAN 1: It was the King -

WOMAN 2: The King's to blame -

WOMAN 3: King Laius caused his death.

JOCASTA: An accident... ?

WOMAN 1: The chariot -

JOCASTA: The chariot! They WOULD ride every day.

WOMAN 2: The King -

JOCASTA: He loved him dearly -

WOMAN 3: The King had handed him the reins,
They swung around the post.

WOMAN 1: Dust swirled wild behind them,
The skidding wheels a blur.

JOCASTA: I see it! Yes, I see it.
He fell? The boy, he fell?

WOMAN 1: No. He did not fall.

WOMAN 2: Wet with sweat the King climbed down

And led his darling boy
Back to his room,
And sweated more, to see the boy
Glowing by his bed.

PAUSE.

JOCASTA: You did not see!
You were not there!

WOMAN 3: Chyrisippus he gave a cry
As Laius came to him:

WOMAN 1: 'Please, no!
My friend,' he begged, 'My trusted friend,
My mentor and my guide -'

WOMAN 3: But Laius touched him on the cheek,
His fingers stroked his neck.

JOCASTA: I cannot hear!
I cannot see!

WOMAN 1: 'Please no!' The cry rang out.
It stabbed the silent corridors.
The boy's fear ran like blood.

JOCASTA: You slaves! You lie! The King -
He loved him like a son -
You say that he - a father - would -

WOMAN 3: King Laius took him by the wrist.
'We'll ride together,' he said,
'Up to the fiery heavens.
We'll leave the earth behind.'

WOMAN 1: 'Please no!' he cried,
'My friend, my guide. Please -'

JOCASTA: I'll hear no more!
But even should this - unnatural - crime,
Have happened, as you say,
Why? What reason
Had Chyrisippus to die?

WOMAN 1: Afterwards -

WOMAN 2: For shame -

WOMAN 3: For shame -

WOMAN 1: He took his sword and fell on it,
So shame would die with him.

JOCASTA: You lie! You lie! You slander.
I should punish you with whips.
Go! Go! I will not see you.

WOMEN LEAVE.

How dare you prick my happiness
When it is so hard-won!
I did not want to be a queen.
To wed an unknown man.
But I have been obedient
And sacrificed and prayed.
I've sought advice from brother Creon,
Who is steady, rational, just,
Who understands the ways of men,
And things that I cannot.
King Laius, he is brutal,
But Creon says: 'Be still. In time the King will
moderate,
And then your time will come'.
But now - oh gentle Chyrisippus!
Attacked, betrayed, assaulted, by the man
you trusted most.
Dear gods have pity on your generous loving
soul!

ENTER KING LAIUS WITH A CRY OF ANGER
AND GRIEF.

LAIUS: Out of my way! He's dead! He's dead!
You cannot even mourn.
You twitter here, no tears, no grief.

JOCASTA: But - I loved him too.

LAIUS: King Pelops gave the boy to me
To learn the arts of war.
His aim was straight. He took the reins.
He could have been my son.
My son, my son! For you have none.
You are a withered bough.

JOCASTA: I'm young! There's time!

LAIUS: Chyrisippus! Chyrisippus!

JOCASTA: My one and only friend!

LAIUS: Oh yes -
I saw you lure him.
What was it that you did?

JOCASTA: We talked, we laughed -

LAIUS: You spun your wicked web.

JOCASTA: We women spun, we wove our cloth -

LAIUS: What stories did you spin?

JOCASTA: He was the one.
We women wove, he talked of -

LAIUS: You talked of me! You laughed at me!

JOCASTA: No, no!

LAIUS: You are the cause!
You caused his death!
I loved him - but he turned.
I tried to show him, but -
You! You...

HE GRABS HER.

JOCASTA: No! No! Please no!

LAIUS: You vicious asp! You poisoned him!
You killed my darling boy!

ENTER CREON.

CREON: What is this noise? My lord, all hear!

LAIUS: Ask your sister here.

LAIUS THROWS HER FROM HIM. CREON
HELPS HER UP.

CREON: Jocasta, what?

LAIUS: I'll tell you Creon!
She cannot bear.
She's shrivelled like a crone.

CREON: My lord she's young.

LAIUS: Two years married and no son.
The gods have cursed her womb.
Let's be divorced. Give out the word.

CREON: My lord, my lord! You act in haste.
Let me here be your guide.
The Oracle will tell us why,
What we must do - a prayer,
A supplication, is all we may require.
Teiresias - he's what we need!
Though blind, he sees it all.
I'll send for him. I'll do it now.

AS CREON LEAVES, HE SPEAKS TO
JOCASTA.

Do anything he says!

LAIUS: I'll have a son. You took my own.
I'll have a son. And now.

HE GRABS HER BY THE WRISTS AND
PULLS HER.

JOCASTA: My lord, not now. We mourn -
I wish it too, a birth -
But death's still acrid in the air -
Now is not -

LAIUS: You dare to question what I say!
Why do you think we're wed?
Your body is a spongy thing
But we must make an heir.
The gods decree -

JOCASTA: My lord, please no!

LAIUS HITS HER ACROSS THE FACE. HE
DRAGS HER TO THE BED.

LAIUS The gods know this is right.