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Dramatic Publishing

Jocasta

Comedy/Tragedy by Sandra Perlman



“Engages both the heart and the mind. ... There are times when laughter and sadness are in close juxtaposition.”

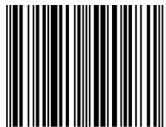
—*The Monterey Herald*

Jocasta

Comedy/Tragedy. By Sandra Perlman. Cast: 3w. *Jocasta* combines both comedy and tragedy in the story of three women—mother, daughter and servant—bound together by blood and loyalty. In this new twist on the Oedipus complex, we take a look at the myth from Jocasta’s complex point of view as a wife, devoted mother and conflicted daughter. On the night before Jocasta is to marry Oedipus, her mother, Ismene, arrives with a beautiful wedding gown. Ismene, a bawdy, hard-drinking tiger mom who loves being the mother of the queen, comes on a mission to convince Jocasta that being queen again will finally bring her happiness. And so begins a familiar mother-daughter dance. They drink wine and confess their sins in a night they will always remember—and we will never forget. Jocasta is hopeful, radiant and ready for the marriage bed one more time. Ten years later, children have been born, and Ismene is dead. Jocasta is consumed with the bitter reality that the Oracle’s predictions have been fulfilled. She will do anything to spare all of her children the shame she thinks is coming. Iris lives to make her queen happy. Saved from death, this young woman would lie, cheat or die for Jocasta. Now her maidservant must be her only witness and comfort. These are strong and complex women who struggle against their fate—and sometimes one another. But their love and devotion is the link that binds them together in life and death. “Jocasta ... has stepped out of the mythological shadows and taken center stage.” (*American Theatre* magazine) *One int. set. Approximate running time: 90 minutes. Code: J71.*

Cover: Cleveland Play House, Cleveland, featuring (l-r) Laura Perrotta and Catherine Albers. Photo: Roger Mastroianni. Cover design: Jeanette Alig-Sergel.

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Jocasta

By

Sandra Perlman



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Jocasta premiered at The Cleveland Play House Next Stage Festival of New Plays on March 6, 2001.

Cast:

Jocasta Laura Perrotta
Ismene Catherine Albers
Iris Erin Hurley

Crew:

Director Eric Schmiedl
Scene and Lighting Design Michael Roesch
Sound Design Richard Ingraham
Costume Design Charlotte Yetman
Stage Manager Karen J. Gornik

Jocasta

CHARACTERS

JOCASTA: Queen of Thebes.

ISMENE: Jocasta's mother.

IRIS: Jocasta's servant

The bedchamber of JOCASTA, the newly-widowed Queen of Thebes. It is the night before her marriage to Oedipus, the handsome young stranger who has come to save the city. Her bedroom is dominated by her bed and a large open window, There is a dressing screen and a table with all of her make-up. Another table overflows with fruits, bread, olives, water and wine. ISMENE, her estranged mother, has arrived to bring her comfort and her wedding gown.

JOCASTA. And how did you calculate our stranger?

ISMENE. Oedipus? Now, he was a surprise.

JOCASTA. So you didn't calculate everything?

ISMENE. No, I don't think even I could have imagined such a young and handsome man coming to our rescue.

JOCASTA. We don't know a thing about him.

ISMENE. He was smart enough to save Thebes and win you.

JOCASTA. Why should we trust him? He isn't even one of us.

ISMENE. Being king will make him more loyal than your own flesh and blood. You'll see.

JOCASTA. We don't even know why he came here.

ISMENE. Thebes is a great city.

JOCASTA. Why now?

ISMENE. Why not?

JOCASTA. He's a stranger.

ISMENE. They're all strangers until we get them into bed!
(Struggles not to smile or laugh.)

JOCASTA. You know something.

ISMENE. Me?

JOCASTA. What are you keeping from me, Mother? Tell me what you know.

ISMENE. I know nothing.

JOCASTA. You're lying.

ISMENE. No, I'm not. *(Giggles.)*

JOCASTA. You could never lie without laughing.

ISMENE. I lied to your father for years without laughing.

JOCASTA. Fine. As usual, you're right and I'm wrong. *(Returns to putting on some makeup.)*

ISMENE *(pause)*. I was walking in the garden today. I heard a voice singing. You can imagine how surprised I was to find it was the voice of your husband-to-be.

JOCASTA. Oedipus?

ISMENE. I caught him by surprise down by the—

JOCASTA (*interrupting*). No! Not one more word.

ISMENE. But it was an accident.

JOCASTA. I don't want to know how you found him—or what he was doing or who he was doing it with!

ISMENE. You're wrong, Jocasta, this was a happy accident.

JOCASTA. There are no "accidents" with you. And I'll decide if it was happy.

ISMENE. I told you I was walking in the garden when I heard someone singing. I followed the voice to the baths and there he was.

JOCASTA. You spied on him bathing.

ISMENE. I didn't know he would be there naked.

JOCASTA. He was naked?

ISMENE. Completely. And looking quite ready for marriage.

JOCASTA. I can't believe this. You have no shame.

ISMENE. I swear I didn't know I would find him there. Naked.

JOCASTA. Now my husband will come to our wedding thinking I've sent my own mother to spy on him!

ISMENE. I was very well hidden, while he was quite exposed. And let me tell you, my dear daughter, he has a very lovely singing voice. Ah-ahhhhhhhh.

(ISMENE dances up to JOCASTA very suggestively.)

JOCASTA. Stop this.

ISMENE. Ahhhhhhhh. (*Continues to provoke her.*)

JOCASTA. Stop this now before you ruin everything!

ISMENE. I'm sorry.

JOCASTA. You're not sorry.

ISMENE. I'm happy for you. Really. Jocasta, you must believe that all I've ever wanted was your happiness.

JOCASTA (*pause*). You're sure he didn't see you?

ISMENE. He never saw me.

JOCASTA. And you think this man's—song—can make me happy?

ISMENE. From what I've heard, you have nothing to worry about.

JOCASTA. Because tomorrow I want him to sing as long and as loudly as he wishes.

(JOCASTA makes some very suggestive moves back to ISMENE.)

ISMENE. Oh Jocasta, you are my daughter!

JOCASTA. But that's the last accident you'll have while I'm queen.

ISMENE. I promise. (*Pause.*) I've watched you. Seen your face when Oedipus comes into a room. You don't turn away.

JOCASTA. No.

ISMENE. Then you do find his face pleasant?

JOCASTA. Yes, I admit his face is very pleasant, almost familiar.

ISMENE. Then you are looking forward to this marriage tomorrow?

JOCASTA. I am looking forward to this marriage.

ISMENE. Good! Then everything's settled. You really should try these figs. I ordered them specially for this evening. I'm told they have wonderful effects on the one who eats them and the one who sleeps with the one who eats them. (*Laughing and eating.*)

JOCASTA. Look at you. So pleased with yourself. I unburden my soul and you talk of figs and figs.

ISMENE. When I'm happy, I'm hungry. And I'm very hungry. Eat.

JOCASTA. I couldn't swallow a thing.

ISMENE (*pacing around the room, moving things*). I was thinking, if we just moved a few things around, it might make the whole room a lot more dramatic. You'll see what I mean. With the window up here and the bed down there, if you moved up here—oh, yes, yes, yes, that's it! When Oedipus first comes into the room, down there, you should appear up here, so the moonlight can silhouette your naked body against the bedroom wall. Absolutely. I can see it now.

JOCASTA. This is my bedroom, Mother, not a theatre.

ISMENE. No, no, no, you're wrong, Jocasta. This is where the most important plays of our lives take place. Right here. Yes, you should definitely think about standing right there.

JOCASTA. Are you trying to manage my wedding night?

ISMENE. I'm trying to give you power in the only place we have it. Our men may start a war out there, but when they come in here, they bring us flowers and perfume. They lower their voice and soften their touch. They whisper sweet words in our ears, trying to convince us to give them the one thing they don't have—the power to make life.

JOCASTA. That's not what happened in this bedroom the first time, Mother, but then you weren't here.

ISMENE. Oh, Jocasta, I've made you angry.

(JOCASTA turns away as ISMENE goes to bring out the wedding dress that she's been hiding.)

ISMENE (*cont'd*). Here's your wedding dress. I hope you like it.

JOCASTA. I don't know what to say.

ISMENE. Yes, you do.

JOCASTA. I've never seen anything like it.

ISMENE. And you never will. I made them swear they'd never make another one.

JOCASTA. So elegant and simple. Poetry.

ISMENE. Put it on.

JOCASTA. Now?

ISMENE. Please, try it on just for me.

JOCASTA. All right.

ISMENE. Go behind that screen and return as a goddess. Take as long as you need. You said we have the whole night.

(JOCASTA goes behind the dressing screen, and ISMENE pours a cup of wine as she begins to carry on a two-way conversation with herself.)

ISMENE *(cont'd)*. More wine? Why, thank you, I'd love some—though my daughter probably thinks I drink too much already. It just puts me in a better humor, really. No one likes me sober. Come to think of it, I don't like me sober.

JOCASTA. Who are you talking to out there? Did someone come in?

ISMENE. Oh, no, don't worry, I'm just talking to myself. I do it all the time. I tell myself wonderful stories, which I find very witty and clever. *(Dramatically.)* "As I kissed Agathon, my soul swelled to my lips ... His lips swelled to my hips, and on and on we swelled till the lips met the hips." You know, I really am my best audience.

JOCASTA. That's not true. I remember you and Father having long conversations.

ISMENE. They just seemed long. Believe me, time is totally different when you're a child.

JOCASTA. I do remember. You both would be talking and laughing together for hours.

ISMENE. You're right. Your father actually liked my stories. We did laugh, and I always had the last word. You should have seen his face. Just when he thought the conversation was over, I'd launch into another one until he would throw up his hands and plead with me to follow him to bed where we would have the most incredible—the most delicious—

JOCASTA. That's quite enough, Mother.

ISMENE. I'd forgotten how I always embarrass you. But it's true, I never could refuse him anything. I never wanted to. Then we'd both end up laughing and singing. Oh, yes, you're right, there were good times. Do you need any help? I feel so useless just standing here drinking. I hope that dress isn't too hard to get out of.

JOCASTA. Be patient.

ISMENE. I never had patience. You got that from your father along with his thick hair and thin waist. I don't remember having such a wonderful evening the last time you married? And I certainly don't remember drinking, which was probably a big mistake.

(JOCASTA comes out in the bridal gown. She looks absolutely radiant.)

ISMENE *(cont'd)*. But this is not a mistake.

JOCASTA. Tell me the truth.

ISMENE. The truth is you need one more thing.

JOCASTA. Where are you going now? Mother!

ISMENE. Don't move.

(ISMENE retrieves the veil and carries it to JOCASTA.)

ISMENE *(cont'd)*. This veil is from my own wedding to your father. I swear I never wore it to any of the others. I don't

know why I didn't give it to you before. Something old and something new. I love ceremonies. The magic. The promise of better things.

(ISMENE places the veil on JOCASTA's head.)

ISMENE *(cont'd)*. Now you are perfection.