

THE TROJAN WOMEN

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### CHARACTERS

*Poseidon*

*Athene*

*Hecuba*

*Talthybius*

*Cassandra*

*Andromache*

*Astyanax*

*Menelaus*

*Helen*

*Chorus of Trojan women*

**SCENE:** *The action takes place shortly after the capture of Troy. All Trojan men have been killed, or have fled; all women and children are captives. The scene is an open space before the city, which is visible in the background, partly demolished and smoldering. Against the walls are tents, or huts, which temporarily house the captive women. The entrance of the Chorus is made, in two separate groups which subsequently unite, from these buildings, as are those of Cassandra and Helen. The entrances of Talthybius, Andromache, and Menelaus are made from the wings. It is imaginable that the gods are made to appear high up, above the level of the other actors, as if near their own temples on the Citadel. As the play opens, Hecuba is prostrate on the ground (it is understood that she hears nothing of what the gods say).*

*(Enter Poseidon.)*

*Poseidon*

I am Poseidon. I come from the Aegean depths  
of the sea beneath whose waters Nereid choirs evolve  
the intricate bright circle of their dancing feet.  
For since that day when Phoebus Apollo and I laid down  
on Trojan soil the close of these stone walls, drawn true  
and straight, there has always been affection in my heart  
unfading, for these Phrygians and for their city;  
which smolders now, fallen before the Argive spears,  
ruined, sacked, gutted. Such is Athene's work, and his,  
the Parnassian, Epeius of Phocis, architect  
and builder of the horse that swarmed with inward steel,  
that fatal bulk which passed within the battlements,  
whose fame hereafter shall be loud among men unborn,  
the Wooden Horse, which hid the secret spears within.  
Now the gods' groves are desolate, their thrones of power  
blood-spattered where beside the lift of the altar steps  
of Zeus Defender, Priam was cut down and died.

5

10

15

The ships of the Achaeans load with spoils of Troy  
now, the piled gold of Phrygia. And the men of Greece  
who made this expedition and took the city, stay  
only for the favoring stern-wind now to greet their wives  
and children after ten years' harvests wasted here.

The will of Argive Hera and Athene won  
its way against my will. Between them they broke Troy.  
So I must leave my altars and great Ilium,  
since once a city sinks into sad desolation  
the gods' state sickens also, and their worship fades.  
Scamander's valley echoes to the wail of slaves,  
the captive women given to their masters now,  
some to Arcadia or the men of Thessaly  
assigned, or to the lords of Athens, Theseus' strain;  
while all the women of Troy yet unassigned are here  
beneath the shelter of these walls, chosen to wait  
the will of princes, and among them Tyndareus' child  
Helen of Sparta, named—with right—a captive slave.

Nearby, beside the gates, for any to look upon  
who has the heart, she lies face upward, Hecuba  
weeping for multitudes her multitude of tears.  
Polyxena, one daughter, even now was killed  
in secrecy and pain beside Achilles' tomb.  
Priam is gone, their children dead; one girl is left,  
Cassandra, reeling crazed at King Apollo's stroke,  
whom Agamemnon, in despite of the gods' will  
and all religion, will lead by force to his secret bed.

O city, long ago a happy place, good-bye;  
good-bye, hewn bastions. Pallas, child of Zeus, did this.  
But for her hatred, you might stand strong-founded still.

(Athene enters.)

Athene

August among the gods, O vast divinity,  
closest in kinship to the father of all, may one  
who quarreled with you in the past make peace, and speak?

Poseidon

You may, lady Athene; for the strands of kinship  
close drawn work no weak magic to enchant the mind.

Athene

I thank you for your gentleness, and bring you now  
questions whose issue touches you and me, my lord.

Poseidon

Is this the annunciation of some new word spoken  
by Zeus, or any other of the divinities?

Athene

No; but for Troy's sake, on whose ground we stand, I come  
to win the favor of your power, and an ally.

Poseidon

You hated Troy once; did you throw your hate away  
and change to pity now its walls are black with fire?

Athene

Come back to the question. Will you take counsel with me  
and help me gladly in all that I would bring to pass?

Poseidon

I will indeed; but tell me what you wish to do.  
Are you here for the Achaeans' or the Phrygians' sake?

Athene

For the Trojans, whom I hated this short time since,  
to make the Achaeans' homecoming a thing of sorrow.

Poseidon

This is a springing change of sympathy. Why must  
you hate too hard, and love too hard, your loves and hates?

Athene

Did you not know they outraged my temple, and shamed me?

Poseidon

I know that Ajax dragged Cassandra there by force.

Athene

And the Achaeans did nothing. They did not even speak.

*Poseidon*

Yet Ilium was taken by your strength alone.

*Athene*

True; therefore help me. I would do some evil to them.

*Poseidon*

I am ready for anything you ask. What will you do?

*Athene*

Make the home voyage a most unhappy coming home.

75

*Poseidon*

While they stay here ashore, or out on the deep sea?

*Athene*

When they take ship from Ilium and set sail for home  
 Zeus will shower down his rainstorms and the weariless beat  
 of hail, to make black the bright air with roaring winds.  
 He has promised my hand the gift of the blazing thunderbolt  
 to dash and overwhelm with fire the Achaean ships.  
 Yours is your own domain, the Aegaeon crossing. Make  
 the sea thunder to the tripled wave and spinning surf,  
 cram thick the hollow Euboean fold with floating dead;  
 so after this Greeks may learn how to use with fear  
 my sacred places, and respect all gods beside.

80

85

*Poseidon*

This shall be done, and joyfully. It needs no long  
 discourse to tell you. I will shake the Aegaeon Sea.  
 Myconos' nesses and the swine-back reefs of Delos,  
 the Capherean promontories, Scyros, Lemnos  
 shall take the washed up bodies of men drowned at sea.  
 Back to Olympus now, gather the thunderbolts  
 from your father's hands, then take your watcher's post, to wait  
 the chance, when the Achaean fleet puts out to sea.

90

That mortal who sacks fallen cities is a fool,  
 who gives the temples and the tombs, the hallowed places  
 of the dead to desolation. His own turn must come.

95

(*The gods leave the stage. Hecuba seems to waken, and  
 gets slowly to her feet as she speaks.*)

*Hecuba*

Rise, stricken head, from the dust;  
 lift up the throat. This is Troy, but Troy  
 and we, Troy's kings, are perished.

100

Stoop to the changing fortune.  
 Steer for the crossing and the death-god,  
 hold not life's prow on the course against  
 wave beat and accident.

Ah me,  
 what need I further for tears' occasion,  
 state perished, my sons, and my husband?  
 O massive pride that my fathers heaped  
 to magnificence, you meant nothing.  
 Must I be hushed? Were it better thus?  
 Should I cry a lament?

105

110

Unhappy, accursed,  
 limbs cramped, I lie  
 backed on earth's stiff bed.

O head, O temples  
 and sides; sweet, to shift,  
 let the tired spine rest  
 weight eased by the sides alternate,  
 against the strain of the tears' song  
 where the stricken people find music yet  
 in the song undanced of their wretchedness.

115

120

You ships' prows, that the fugitive  
 oars swept back to blessed Ilium  
 over the sea's blue water  
 by the placid harbors of Hellas  
 to the flute's grim beat  
 and the swing of the shrill boat whistles;  
 you made the crossing, made fast ashore  
 the Egyptians' skill, the sea cables,  
 alas, by the coasts of Troy;

125

130

it was you, ships, that carried the fatal bride  
of Menelaus, Castor her brother's shame,  
the stain on the Eurotas.

Now she has killed  
the sire of the fifty sons,  
Priam; me, unhappy Hecuba,  
she drove on this reef of ruin.

Such state I keep  
to sit by the tents of Agamemnon.  
I am led captive  
from my house, an old, unhappy woman,  
like my city ruined and pitiful.  
Come then, sad wives of the Trojans  
whose spears were bronze,  
their daughters, brides of disaster,  
let us mourn the smoke of Ilium.  
And I, as among winged birds  
the mother, lead out  
the clashing cry, the song; not that song  
wherein once long ago,  
when I held the scepter of Priam,  
my feet were queens of the choir and led  
the proud dance to the gods of Phrygia.

*(The First Half-chorus comes out of the shelter  
at the back.)*

*First Half-chorus*

Hecuba, what are these cries?  
What news now? For through the walls  
I heard your pitiful weeping,  
and fear shivered in the breasts  
of the Trojan women, who within  
sob out the day of their slavery.

*Hecuba*

My children, the ships of the Argives  
will move today. The hand is at the oar.

*First Half-chorus*

They will? Why? Must I take ship  
so soon from the land of my fathers?

*Hecuba*

I know nothing. I look for disaster.

*First Half-chorus*

Alas!

Poor women of Troy, torn from your homes,  
bent to forced hard work.  
The Argives push for home.

*Hecuba*

Oh,  
let her not come forth,  
not now, my child  
Cassandra, driven delirious  
to shame us before the Argives;  
not the mad one, to bring fresh pain to my pain.  
Ah no.  
Troy, ill-starred Troy, this is the end;  
your last sad people leave you now,  
still alive, and broken.

*(The Second Half-chorus comes out of the shelter  
at the back.)*

*Second Half-chorus*

Ah me. Shivering, I left the tents  
of Agamemnon to listen.  
Tell us, our queen. Did the Argive council  
decree our death?  
Or are the seamen manning the ships now,  
oars ready for action?

*Hecuba*

My child, do not fear so. Lighten your heart.  
But I go stunned with terror.

*Second Half-chorus*

Has a herald come from the Danaans yet?  
Whose wretched slave shall I be ordained?

185

*Hecuba*

You are near the lot now.

*Second Half-chorus*

Alas!  
Who will lead me away? An Argive?  
To an island home? To Phthiotis?  
Unhappy, surely, and far from Troy.

*Hecuba*

And I,  
whose wretched slave  
shall I be? Where, in my gray age,  
a faint drone,  
poor image of a corpse,  
weak shining among dead men? Shall  
I stand and keep guard at their doors,  
shall I nurse their children, I who in Troy  
held state as a princess?

190

195

*(The two half-choruses now unite to form a  
single Chorus.)*

*Chorus*

So pitiful, so pitiful  
your shame and your lamentation.  
No longer shall I move the shifting pace  
of the shuttle at the looms of Ida.  
I shall look no more on the bodies of my sons.  
No more. Shall I be a drudge besides  
or be forced to the bed of Greek masters?  
Night is a queen, but I curse her.  
Must I draw the water of Pirene,  
a servant at sacred springs?  
Might I only be taken to Athens, domain  
of Theseus, the bright, the blessed!

200

205

Never to the whirl of Eurotas, not Sparta  
detested, who gave us Helen,  
not look with slave's eyes on the scourge  
of Troy, Menelaus.

210

I have heard the rumor  
of the hallowed ground by Peneus,  
bright doorstone of Olympus,  
deep burdened in beauty of flower and harvest.  
There would I be next after the blessed,  
the sacrosanct hold of Theseus.

215

And they say that the land of Aetna,  
the Fire God's keep against Punic men,  
mother of Sicilian mountains, sounds  
in the herald's cry for games' garlands;  
and the land washed

220

by the streaming Ionian Sea,  
that land watered by the loveliest  
of rivers, Crathis, with the red-gold tresses  
who draws from the depths of enchanted wells  
blessings on a strong people.

225

See now, from the host of the Danaans  
the herald, charged with new orders, takes  
the speed of his way toward us.

230

What message? What command? Since we count as slaves  
even now in the Dorian kingdom.

*(Talthybius enters, followed by a detail of  
armed soldiers.)*

*Talthybius*

Hecuba, incessantly my ways have led me to Troy  
as the messenger of all the Achaean armament.  
You know me from the old days, my lady; I am sent,  
Talthybius, with new messages for you to hear.

235

*Hecuba*

It comes, beloved daughters of Troy; the thing I feared.

*Talthybius*  
 You are all given your masters now. Was this your dread? 240

*Hecuba*  
 Ah, yes. Is it Phthia, then? A city of Thessaly?  
 Tell me. The land of Cadmus?

*Talthybius*  
 All are allotted separately, each to a man.

*Hecuba*  
 Who is given to whom? Oh, is there any hope  
 left for the women of Troy? 245

*Talthybius*  
 I understand. Yet ask not for all, but for each apart.

*Hecuba*  
 Who was given my child? Tell me, who shall be lord  
 of my poor abused Cassandra?

*Talthybius*  
 King Agamemnon chose her. She was given to him.

*Hecuba*  
 Slave woman to that Lacedaemonian wife?  
 My unhappy child! 250

*Talthybius*  
 No. Rather to be joined with him in the dark bed of love.

*Hecuba*  
 She, Apollo's virgin, blessed in the privilege  
 the gold-haired god gave her, a life forever unwed?

*Talthybius*  
 Love's archery and the prophetic maiden struck him hard. 255

*Hecuba*  
 Dash down, my daughter,  
 the keys of your consecration,  
 break the god's garlands to your throat gathered.

*Talthybius*  
 Is it not high favor to be brought to a king's bed?

*Hecuba*  
 My poor youngest, why did you take her away from me? 260

*Talthybius*  
 You spoke now of Polyxena. Is it not so?

*Hecuba*  
 To whose arms did the lot force her?

*Talthybius*  
 She is given a guardianship, to keep Achilles' tomb.

*Hecuba*  
 To watch, my child? Over a tomb? 265  
 Tell me, is this their way,  
 some law, friend, established among the Greeks?

*Talthybius*  
 Speak of your child in words of blessing. She feels no pain.

*Hecuba*  
 What did that mean? Does she live in the sunlight still?

*Talthybius*  
 She lives her destiny, and her cares are over now. 270

*Hecuba*  
 The wife of bronze-embattled Hector: tell me of her,  
 Andromache the forlorn. What shall she suffer now?

*Talthybius*  
 The son of Achilles chose her. She was given to him.

*Hecuba*  
 And I, my aged strength crutched for support on staves, 275  
 whom shall I serve?

*Talthybius*  
 You shall be slave to Odysseus, lord of Ithaca.

*Hecuba*  
 Oh no, no!  
 Tear the shorn head,  
 rip nails through the folded cheeks. 280

Must I?

To be given as slave to serve that vile, that slippery man,  
right's enemy, brute, murderous beast,  
that mouth of lies and treachery, that makes void  
faith in things promised  
and that which was beloved turns to hate. Oh, mourn,  
daughters of Ilium, weep as one for me.  
I am gone, doomed, undone,  
O wretched, given  
the worst lot of all.

285

290

*Chorus*

I know your destiny now, Queen Hecuba. But mine?  
What Hellene, what Achaean is my master now?

*Talthybius*

Men-at-arms, do your duty. Bring Cassandra forth  
without delay. Our orders are to deliver her  
to the general at once. And afterwards we can bring  
to the rest of the princes their allotted captive women.  
But see! What is that burst of a torch flame inside?  
What can it mean? Are the Trojan women setting fire  
to their chambers, at point of being torn from their land  
to sail for Argos? Have they set themselves aflame  
in longing for death? I know it is the way of freedom  
in times like these to stiffen the neck against disaster.  
Open, there, open; let not the fate desired by these,  
dreaded by the Achaeans, hurl their wrath on me.

295

300

305

*Hecuba*

You are wrong, there is no fire there. It is my Cassandra  
whirled out on running feet in the passion of her frenzy.

*(Cassandra, carrying a flaming torch, bursts  
from the shelter.)*

*Cassandra*

Lift up, heave up; carry the flame; I bring fire of worship,  
torches to the temple.  
Io, Hymen, my lord. Hymenaeus.

310

Blessed the bridegroom.

Blessed am I indeed to lie at a king's side,  
blessed the bride of Argos.

Hymen, my lord, Hymenaeus.

Yours were the tears, my mother,  
yours was the lamentation for my father fallen,  
for your city so dear beloved,  
but mine this marriage, my marriage,  
and I shake out the torch-flare,  
brightness, dazzle,  
light for you, Hymenaeus,  
Hecate, light for you,  
for the bed of virginity as man's custom ordains.

315

320

Let your feet dance, rippling the air; let go the chorus,  
as when my father's  
fate went in blessedness.

325

O sacred circle of dance.

Lead now, Phoebos Apollo; I wear your laurel,  
I tend your temple,  
Hymen, O Hymenaeus.

330

Dance, Mother, dance, laugh; lead; let your feet  
wind in the shifting pattern and follow mine,  
keep the sweet step with me,  
cry out the name Hymenaeus  
and the bride's name in the shrill  
and the blessed incantation.

335

O you daughters of Phrygia robed in splendor,  
dance for my wedding,  
for the lord fate appointed to lie beside me.

340

*Chorus*

Can you not, Queen Hecuba, stop this bacchanal before  
her light feet whirl her away into the Argive camp?

*Hecuba*

Fire God, in mortal marriages you lift up your torch,  
but here you throw a melancholy light, not seen

through my hopes that went so high in days gone past. O  
child,

there was a time I dreamed you would not wed like this,  
not at the spear's edge, not under force of Argive arms.  
Let me take the light; crazed, passionate, you cannot carry  
it straight enough, poor child. Your fate is intemperate  
as you are, always. There is no relief for you.

*(Attendants come from the shelter. Hecuba gently takes the  
torch from Cassandra and gives  
it to them to carry away.)*

You Trojan women, take the torch inside, and change  
to songs of tears this poor girl's marriage melodies.

*Cassandra*

O Mother, star my hair with flowers of victory.  
I know you would not have it happen thus; and yet  
this is a king I marry; then be glad; escort  
the bride. Oh, thrust her strongly on. If Loxias  
is Loxias still, the Achaeans' pride, great Agamemnon  
has won a wife more fatal than ever Helen was.  
Since I will kill him; and avenge my brothers' blood  
and my father's in the desolation of his house.  
But I leave this in silence and sing not now the ax  
to drop against my throat and other throats than mine,  
the agony of the mother murdered, brought to pass  
from our marriage rites, and Atreus' house made desolate.  
I am ridden by God's curse still, yet I will step so far  
out of my frenzy as to show this city's fate  
is blessed beside the Achaeans'. For one woman's sake,  
one act of love, these hunted Helen down and threw  
thousands of lives away. Their general—clever man—  
in the name of a vile woman cut his darling down,  
gave up for a brother the sweetness of children in his house,  
all to bring back that brother's wife, a woman who went  
of her free will, not caught in constraint of violence.  
The Achaeans came beside Scamander's banks, and died

day after day, though none sought to wrench their land from  
them

nor their own towering cities. Those the War God caught  
never saw their sons again, nor were they laid to rest  
decently in winding sheets by their wives' hands, but lie  
buried in alien ground; while all went wrong at home  
as the widows perished, and barren couples raised and nursed  
the children of others, no survivor left to tend  
the tombs, and what is left there, with blood sacrificed.  
For such success as this congratulate the Greeks.

No, but the shame is better left in silence, for fear  
my singing voice become the voice of wretchedness.

The Trojans have that glory which is loveliest:  
they died for their own country. So the bodies of all  
who took the spears were carried home in loving hands,  
brought, in the land of their fathers, to the embrace of earth  
and buried becomingly as the rite fell due. The rest,  
those Phrygians who escaped death in battle, day by day  
came home to happiness the Achaeans could not know;  
their wives, their children. Then was Hector's fate so sad?  
You think so. Listen to the truth. He is dead and gone  
surely, but with reputation, as a valiant man.

How could this be, except for the Achaeans' coming?  
Had they held back, none might have known how great he  
was.

The bride of Paris was the daughter of Zeus. Had he  
not married her, fame in our house would sleep in silence still.  
Though surely the wise man will forever shrink from war,  
yet if war come, the hero's death will lay a wreath  
not lustreless on the city. The coward alone brings shame.  
Let no more tears fall, Mother, for our land, nor for  
this marriage I make; it is by marriage that I bring  
to destruction those whom you and I have hated most.

*Chorus*

You smile on your disasters. Can it be that you  
some day will illuminate the darkness of this song?

*Talthybius*

Were it not Apollo who has driven wild your wits  
 I would make you sorry for sending the princes of our host  
 on their way home in augury of foul speech like this. 410  
 Now pride of majesty and wisdom's outward show  
 have fallen to stature less than what was nothing worth  
 since he, almighty prince of the assembled Hellenes,  
 Atreus' son beloved, has stooped—by his own will—  
 to find his love in a crazed girl. I, a plain man, 415  
 would not marry this woman or keep her as my slave.  
 You then, with your wits unhinged by idiocy,  
 your scolding of Argos and your Trojans glorified  
 I throw to the winds to scatter them. Come now with me  
 to the ships, a bride—and such a bride—for Agamemnon. 420  
 Hecuba, when Laertes' son calls you, be sure  
 you follow; if what all say who came to Ilium  
 is true, at the worst you will be a good woman's slave.

*Cassandra*

That servant is a vile thing. Oh, how can heralds keep  
 their name of honor? Lackeys for despots be they, or  
 lackeys to the people, all men must despise them still. 425  
 You tell me that my mother must be slave in the house  
 of Odysseus? Where are all Apollo's promises  
 uttered to me, to my own ears, that Hecuba  
 should die in Troy? Odysseus I will curse no more,  
 poor wretch, who little dreams of what he must go through 430  
 when he will think Troy's pain and mine were golden grace  
 beside his own luck. Ten years he spent here, and ten  
 more years will follow before he at last comes home, forlorn  
 after the terror of the rock and the thin strait,  
 Charybdis; and the mountain striding Cyclops, who eats  
 men's flesh; the Ligyan witch who changes men to swine,  
 Circe; the wreck of all his ships on the salt sea,  
 the lotus passion, the sacred oxen of the Sun 435

slaughtered, and dead flesh moaning into speech, to make  
 Odysseus listening shiver. Cut the story short: 440  
 he will go down to the water of death, and return alive  
 to reach home and the thousand sorrows waiting there.  
 Why must I transfix each of Odysseus' labors one by one?  
 Lead the way quick to the house of death where I shall  
 take my mate. 445  
 Lord of all the sons of Danaus, haughty in your mind of pride,  
 not by day, but evil in the evil night you shall find your grave  
 when I lie corpse-cold and naked next my husband's sepulcher,  
 piled in the ditch for animals to rip and feed on, beaten by  
 streaming storms of winter, I who wore Apollo's sacraments. 450  
 Garlands of the god I loved so well, the spirit's dress of pride,  
 leave me, as I leave those festivals where once I was so gay.  
 See, I tear your adornments from my skin not yet defiled by  
 touch,  
 throw them to the running winds to scatter, O lord of prophecy,  
 Where is this general's ship, then? Lead me where I must set my  
 feet on board. 455  
 Wait the wind of favor in the sails; yet when the ship goes out  
 from this shore, she carries one of the three Furies in my shape.  
 Land of my ancestors, good-bye; O Mother, weep no more for  
 me.  
 You beneath the ground, my brothers, Priam, father of us all,  
 I will be with you soon and come triumphant to the dead below, 460  
 leaving behind me, wrecked, the house of Atreus, which de-  
 stroyed our house.

*(Cassandra is taken away by Talthybius and his soldiers.  
 Hecuba collapses.)*

*Chorus*

Handmaids of aged Hecuba, can you not see  
 how your mistress, powerless to cry out, lies prone? Oh, take  
 her hand and help her to her feet, you wretched maids.  
 Will you let an aged helpless woman lie so long? 465

*Hecuba*

No. Let me lie where I have fallen. Kind acts, my maids,  
 must be unkind, unwanted. All that I endure  
 and have endured and shall, deserves to strike me down.  
 O gods! What wretched things to call on—gods!—for help  
 although the decorous action is to invoke their aid  
 when all our hands lay hold on is unhappiness.  
 No. It is my pleasure first to tell good fortune's tale,  
 to cast its count more sadly against disasters now.  
 I was a princess, who was once a prince's bride,  
 mother by him of sons pre-eminent, beyond  
 the mere numbers of them, lords of the Phrygian domain,  
 such sons for pride to point to as no woman of Troy,  
 no Hellene, none in the outlander's wide world might match.  
 And then I saw them fall before the spears of Greece,  
 and cut this hair for them, and laid it on their graves.  
 I mourned their father, Priam. None told me the tale  
 of his death. I saw it, with these eyes. I stood to watch  
 his throat cut, next the altar of the protecting god.  
 I saw my city taken. And the girls I nursed,  
 choice flowers to wear the pride of any husband's eyes,  
 matured to be dragged by hands of strangers from my arms.  
 There is no hope left that they will ever see me more,  
 no hope that I shall ever look on them again.  
 There is one more stone to key this arch of wretchedness:  
 I must be carried away to Hellas now, an old  
 slave woman, where all those tasks that wrack old age shall be  
 given me by my masters. I must work the bolt  
 that bars their doorway, I whose son was Hector once;  
 or bake their bread; lay down these withered limbs to sleep  
 on the bare ground, whose bed was royal once; abuse  
 this skin once delicate the slattern's way, exposed  
 through robes whose rags will mock my luxury of long since.  
 Unhappy, O unhappy. And all this came to pass  
 and shall be, for the way one woman chose a man.  
 Cassandra, O Daughter, whose excitements were the god's,

470

475

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485

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495

500

you have paid for your consecration now; at what a price!  
 And you, my poor Polyxena, where are you now?  
 Not here, nor any boy or girl of mine, who were  
 so many once, is near me in my unhappiness.  
 And you would lift me from the ground? What hope? What use?  
 Guide these feet long ago so delicate in Troy,  
 a slave's feet now, to the straw sacks laid on the ground  
 and the piled stones; let me lay down my head and die  
 in an exhaustion of tears. Of all who walk in bliss  
 call not one happy yet, until the man is dead.

505

510

*(Hecuba, after being led to the back of the stage, flings herself  
 to the ground once more.)*

*Chorus*

Voice of singing, stay  
 with me now, for Ilium's sake;  
 take up the burden of tears,  
 the song of sorrow;  
 the dirge for Troy's death  
 must be chanted;  
 the tale of my captivity  
 by the wheeled stride of the four-foot beast of the Argives,  
 the horse they left in the gates,  
 thin gold at its brows,  
 inward, the spears' high thunder.  
 Our people thronging  
 the rock of Troy let go the great cry:  
 "The war is over! Go down,  
 bring back the idol's enchanted wood  
 to the Maiden of Ilium, Zeus' daughter."  
 Who stayed then? Not one girl, not one  
 old man, in their houses,  
 but singing for happiness  
 let the lurking death in.  
 And the generation of Troy  
 swept solid to the gates

515

520

525

530

to give the goddess  
 her pleasure: the colt immortal, unbroken,  
 the nest of Argive spears,  
 death for the children of Dardanus  
 sealed in the sleek hill pine chamber.  
 In the sling of the flax twist shipwise  
 they berthed the black hull  
 in the house of Pallas Athene  
 stone paved, washed now in the blood of our people.  
 Strong, gay work  
 deep into black night  
 to the stroke of the Libyan lute  
 and all Troy singing, and girls'  
 light feet pulsing the air  
 in the kind dance measures;  
 indoors, lights everywhere,  
 torchflares on black  
 to forbid sleep's onset.  
 I was there also: in the great room  
 I danced the maiden of the mountains,  
 Artemis, Zeus' daughter.  
 When the cry went up, sudden,  
 bloodshot, up and down the city, to stun  
 the keep of the citadel. Children  
 reached shivering hands to clutch  
 at the mother's dress.  
 War stalked from his hiding place.  
 Pallas did this.  
 Beside their altars the Trojans  
 died in their blood. Desolate now,  
 men murdered, our sleeping rooms gave up  
 their brides' beauty  
 to breed sons for Greek men,  
 sorrow for our own country.

535

540

545

550

555

560

565

(A wagon comes on the stage. It is heaped with a number of  
 spoils of war, in the midst of which sits Andromache  
 holding Astyanax. While the chorus continues  
 speaking, Hecuba rises once more.)

Hecuba look, I see her, rapt  
 to the alien wagon, Andromache,  
 close to whose beating breast clings  
 the boy Astyanax, Hector's sweet child.  
 O carried away—to what land?—unhappy woman,  
 on the wagon floor, with the brazen arms  
 of Hector, of Troy  
 captive and heaped beside you,  
 torn now from Troy, for Achilles' son  
 to hang in the shrines of Phthia.

570

575

*Andromache*

I am in the hands of Greek masters.

*Hecuba*

Alas!

*Andromache*

Must the incantation

*Hecuba*

(ah me!)

*Andromache*

of my own grief win tears from you?

*Hecuba*

It must—O Zeus!

*Andromache*

My own distress?

580

*Hecuba*

O my children

*Andromache*

once. No longer.

*Hecuba*

Lost, lost, Troy our dominion

*Andromache*  
unhappy

*Hecuba*  
and my lordly children.

*Andromache*  
Gone, alas!

*Hecuba*  
They were mine.

*Andromache*  
Sorrows only.

*Hecuba*  
Sad destiny 585

*Andromache*  
of our city

*Hecuba*  
a wreck, and burning.

*Andromache*  
Come back, O my husband.

*Hecuba*  
Poor child, you invoke  
a dead man; my son once

*Andromache*  
my defender. 590

*Hecuba*  
And you, whose death shamed the Achaeans,

*Andromache*  
lord of us all once,  
O patriarch, Priam,

*Hecuba*  
take me to my death now.

*Andromache*  
Longing for death drives deep;

*Hecuba*  
O sorrowful, such is our fortune; 595

*Andromache*  
lost our city

*Hecuba*  
and our pain lies deep under pain piled over.

*Andromache*  
We are the hated of God, since once your youngest escaping  
death, brought down Troy's towers in the arms of a worthless  
woman,  
piling at the feet of Pallas the bleeding bodies of our young men  
sprawled, kites' food, while Troy takes up the yoke of captivity. 600

*Hecuba*  
O my city, my city forlorn

*Andromache*  
abandoned, I weep this

*Hecuba*  
miserable last hour

*Andromache*  
of the house where I bore my children.

*Hecuba*  
O my sons, this city and your mother are desolate of you.  
Sound of lamentation and sorrow,  
tears on tears shed. Home, farewell, since the dead have forgotten 605  
all sorrows, and weep no longer.

*Chorus*  
They who are sad find somehow sweetness in tears, the song  
of lamentation and the melancholy Muse.

*Andromache*  
Hecuba, mother of the man whose spear was death 610  
to the Argives, Hector: do you see what they have done to us?

*Hecuba*  
I see the work of gods who pile tower-high the pride  
of those who were nothing, and dash present grandeur down.

*Andromache*

We are carried away, sad spoils, my boy and I; our life transformed, as the aristocrat becomes the serf.

615

*Hecuba*

Such is the terror of necessity. I lost  
Cassandra, roughly torn from my arms before you came.

*Andromache*

Another Ajax to haunt your daughter? Some such thing it must be. Yet you have lost still more than you yet know.

*Hecuba*

There is no numbering my losses. Infinitely  
misfortune comes to outrace misfortune known before.

620

*Andromache*

Polyxena is dead. They cut your daughter's throat to pleasure dead Achilles' corpse, above his grave.

*Hecuba*

O wretched. This was what Talthybius meant, that speech cryptic, incomprehensible, yet now so clear.

625

*Andromache*

I saw her die, and left this wagon seat to lay  
a robe upon her body and sing the threnody.

*Hecuba*

Poor child, poor wretched, wretched darling, sacrificed,  
but without pity, and in pain, to a dead man.

*Andromache*

She is dead, and this was death indeed; and yet to die  
as she did was better than to live as I live now.

630

*Hecuba*

Child, no. No life, no light is any kind of death,  
since death is nothing, and in life the hopes live still.

*Andromache*

O Mother, our mother, hear me while I reason through  
this matter fairly—might it even hush your grief?

635

Death, I am sure, is like never being born, but death is better thus by far than to live a life of pain,  
since the dead with no perception of evil feel no grief,  
while he who was happy once, and then unfortunate,  
finds his heart driven far from the old lost happiness.

640

She died; it is as if she never saw the light  
of day, for she knows nothing now of what she suffered.

But I, who aimed the arrows of ambition high  
at honor, and made them good, see now how far I fall,

I, who in Hector's house worked out all custom that brings  
discretion's name to women. Blame them or blame them not,  
there is one act that swings the scandalous speech their way  
beyond all else: to leave the house and walk abroad.

645

I longed to do it, but put the longing aside, and stayed  
always within the inclosure of my own house and court.

650

The witty speech some women cultivate I would  
not practice, but kept my honest inward thought, and made  
my mind my only and sufficient teacher. I gave

my lord's presence the tribute of hushed lips, and eyes  
quietly downcast. I knew when my will must have its way  
over his, knew also how to give way to him in turn.

655

Men learned of this; I was talked of in the Achaean camp,  
and reputation has destroyed me now. At the choice  
of women, Achilles' son picked me from the rest, to be  
his wife: a lordly house, yet I shall be a slave.

660

If I dash back the beloved memory of Hector  
and open wide my heart to my new lord, I shall be  
a traitor to the dead love, and know it; if I cling

faithful to the past, I win my master's hatred. Yet  
they say one night of love suffices to dissolve

665

a woman's aversion to share the bed of any man.

I hate and loathe that woman who casts away the once  
beloved, and takes another in her arms of love.

Even the young mare torn from her running mate and teamed  
with another will not easily wear the yoke. And yet

670

this is a brute and speechless beast of burden, not

like us intelligent, lower far in nature's scale.  
 Dear Hector, when I had you I had a husband, great  
 in understanding, rank, wealth, courage: all my wish.  
 I was a virgin when you took me from the house  
 of my father; I gave you all my maiden love, my first,  
 and now you are dead, and I must cross the sea, to serve,  
 prisoner of war, the slave's yoke on my neck, in Greece.  
 No, Hecuba; can you not see my fate is worse  
 than hers you grieve, Polyxena's? That one thing left  
 always while life lasts, hope, is not for me. I keep  
 no secret deception in my heart—sweet though it be  
 to dream—that I shall ever be happy any more.

*Chorus*

You stand where I do in misfortune, and while you mourn  
 your own life, tell me what I, too, am suffering.

*Hecuba*

I have never been inside the hull of a ship, but know  
 what I know only by hearsay and from painted scenes,  
 yet think that seamen, while the gale blows moderately,  
 take pains to spare unnecessary work, and send  
 one man to the steering oar, another aloft, and crews  
 to pump the bilge from the hold. But when the tempest comes,  
 and seas wash over the decks they lose their nerve, and let  
 her go by the run at the waves' will, leaving all to chance.  
 So I, in this succession of disasters, swamped,  
 battered by this storm immortally inspired, have lost  
 my lips' control and let them go, say anything  
 they will. Yet still, beloved child, you must forget  
 what happened with Hector. Tears will never save you now.  
 Give your obedience to the new master; let your ways  
 entice his heart to make him love you. If you do  
 it will be better for all who are close to you. This boy,  
 my own son's child, might grow to manhood and bring back—  
 he alone could do it—something of our city's strength.

On some far day the children of your children might  
 come home, and build. There still may be another Troy.

705

But *we* say this, and others will speak also. See,  
 here is some runner of the Achaeans come again.  
 Who is he? What news? What counsel have they taken now?

(*Talthybius enters again with his escort.*)

*Talthybius*

O wife of Hector, once the bravest man in Troy,  
 do not hate me. This is the will of the Danaans and  
 the kings. I wish I did not have to give this message.

710

*Andromache*

What can this mean, this hint of hateful things to come?

*Talthybius*

The council has decreed for your son—how can I say this?

685

*Andromache*

That he shall serve some other master than I serve?

*Talthybius*

No man of Achaea shall ever make this boy his slave.

715

*Andromache*

Must he be left behind in Phrygia, all alone?

690

*Talthybius*

Worse; horrible. There is no easy way to tell it.

*Andromache*

I thank your courtesy—unless your news be really good.

695

*Talthybius*

They will kill your son. It is monstrous. Now you know the truth.

*Andromache*

Oh, this is worse than anything I heard before.

720

700

*Talthybius*

Odysseus. He urged it before the Greeks, and got his way.

*Andromache*

This is too much grief, and more than anyone could bear.

*Talthybius*

He said a hero's son could not be allowed to live.

*Andromache*

Even thus may his own sons some day find no mercy.

*Talthybius*

He must be hurled from the battlements of Troy.

*(He goes toward Andromache, who clings fast to her child, as if to resist.)*

No, wait!

725

Let it happen this way. It will be wiser in the end.  
Do not fight it. Take your grief as you were born to take it,  
give up the struggle where your strength is feebleness  
with no force anywhere to help. Listen to me!  
Your city is gone, your husband. You are in our power.  
How can one woman hope to struggle against the arms  
of Greece? Think, then. Give up the passionate contest.

730

This  
will bring no shame. No man can laugh at your submission.  
And please—I request you—hurl no curse at the Achaeans  
for fear the army, savage over some reckless word,  
forbid the child his burial and the dirge of honor.  
Be brave, be silent; out of such patience you can hope  
the child you leave behind will not lie unburied here,  
and that to you the Achaeans will be less unkind.

735

*Andromache*

O darling child I loved too well for happiness,  
your enemies will kill you and leave your mother forlorn.  
Your own father's nobility, where others found  
protection, means your murder now. The memory  
of his valor comes ill-timed for you. O bridal bed,  
O marriage rites that brought me home to Hector's house  
a bride, you were unhappy in the end. I lived  
never thinking the baby I had was born for butchery  
by Greeks, but for lordship over all Asia's pride of earth.

740

745

Poor child, are you crying too? Do you know what they  
will do to you? Your fingers clutch my dress. What use,  
to nestle like a young bird under the mother's wing?

750

Hector cannot come back, not burst from underground  
to save you, that spear of glory caught in the quick hand,  
nor Hector's kin, nor any strength of Phrygian arms.

Yours the sick leap head downward from the height, the fall  
where none have pity, and the spirit smashed out in death.

755

O last and loveliest embrace of all, O child's  
sweet fragrant body. Vanity in the end. I nursed  
for nothing the swaddled baby at this mother's breast;  
in vain the wrack of the labor pains and the long sickness.

760

Now once again, and never after this, come close  
to your mother, lean against my breast and wind your arms  
around my neck, and put your lips against my lips.

*(She kisses Astyanax and relinquishes him.)*

Greeks! Your Greek cleverness is simple barbarity.  
Why kill this child, who never did you any harm?

765

O flowering of the house of Tyndareus! Not his,  
not God's daughter, never that, but child of many fathers  
I say; the daughter of Vindictiveness, of Hate,  
of Blood, Death; of all wickedness that swarms on earth.

I cry it aloud: Zeus never was your father, but you  
were born a pestilence to all Greeks and the world beside.

770

Accursed; who from those lovely and accursed eyes  
brought down to shame and ruin the bright plains of Troy.

Oh, seize him, take him, dash him to death if it must be done;  
feed on his flesh if it is your will. These are the gods

775

who damn us to this death, and I have no strength to save  
my boy from execution. Cover this wretched face

and throw me into the ship and that sweet bridal bed  
I walk to now across the death of my own child.

*(Talthybius gently lifts the child out of the wagon, which leaves the stage, carrying Andromache away.)*

*Chorus*

Unhappy Troy! For the sweetness in one woman's arms' embrace, unspeakable, you lost these thousands slain.

*Talthybius*

Come, boy, taken from the embrace beloved of your mourning mother. Climb the high circle of the walls your fathers built. There end life. This was the order.

Take him.

*(He hands Astyanax to the guards, who lead him out.)*

I am not the man to do this. Some other without pity, not as I ashamed, should be herald of messages like this.

*(He goes out.)*

*Hecuba*

O child of my own unhappy child, shall your life be torn from your mother and from me? Wicked. Can I help, dear child, not only suffer? What help? Tear face, beat bosom. This is all my power now. O city, O child, what have we left to suffer? Are we not hurled down the whole length of disaster?

*Chorus*

Telamon, O king in the land where the bees swarm, Salamis the surf-pounded isle where you founded your city to front that hallowed coast where Athene broke forth the primeval pale branch of olive, wreath of the bright air and a glory on Athens the shining: O Telamon, you came in your pride of arms with Alcmena's archer to Ilium, our city, to sack and destroy it on that age-old venture.

This was the first flower of Hellenic strength Heracles brought in anger

for the horses promised; and by Simois' calm waters checked the surf-wandering oars and made fast the ships' stern cables.

From which vessels came out the deadly bow hand, death to Laomedon, as the scarlet wind of the flames swept over masonry straight-hewn by the hands of Apollo.

This was a desolation of Troy twice taken; twice in the welter of blood the walls Dardanian went down before the red spear.

In vain, then, Laomedon's child, you walk in delicate pride by the golden pitchers in loveliest servitude

to fill Zeus' wine cups; while Troy your mother is given to the flame to eat, and the lonely beaches mourn, as sad birds sing for the young lost, for the sword hand and the children and the aged women.

Gone now the shining pools where you bathed, the fields where you ran all desolate. And you,

Ganymede, go in grace by the thrones of God with your young, calm smile even now as Priam's kingdom falls to the Greek spear.

O Love, Love, it was you in the high halls of Dardanus, the sky-daughters of melody beside you, who piled the huge strength of Troy in towers, the gods' own hands concerned. I speak no more

against Zeus' name.

But the light men love, who shines  
through the pale wings of morning,  
balestar on this earth now,  
watched the collapse of tall towers:  
Dawn. Her lord was of this land;  
she bore his children,  
Tithonus, caught away by the golden car  
and the starry horses,  
who made our hopes so high.  
For the gods loved Troy once.  
Now they have forgotten.

*(Menelaus comes on the stage, attended by a detail of  
armed soldiers.)*

*Menelaus*

O splendor of sunburst breaking forth this day, whereon  
I lay my hands once more on Helen, my wife. And yet  
it is not, so much as men think, for the woman's sake  
I came to Troy, but against that guest proved treacherous,  
who like a robber carried the woman from my house.  
Since the gods have seen to it that *he* paid the penalty,  
fallen before the Hellenic spear, his kingdom wrecked,  
I come for *her* now, the wife once my own, whose name  
I can no longer speak with any happiness,  
to take her away. In this house of captivity  
she is numbered among the other women of Troy, a slave.  
And those men whose work with the spear has won her back  
gave her to me, to kill, or not to kill, but lead  
away to the land of Argos, if such be my pleasure.  
And such it is; the death of Helen in Troy I will let  
pass, have the oars take her by sea ways back to Greek  
soil, and there give her over to execution;  
blood penalty for friends who are dead in Ilium here.  
Go to the house, my followers, and take her out;  
no, drag her out; lay hands upon that hair so stained

with men's destruction. When the winds blow fair astern  
we will take ship again and bring her back to Hellas.

*Hecuba*

850

O power, who mount the world, wheel where the world rides,  
O mystery of man's knowledge, whosoever you be,  
Zeus named, nature's necessity or mortal mind,  
I call upon you; for you walk the path none hears  
yet bring all human action back to right at last.

885

855

*Menelaus*

What can this mean? How strange a way to call on gods.

*Hecuba*

Kill your wife, Menelaus, and I will bless your name.  
But keep your eyes away from her. Desire will win.  
She looks enchantment, and where she looks homes are set fire;  
she captures cities as she captures the eyes of men.  
We have had experience, you and I. We know the truth.

890

860

865

*(Men at arms bring Helen roughly out of the shelter.  
She makes no resistance.)*

*Helen*

Menelaus, your first acts are argument of terror  
to come. Your lackeys put their hands on me. I am dragged  
out of my chambers by brute force. I know you hate  
me; I am almost sure. And still there is one question  
I would ask you, if I may. What have the Greeks decided  
to do with me? Or shall I be allowed to live?

895

870

900

*Menelaus*

You are not strictly condemned, but all the army gave  
you into my hands, to kill you for the wrong you did.

875

*Helen*

Is it permitted that I argue this, and prove  
that my death, if I am put to death, will be unjust?

880

*Menelaus*

I did not come to talk with you. I came to kill.

905

*Hecuba*

No, Menelaus, listen to her. She should not die unheard. But give me leave to take the opposite case; the prosecution. There are things that happened in Troy which you know nothing of, and the long-drawn argument will mean her death. She never can escape us now.

*Menelaus*

This is a gift of leisure. If she wishes to speak she may. But it is for your sake, understand, that I give this privilege I never would have given to her.

*Helen*

Perhaps it will make no difference if I speak well or badly, and your hate will not let you answer me. All I can do is to foresee the arguments you will use in accusation of me, and set against the force of your charges, charges of my own.

First, then!

*She* mothered the beginning of all this wickedness. For Paris was her child. And next to her the old king, who would not destroy the infant Alexander, that dream of the firebrand's agony, has ruined Troy, and me. This is not all; listen to the rest I have to say. Alexander was the judge of the goddess trinity. Pallas Athene would have given him power, to lead the Phrygian arms on Hellas and make it desolate. All Asia was Hera's promise, and the uttermost zones of Europe for his lordship, if her way prevailed. But Aphrodite, picturing my loveliness, promised it to him, if he would say her beauty surpassed all others. Think what this means, and all the consequence. Cypris prevailed, and I was won in marriage: all for Greek advantage. Asia is not your lord; you serve no tyrant now, nor take the spear in his defense. Yet Hellas' fortune was my own misfortune. I,

sold once for my body's beauty stand accused, who should for what has been done wear garlands on my head.

I know.

You will say all this is nothing to the immediate charge: I did run away; I did go secretly from your house. But when he came to me—call him any name you will: Paris? or Alexander? or the spirit of blood to haunt this woman?—he came with a goddess at his side; no weak one. And you—it was criminal—took ship for Crete and left me there in Sparta in the house, alone.

You see?

I wonder—and I ask this of myself, not you—why *did* I do it? What made me run away from home with the stranger, and betray my country and my hearth? Challenge the goddess then, show your greater strength than Zeus'

who has the other gods in his power, and still is slave to Aphrodite alone. Shall I not be forgiven? Still you might have some show of argument against me. When Paris was gone to the deep places of death, below ground, and the immortal practice on my love was gone, I should have come back to the Argive ships, left Troy. I did try to do it, and I have witnesses, the towers' gatekeepers and the sentinels on the wall, who caught me again and again as I let down the rope from the battlements and tried to slip away to the ground. For Deiphobus, my second husband: he took me away by force and kept me his wife against the Phrygians' will.

O my husband, can you kill me now and think you kill in righteousness? I was the bride of force. Before, I brought their houses to the sorrow of slavery instead of conquest. Would you be stronger than the gods? Try, then. But even such ambition is absurd.

*Chorus*

O Queen of Troy, stand by your children and your country!  
Break down the beguilement of this woman, since she speaks  
well, and has done wickedly. This is dangerous.

*Hecuba*

First, to defend the honor of the gods, and show  
that the woman is a scandalous liar. I will not  
believe it! Hera and the virgin Pallas Athene  
could never be so silly and empty-headed  
that Hera would sell Argos to the barbarians,  
or Pallas let Athenians be the slaves of Troy.  
They went to Ida in girlish emulation, vain  
of their own loveliness? Why? Tell me the reason Hera  
should fall so much in love with the idea of beauty.  
To win some other lord more powerful than Zeus?  
Or has Athene marked some god to be her mate,  
she, whose virginity is a privilege won from Zeus,  
who abjures marriage? Do not trick out your own sins  
by calling the gods stupid. No wise man will believe you.  
You claim, and I must smile to hear it, that Aphrodite  
came at my son's side to the house of Menelaus;  
who could have caught up you and your city of Amyclae  
and set you in Ilium, moving not from the quiet of heaven.  
Nonsense. My son was handsome beyond all other men.  
You looked at him, and sense went Cyprian at the sight,  
since Aphrodite is nothing but the human lust,  
named rightly, since the word of lust begins the god's name.  
You saw him in the barbaric splendor of his robes,  
gorgeous with gold. It made your senses itch. You thought,  
being queen only in Argos, in little luxury,  
that once you got rid of Sparta for the Phrygian city  
where gold streamed everywhere, you could let extravagance  
run wild. No longer were Menelaus and his house  
sufficient to your spoiled luxurious appetites.

So much for that. You say my son took you away  
by force. What Spartan heard you cry for help? You did  
cry out? Or did you? Castor, your brother, was there, a young  
man, and his twin not yet caught up among the stars. 1000  
Then when you had reached Troy, and the Argives at your heels  
came, and the agony of the murderous spears began,  
when the reports came in that Menelaus' side  
was winning, you would praise him, simply to make my son 1005  
unhappy at the strength of his love's challenger,  
forgetting your husband when the luck went back to Troy.  
You worked hard: not to make yourself a better woman,  
but to make sure always to be on the winning side.  
You claim you tried to slip away with ropes let down, 1010  
from the ramparts, and this proves you stayed against your will?  
Perhaps. But when were you ever caught in the strangling noose,  
caught sharpening a dagger? Which any noble wife  
would do, desperate with longing for her lord's return.  
Yet over and over again I gave you good advice: 1015  
"Make your escape, my daughter; there are other girls  
for my sons to marry. I will help you get away  
to the ships of the Achaeans. Let the Greeks, and us,  
stop fighting." So I argued, but you were not pleased.  
Spoiled in the luxury of Alexander's house 1020  
you liked foreigners to kiss the ground before your feet.  
All that impressed you.

And now you dare to come outside,  
figure fastidiously arranged, to look upon  
the same air as your husband, O abominable  
heart, who should walk submissively in rags of robes, 1025  
shivering with anxiety, head Scythian-cropped,  
your old impudence gone and modesty gained at last  
by reason of your sinful life.

O Menelaus,  
mark this, the end of my argument. Be true to your  
high reputation and to Hellas. Grace both, and kill 1030

Helen. Thus make it the custom toward all womankind hereafter, that the price of adultery is death.

*Chorus*

Menelaus, keep the ancestral honor of your house. Punish your wife, and purge away from Greece the stigma on women. You shall seem great even to your enemies.

1035

*Menelaus*

All you have said falls into line with my own thought. This woman left my household for a stranger's bed of her own free will, and all this talk of Aphrodite is for pure show. Away, and face the stones of the mob. Atone for the long labors of the Achaeans in the brief act of dying, and know your penance for my shame.

1040

*(Helen drops before him and embraces his knees.)*

*Helen*

No, by your knees! I am not guilty of the mind's infection, which the gods sent. Do not kill! Have pity!

*Hecuba*

Be true to the memory of all your friends she murdered. It is for them and for their children that I plead.

1045

*(Menelaus pushes Helen away.)*

*Menelaus*

Enough, Hecuba. I am not listening to her now. I speak to my servants: see that she is taken away to where the ships are beached. She will make the voyage home.

*Hecuba*

But let her not be put in the same ship with you.

*Menelaus*

What can you mean? That she is heavier than she was?

1050

*Hecuba*

A man in love once never is out of love again.

*Menelaus*

Sometimes; when the beloved's heart turns false to him. Yet it shall be as you wish. She shall not be allowed

in the same ship I sail in. This was well advised. And once in Argos she must die the vile death earned by her vile life, and be an example to all women to live temperately. This is not the easier way; and yet her execution will tincture with fear the lust of women even more depraved than she.

1055

*(Helen is led out, Menelaus following.)*

*Chorus*

Thus, O Zeus, you betrayed all to the Achaeans: your temple in Ilium, your misted altar, the flame of the clotted sacraments, the smoke of the skying incense, Pergamum the hallowed, the ivied ravines of Ida, washed by the running snow. The utter peaks that surprise the sun bolts, shining and primeval place of divinity.

1060

1065

1070

Gone are your sacrifices, the choirs' glad voices singing to the gods night long, deep into darkness; gone the images, gold on wood laid, the twelves of the sacred moons, the magic Phrygian number. Can it be, can it be, my lord, you have forgotten from your throne high in heaven's bright air, my city which is ruined and the flame storm that broke it?

1075

1080

O my dear, my husband, O wandering ghost unwashed, unburied; the sea hull must carry me in the flash of its wings' speed to Argos, city of horses, where the stone walls built by giants invade the sky. The multitudes of our children stand

1085

1090

clinging to the gates and cry through their tears.  
And one girl weeps:

“O Mother, the Achaeans take me away  
lonely from your eyes  
to the black ship  
where the oars dip surf  
toward Salamis the blessed,  
or the peak between two seas  
where Pelops’ hold  
keeps the gates at the Isthmus.”

Oh that as Menelaus’ ship  
makes way through the mid-sea  
the bright pronged spear immortal of thunder might smash it  
far out in the Aegaeon,  
as in tears, in bondage to Hellas  
I am cut from my country;  
as she holds the golden mirror  
in her hands, girls’ grace,  
she, God’s daughter.

Let him never come home again, to a room in Laconia  
and the hearth of his fathers;  
never more to Pitana’s streets  
and the bronze gates of the Maiden;  
since he forgave his shame  
and the vile marriage, the sorrows  
of great Hellas and the land  
watered by Simois.

*(Talthybius returns. His men carry, laid on the shield of  
Hector, the body of Astyanax.)*

But see!  
Now evils multiply in our land.  
Behold, O pitiful wives  
of the Trojans. This is Astyanax,  
dead, dashed without pity from the walls, and borne  
by the Danaans, who murdered him.

*Talthybius*

Hecuba, one last vessel of Achilles’ son  
remains, manned at the oar sweeps now, to carry back  
to the shores of Phthiotis his last spoils of war.  
Neoptolemus himself has put to sea. He heard  
news of old Peleus in difficulty and the land  
invaded by Acastus, son of Pelias.

Such news put speed above all pleasure of delay.  
So he is gone, and took with him Andromache,  
whose lamentations for her country and farewells  
to Hector’s tomb as she departed brought these tears  
crowding into my eyes. And she implored that you  
bury this dead child, your own Hector’s son, who died  
flung from the battlements of Troy. She asked as well  
that the bronze-backed shield, terror of the Achaeans once,  
when the boy’s father slung its defense across his side,  
be not taken to the hearth of Peleus, nor the room  
where the slain child’s Andromache must be a bride  
once more, to waken memories by its sight, but used  
in place of the cedar coffin and stone-chambered tomb  
for the boy’s burial. He shall be laid in your arms  
to wrap the body about with winding sheets, and flowers,  
as well as you can, out of that which is left to you.  
Since she is gone. Her master’s speed prevented her  
from giving the rites of burial to her little child.

The rest of us, once the corpse is laid out, and earth  
is piled above it, must raise the mast tree, and go.  
Do therefore quickly everything that you must do.  
There is one labor I myself have spared you. As  
we forded on our way here Scamander’s running water,  
I washed the body and made clean the wounds. I go  
now, to break ground and dig the grave for him, that my  
work be made brief, as yours must be, and our tasks end  
together, and the ships be put to sea, for home.

*Hecuba*

Lay down the circled shield of Hector on the ground:  
a hateful thing to look at; it means no love to me.

*(Talthybius and his escort leave. Two soldiers wait.)*

Achaean! All your strength is in your spears, not in  
the mind. What were you afraid of, that it made you kill  
this child so savagely? That Troy, which fell, might be  
raised from the ground once more? Your strength meant  
nothing, then. 1160

When Hector's spear was fortunate, and numberless  
strong hands were there to help him, we were still destroyed.  
Now when the city is fallen and the Phrygians slain,  
this baby terrified you? I despise the fear 1165  
which is pure terror in a mind unreasoning.

O darling child, how wretched was this death. You might  
have fallen fighting for your city, grown to man's  
age, and married, and with the king's power like a god's,  
and died happy, if there is any happiness here. 1170

But no. You grew to where you could see and learn, my child,  
yet your mind was not old enough to win advantage  
of fortune. How wickedly, poor boy, your fathers' walls,  
Apollo's handiwork, have crushed your pitiful head  
tended and trimmed to ringlets by your mother's hand,  
and the face she kissed once, where the brightness now is blood  
shining through the torn bones—too horrible to say more. 1175

O little hands, sweet likenesses of Hector's once,  
now you lie broken at the wrists before my feet;  
and mouth beloved whose words were once so confident,  
you are dead; and all was false, when you would lean across  
my bed, and say: "Mother, when you die I will cut  
my long hair in your memory, and at your grave  
bring companies of boys my age, to sing farewell."  
It did not happen; now I, a homeless, childless, old  
woman must bury your poor corpse, which is so young. 1180  
Alas for all the tendernesses, my nursing care, 1185

and all your slumbers gone. What shall the poet say,  
what words will he inscribe upon your monument?  
*Here lies a little child the Argives killed, because* 1190  
*they were afraid of him.* That? The epitaph of Greek shame.

You will not win your father's heritage, except  
for this, which is your coffin now: the brazen shield.

O shield, who guarded the strong shape of Hector's arm:  
the bravest man of all, who wore you once, is dead. 1195  
How sweet the impression of his body on your sling,  
and at the true circle of your rim the stain of sweat  
where in the grind of his many combats Hector leaned  
his chin against you, and the drops fell from his brow!

Take up your work now; bring from what is left some robes  
to wrap the tragic dead. The gods will not allow us  
to do it right. But let him have what we can give. 1200

That mortal is a fool who, prospering, thinks his life  
has any strong foundation; since our fortune's course  
of action is the reeling way a madman takes,  
and no one person is ever happy all the time. 1205

*(Hecuba's handmaidens bring out from the shelter a basket of  
robes and ornaments. During the scene which follows,  
the body of Astyanax is being made ready for burial.)*

*Chorus*

Here are your women, who bring you from the Trojan spoils  
such as is left, to deck the corpse for burial.

*Hecuba*

O child, it is not for victory in riding, won  
from boys your age, not archery—in which acts our people  
take pride, without driving competition to excess— 1210  
that your sire's mother lays upon you now these treasures  
from what was yours before; though now the accursed of God,  
Helen, has robbed you, she who has destroyed as well  
the life in you, and brought to ruin all our house. 1215

*Chorus*

My heart,  
you touched my heart, you who were once  
a great lord in my city.

*Hecuba*

These Phrygian robes' magnificence you should have worn  
at your marriage to some princess uttermost in pride  
in all the East, I lay upon your body now. 1220

And you, once so victorious and mother of  
a thousand conquests, Hector's huge beloved shield:  
here is a wreath for you, who die not, yet are dead  
with this body; since it is better far to honor you  
than the armor of Odysseus the wicked and wise. 1225

*Chorus*

Ah me.  
Earth takes you, child;  
our tears of sorrow.  
Cry aloud, our mother.

*Hecuba*

Yes.

*Chorus*

The dirge of the dead.

*Hecuba*

Ah me. 1230

*Chorus*

Evils never to be forgotten.

*Hecuba*

I will bind up your wounds with bandages, and be  
your healer: a wretched one, in name alone, no use.  
Among the dead your father will take care of you.

*Chorus*

Rip, tear your faces with hands  
that beat like oars. 1235  
Alas.

*Hecuba*

Dear women. . . .

*Chorus*

Hecuba, speak to us. We are yours. What did you cry aloud?

*Hecuba*

The gods meant nothing except to make life hard for me, 1240  
and of all cities they chose Troy to hate. In vain  
we sacrificed. And yet had not the very hand

of God gripped and crushed this city deep in the ground,  
we should have disappeared in darkness, and not given  
a theme for music, and the songs of men to come. 1245

You may go now, and hide the dead in his poor tomb;  
he has those flowers that are the right of the underworld.  
I think it makes small difference to the dead, if they  
are buried in the tokens of luxury. All this  
is an empty glorification left for those who live. 1250

*(The soldiers take up and carry away the body  
of Astyanax.)*

*Chorus*

Sad mother, whose hopes were so huge  
for your life. They are broken now.

Born to high blessedness  
and a lordly line  
your death was horror. 1255

But see, see  
on the high places of Ilium  
the torchflares whirling in the hands  
of men. For Troy  
some ultimate agony.

*(Talthybius comes back, with numerous men.)*

*Talthybius*

I call to the captains who have orders to set fire  
to the city of Priam: shield no longer in the hand  
the shining flame. Let loose the fire upon it. So 1260

with the citadel of Ilium broken to the ground  
we can take leave of Troy, in gladness, and go home.

I speak to you, too, for my orders include this. 1265  
Children of Troy, when the lords of the armament sound  
the high echoing crash of the trumpet call, then go  
to the ships of the Achaeans, to be taken away  
from this land. And you, unhappiest and aged woman,  
go with them. For Odysseus' men are here, to whom 1270  
enslaved the lot exiles you from your native land.

*Hecuba*

Ah, wretched me. So this is the unhappy end  
and goal of all the sorrows I have lived. I go  
forth from my country and a city lit with flames.  
Come, aged feet; make one last weary struggle, that I 1275  
may hail my city in its affliction. O Troy, once  
so huge over all Asia in the drawn wind of pride,  
your very name of glory shall be stripped away.  
They are burning you, and us they drag forth from our land  
enslaved. O gods! Do I call upon those gods for help? 1280  
I cried to them before now, and they would not hear.  
Come then, hurl ourselves into the pyre. Best now  
to die in the flaming ruins of our fathers' house!

*Talthybius*

Unhappy creature, ecstatic in your sorrows! Men,  
take her, spare not. She is Odysseus' property. 1285  
You have orders to deliver her into his hands.

*Hecuba*

O sorrow.  
Cronion, Zeus, lord of Phrygia,  
prince of our house, have you seen  
the dishonor done to the seed of Dardanus? 1290

*Chorus*

He has seen, but the great city  
is a city no more, it is gone. There is no Troy.

*Hecuba*

O sorrow.  
Ilium flares. 1295  
The chambers of Pergamum take fire,  
the citadel and the wall's high places.

*Chorus*

Our city fallen to the spear  
fades as smoke winged in the sky.  
halls hot in the swept fire  
and the fierce lances. 1300

*Hecuba*

O soil where my children grew.

*Chorus*

Alas.

*Hecuba*

O children, hear me; it is your mother who calls.

*Chorus*

They are dead you cry to. This is a dirge.

*Hecuba*

I lean my old body against the earth  
and both hands beat the ground. 1305

*Chorus*

I kneel to the earth, take up  
the cry to my own dead,  
poor buried husband.

*Hecuba*

We are taken, dragged away

*Chorus*

a cry of pain, pain

1310

*Hecuba*

under the slave's roof

*Chorus*

away from my country.

*Hecuba*

Priam, my Priam. Dead  
graveless, forlorn,  
you know not what they have done to me.

*Chorus*

Now dark, holy death  
in the brutal butchery closed his eyes.

1315

*Hecuba*

O gods' house, city beloved

*Chorus*

alas

*Hecuba*

you are given the red flame and the spear's iron.

*Chorus*

You will collapse to the dear ground and be nameless.

*Hecuba*

Ash as the skyward smoke wing  
piled will blot from my sight the house where I lived once.

1320

*Chorus*

Lost shall be the name on the land,  
all gone, perished. Troy, city of sorrow,  
is there no longer.

*Hecuba*

Did you see, did you hear?

*Chorus*

The crash of the citadel.

1325

*Hecuba*

The earth shook, riven

*Chorus*

to engulf the city.

*Hecuba*

O  
shaking, tremulous limbs,

this is the way. Forward:  
into the slave's life.

1330

*Chorus*

Mourn for the ruined city, then go away  
to the ships of the Achaeans.

*(Hecuba is led away, and all go out, leaving  
the stage empty.)*

THE COMPLETE GREEK TRAGEDIES

*Edited by David Grene and Richmond Lattimore*

## EURIPIDES • III

HECUBA

*Translated by William Arrowsmith*

ANDROMACHE

*Translated by John Frederick Nims*

THE TROJAN WOMEN

*Translated by Richmond Lattimore*

ION

*Translated by Ronald Frederick Willetts*

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