Euripides THE TROJAN WOMEN [Troades]

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Translator's Note

In numbering the lines in the following English text, the translator has normally included a short indented line with the short line immediately above it, so that two or three partial lines count as a single line in the reckoning. The line numbers in square brackets refer to the Greek text; line numbers without brackets refer to the English text.

The *Trojan Women* was first performed in 415 BCE at the city Dionysia, where it was the third member of the four plays that won second prize (Alexander, Palamedes, Trojan Women, and Sisyphus). The other three plays have been lost.

Note that Euripides normally refers to the Greeks as the Argives or the Achaeans or the Hellenes and often to the Trojans as the Phrygians. I have used the traditional English name Hecuba, rather than the transliteration of the Greek, Hecabe.

I would like to acknowledge my debt to the Perseus Digital Library, which provided the Greek text and the translation by E. P. Coleridge.

Dramatis Personae

POSEIDON: god of the sea and earthquakes, brother of Zeus.

ATHENA: goddess of wisdom, daughter of Zeus.

HECUBA: queen of Troy, widow of Priam, an old woman.

CASSANDRA: daughter of Hecuba, a prophetess.

ANDROMACHE: widow of Hector, daughter-in-law of Hecuba.

HELEN: ex-wife of Menelaus and of Paris. TALTHYBIUS: herald of the Argive forces.

ASTYANAX: infant son of Hector and Andromache.

MENELAUS: co-commander of the Argive army, Helen's first husband.

CHORUS: captive Trojan women.

SOLDIERS and ATTENDANTS: troops from the Argive army.

[The scene is a battlefield a few days after the capture and destruction of Troy, whose battered walls are visible at the back. Some huts are also visible; these house the women who have been captured and are waiting to be allocated to the Argive leaders. In front Hecuba is asleep on the ground. It is just before sunrise. Enter Poseidon.]

POSEIDON

I am the god Poseidon. I have left the salty depths of the Aegean sea where nereid choruses weave their steps in magical dancing, and have come here, for since that time Phoebus Apollo and I carefully surveyed and built stone towers and walls to ring the territory of Troy, friendship for my city of Phrygians has never left my heart.¹ And now it lies in smouldering ruins, overpowered by Argive spears. For a Phocian man, Epeius from Parnassus, with the help of Pallas Athene's devious advice, built a wooden horse, its pregnant belly crammed with warriors, a deadly idol, and had it hauled inside the city walls.² Now the sacred groves have been abandoned, the temples of the gods drip crimson blood,

10

[10]

¹The term Phrygia refers to a geographical area in west central Asia Minor. In Greek literature the term Phrygians is often used to denote the citizens of Troy. In the distant past, Zeus had ordered Poseidon and Apollo (as a punishment) to assist Laomedon, king of Troy. The two gods built the famous walls of the city.

²In the traditional story, the Argives left the Wooden Horse outside the walls of Troy and pretended to abandon the war. The Trojans, after much debate about what to do with the Horse, pulled it inside the city. At night the warriors inside came out, seized the gates of Troy, and let in the main army, which had secretly returned.

and beside the altar's foundation stone, in front of Zeus, protector of the home, 20 Priam lies dead.³ Meanwhile huge loads of gold and Phrygian loot are being carried off to the Achaean ships. Those Greeks who marched against the city are waiting for the wind, a favourable stern breeze, so that now, after ten years, they may rejoice to see [20] their wives and children. I have been bested by Argive goddess Hera and Athena, who together helped to conquer Phrygia.⁴ So I am leaving famous Ilion 30 and my altars here.⁵ For when a city is in the grip of woeful desolation, worship of the gods wanes; they lose respect. Scamander echoes with the many cries of captured women as they learn about the masters they have been assigned by lot.⁶ Arcadia takes some, and other women go [30] to troops from Thessaly. Still others go to sons of Theseus, the leading men among Athenians. The Trojan women 40 not yet assigned by lot are in those huts, set aside for leaders of the army. With them is that child of Tyndareus, Spartan Helen, who has been justly called a prisoner of war. And if anyone wishes to see the depths of misery, he can, for Hecuba is lying there, before the gates, weeping plenteous tears for her many sorrows. Her own daughter Polyxena has been killed in secret 50 at Achilles' tomb—a miserable death.⁷ [40] Priam is gone and their children, too. Cassandra, whom lord Apollo cast aside and left a frantic virgin, has been forced by Agamemnon into his marriage bed, a shameful act that totally ignores

³Priam was king of Troy and Hecuba's husband.

⁴In Homer's *Iliad*, Hera, the wife of Zeus, and Athena were the fiercest supporters of the Greeks.

⁵Ilion is another name for Troy.

⁶Scamander is the river that runs near Troy.

⁷The Achaeans sacrificed Polyxena, a daughter of Hecuba, at the grave of Achilles. Gilbert Murray suggests that the murder was kept secret because the Achaeans were ashamed of what they had done.

what gods demand and piety as well.⁸ And so goodbye, you once wealthy city, towers of polished stone. If Athena, daughter of Zeus, had not demolished you, you would stand on firm foundations still.

60

[Enter Athena.]

ATHENA

May I speak to the mighty deity who is honoured by the gods and whose blood is closely related to my father's—setting aside our earlier enmity?⁹

[50]

POSEIDON

You may, goddess Athena, for family ties exert no small effect upon the heart.

ATHENA

I am grateful for your good-natured mood. My lord, I carry messages for you, matters of interest to both you and me.

70

POSEIDON

Do you have fresh news from the gods? From Zeus? Or from some other deity?

ATHENA

No, no.

It's about Troy, the land where we now stand. I have come to ask for your assistance—to combine your power with my own.

POSEIDON

What?

Have you set aside your former hatred and now feel compassion for the city, when fire has turned it into ash?

[60]

ATHENA

First things first.

Will you work with me—help me carry out what I wish to do?

⁸Apollo loved Cassandra and gave her the gift of prophecy. But Cassandra rejected Apollo's love. The god, in anger, then told Cassandra that she would retain her prophetic powers but would never be believed.

⁹Poseidon is the brother of Zeus, Athena's father.

POSEIDON

Yes, of course I will.

But I would like to know what you are planning—whether you have come to help Achaeans or to assist the Phrygians.

ATHENA

What I want

is to bring joy to my former enemies, the Trojans, and to make the return home of the Achaean army very painful.

POSEIDON

Why jump like this from one mood to another? Your love and hate, no matter where they fall, are too excessive.

ATHENA

Surely you have heard how they desecrated me and my shrines?

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POSEIDON

Yes, I have heard about that—it happened when Ajax dragged Cassandra off by force.¹⁰

[70]

ATHENA

And no Achaean was punished for it. They do not even want to talk about it!

POSEIDON

And yet it was thanks to your great power they managed to demolish Ilion.

ATHENA

That is why I would like you to join me and make them suffer.

POSEIDON

I'm prepared to act however you wish. What do you mean to do?

¹⁰Ajax, son of Oileus, often called the Lesser Ajax to distinguish him from Ajax, son of Telamon, the Greater Ajax, assaulted Cassandra while she was clinging to the Palladium (a statue of Athena in Troy, a very important religious object on which the safety of Troy was said to depend).

ATHENA

I want to force on them a journey back which does not bring them home.

100

POSEIDON

While they are still here, waiting on land, or when they are sailing the salt-filled seas?

ATHENA

When they set sail from Troy, heading home. From the sky Zeus will send down heavy rain, constant hail, and pitch-black storms on them. He says he'll let me have his thunder bolts to hurl at the Achaeans and fire their ships. Now for your part. Make the Aegean strait roar with overpowering waves and whirlpools, and glut the empty shores of Euboea with human corpses, so that in days to come Achaeans learn to venerate my shrines and honour all the other sacred gods.

[80]

110

POSEIDON

I will do that. For I do not require many words to carry out this favour.

I will stir up the salt Aegean sea—the high cliffs of Caphareus, the shores of Myconos and the Delian rocks,
Scyros and Lemnos, too, will be littered with countless bodies of the dead. But now you should make your way to mount Olympus. Once you get your father to hand over his lightning bolts, then wait until the day the Argive army sets off in earnest.

120 [90]

[Exit Athena.]

A man who pillages a human city, looting its shrines and tombs, the sacred homes of those whose toil is over, is a fool he makes a wilderness around him, but in the end he too will be destroyed

/Exit Poseidon.]

HECUBA [waking up slowly]

You wretched woman, 130

lift your head up from the ground. Bend your neck. This is no longer Troy—nor am I still queen [100] in Ilion. My destiny has changed. I must endure it, sail with the currents wherever fate may lead, not set the prow of my life's ship against the flowing seas. Aaaaaiiiii . . . Aaaaiiii . . . What's left for me but cries of grief, now that my native land, my children, and my husband are all gone, the celebrated splendour of our ancestors 140 [110] now demolished and reduced to nothing. What words should I suppress? What should I say? What dirges for the dead must I now sing? How pathetic I am to be lying here, my limbs stretched out on this hard bed, weighed down by heavy fate. O my temples, my head, my ribs! I wish I could roll over one way or another to ease my back and spine, while constant tears accompany my mournful requiem, which in itself 150 is music to the unfortunate, who chant but do not dance their sorrowful lament. [120]

[Hecuba sits up and looks out at the Achaean ships drawn up on the shore.]

O you prows on those Achaean ships rowed by swift oars plying the purple sea to sacred Ilion, past safe harbours in the land of Hellas, to the music of ominous flutes and jaunty sounds of pipes, you reached the very heart of Troy, [130] and tied up with twisted rope from Egypt, chasing the hateful wife of Menelaus, 160 who dishonoured Castor and brought disgrace to Eurotas.¹¹ She slaughtered Priam, the father of fifty sons and daughters, and is the reason I, ruined Hecuba, have foundered on this miserable rock. O that I should be sitting in this spot, by Agamemnon's tents. I am being led away from here a slave, an old woman [140] taken from my home with my head sheared, a humiliating sight.

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¹¹Helen of Troy was the daughter of Zeus and Leda, and the wife of Menelaus. She had two brothers Castor and Polydeuces (or Pollux). Her human father was Tyndareus, a king of Sparta. The Eurotas was a river near Sparta, Helen's home.

180

[160]

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[Hecuba stands up and calls to the women in the huts.]

O you women,

you wretched wives of Trojan warriors,
you women, and you ill-fated brides,
Troy is slowing burning. We must lament.
I, like some mother bird guarding her brood,
will begin our chant, but what I sing now
will not be the same as what I once sang
to the gods, leaning on Priam's sceptre
and leading the dance by stamping my foot
in a rhythmic Phrygian beat.

[Members of the Chorus start emerging from the huts.]

CHORUS MEMBER 1

Hecuba, what have you been saying? Why have you been calling out to us?

CHORUS MEMBER 2

And what do your words mean? For from the hut I could hear you as you spoke your sad lament.

CHORUS MEMBER 3

Fear pierces the heart in every Trojan who in the hut wails for her servile fate.

HECUBA

O my child, the Argives are already at their ships . . .

CHORUS MEMBER 2

Are the rowers getting ready

to move out?

CHORUS MEMBER 3

What do they mean to do? Are they planning to take me with them far from Troy in those ships of theirs?

HECUBA

I do not know.

but I would guess that is to be our fate.

CHORUS MEMBER 3

Alas, for the wretched Trojan women about to learn what hardships lie in store.

[Calling out to the women in the other hut.]

Come out of the hut! Come on! The Argives are getting ready for their voyage home!

[The remaining members of the Chorus enter from their hut.]

HECUBA

No! No! Do not let frantic Cassandra come outside—her prophecies will insult the Argives and increase the pain I feel. O unhappy Troy, your days are over. Unhappy, too, the ones now leaving you— 200 those still alive and those who have been killed.

CHORUS MEMBER 2

I am shaking with fear now I have left Agamemnon's hut, to find out from you, my queen, whether the Argives have decided to end my wretched life or if the sailors are getting the oars ready at the stern and preparing to move out.

HECUBA

O my child, your heart is sleepless in the early dawn.

CHORUS MEMBER 2

I have come here in a total panic! Has a herald from the Danaan army already come? Who is going to get me as his unhappy slave?

HECUBA

I assume your lot will be determined very soon.

CHORUS MEMBER 2

Alas!

Will someone from Argos or from Phthia or from some island city lead me off in misery to somewhere far from Troy?

HECUBA

Alas! Now I am to become a slave. To whom, I wonder, and in what land? Me, a paltry, withered, miserable crone, the image of a corpse or fleeting shade

[170]

[180]

210

[190]

[200]

of someone who has died, set to keep watch at the gate or care for someone's children— I, who was once revered as queen of Troy.

MEMBERS OF THE CHORUS [speaking as individuals] Alas, alas, with what kind of lament will you bewail the outrage done to you?

No more will I be moving the shuttle back and forth on weaving looms in Ida.¹²

For the last time I can see my children, one final glimpse of their poor corpses.

I will have to bear such great misery—
dragged, perhaps by force, to some Hellene's bed—
perish the night and the divine power
that makes me do it—or I may end up
a wretched servant girl drawing water
from the sacred fountain of Peirene.¹³

O that we could go to that famous land of Theseus, a truly fortunate place. [210] I never wish to see the whirling streams of Eurotas, the hateful home of Helen, to be a slave there, and meet Menelaus, the man whose fist obliterated Troy. 14

I have heard stories of that sacred land of the Peneus, a beautiful place at the very foot of mount Olympus, and, so people say, weighed down with riches, a blooming, fruitful place, which might well be my second choice, after the sacred land of Theseus, so favoured by the gods.¹⁵

I have also heard Hephaestus' home [220] facing Phoenicia, close to mount Etna, the mother of all Sicilian mountains, is famous for the crowns of victory it awards its citizens for excellence. 16

¹²Ida is a mountain near Troy. The name is sometimes used to denote Troy and its environs.

¹³The fountain of Peirene was located in Corinth.

¹⁴Theseus's land is Athens. Eurotas is the name of the river that flows past Sparta.

¹⁵Theseus was a legendary hero of Athens.

¹⁶Hephaestus is the artistic god of forge. Mount Etna is a volcano in Sicily.

There is that place lying very near the Ionian sea, watered by the stream of lovely Crathis, which gives yellow hair a tinge of red and with its sacred flow nurtures a land full of the finest men, just and true, and keeps the country happy.

CHORUS LEADER

Look—a herald from the Danaan army—he'll be carrying some new dispatches. He's in a hurry. What is he here for? What does he say? For now we are all slaves of our Dorian masters.

|Enter Talthybius with a small armed escort.]

TALTHYBIUS

You already know me, Hecuba, from when I was a herald for the Argive army and often came to Troy. I knew you even before that. Lady, I am Talthybius. I've come to bring you a new message.

HECUBA

Ah, my fellow Trojans, the moment we have dreaded has arrived.

TALTHYBIUS

If your fears are about the lottery, it has already taken place.

HECUBA

Ah, well then, are you going to tell us of the city? Is it in Thessaly, or in Phthia, or in Cadmean lands?

TALTHYBIUS

The lottery did not lump together all you women. Each warrior has won a different prize.

HECUBA

To whom has each of us been assigned?

260 [230]

270

[240]

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[250]

Which of these daughters of Ilos can expect a prosperous fate?¹⁷

TALTHYBIUS

That I know. But ask me about each one in turn, not all at once.

HECUBA

Then tell me this—my poor child Cassandra—to whom was she allotted?

TALTHYBIUS

She was chosen by lord Agamemnon, a special prize just for him.

HECUBA

She is to serve as a slave attending on his Lacedaemonian wife?¹⁸
The poor girl . . .

TALTHYBIUS

No, no. She will share his bed as his secret mistress.

HECUBA

What! A virgin girl dedicated to Apollo, the one to whom the god with yellow hair gave, as a special gift, a life of chastity?

TALTHYBIUS

Eros has shot an arrow in his heart—passionate feelings for the frantic girl.

HECUBA

My child, toss aside those sacred keys and take the holy garlands off your head.

TALTHYBIUS

She has won the royal bed. Is that not an important honour?

¹⁷Ilos was a legendary founder of Troy.

¹⁸Agamemnon's wife is Clytaemnestra, daughter of Tyndareus, king of Sparta (also called Lacedaemon).

HECUBA

What have you done with that child you took away from me just recently? Where is she now?

[260]

TALTHYBIUS

You mean

Polyxena? Or is it someone else?

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HECUBA

Yes, that's the one. Who did the lottery assign her to?

TALTHYBIUS

Polyxena was sent to be a slave girl at Achilles' tomb.

HECUBA

Alas for me! I am now the mother of a dead man's grave attendant! Tell me, my friend, is this decision some sort of law or a tradition among the Hellenes?

TALTHYBIUS

Be happy for your child. She is doing well.

HECATE

What did you just say? Then tell me this— Is she still alive?

TALTHYBIUS

Her Fate has claimed her, and she has been released from suffering.

310 [270]

HECUBA

What about poor Andromache, the wife of that skilled warrior Hector?¹⁹ What's her fate?

TALTHYBIUS

Achilles' son took her as his special prize.

HECUBA

And what of me, an old white-haired woman, who needs to hold a staff as a third foot, what man am I to serve?

¹⁹Hector, a son of Hecuba and leader of the Trojan forces, was killed by Achilles in single combat outside the city walls in the last year of the war.

TALTHYBIUS

Odysseus,

king of Ithaca, chose you as his slave.

HECUBA

O no! No! Now beat your close-cropped head, and with these nails rip both your cheeks to shreds! This is disastrous! To be made the slave of that loathsome, deceitful man, the enemy of what is just, that lawless venomous snake, whose forked double tongue turns everything to something else, then turns it back again—changing our earlier love to hatred. Weep for me, you Trojan women. Weep. I must be gone on my unhappy way, a wretched woman, my life in ruins. I have fallen on a miserable fate.

[290]

[280]

330

CHORUS LEADER

My queen, you now know your lot. But what man, Achaean or Greek, controls my destiny.

TALTHYBIUS [to his attendants]

You men, go and get Cassandra. Bring her as quickly as you can, so I can hand her over to Agamemnon, our commander, and then lead the other captive women to the remaining warriors to whom each one of them has been assigned by lot.

[In one of the huts a light appears. Talthybius notices it.]

Just a moment! Why is there a fiery torch blazing in that hut? What are they doing? Are Trojan women burning every nook, because it is their fate to leave this place and go to Argos? Are they setting fire to themselves because they are in love with death? In times like these, free people find it truly difficult to bend their necks beneath the yoke of slavery. Open up! Open the door! What they are doing in there may suit their purposes but work against Achaean interests, and I could be blamed.

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[300]

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HECUBA

They are not setting anything on fire. My daughter Cassandra is rushing here

in a raving frenzy.

Cassandra enters from the hut carrying a burning torch in each hand. She is in a frantic state, dancing and gesturing erratically.]

CASSANDRA

Hold up the light, raise it high! I bear the flame! I worship the god!— Look! Look! And light his sacred shrine with burning torches! O Hymen, lord of marriage, blessed is the groom! And blessed, too, am I, about to share a royal bed in Argos! O Hymen! Lord Hymen!

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370

Since you, my mother, are in mourning, crying and groaning for my dead father and our beloved native land, I have kindled fiery light to cast its sun-like radiance at my own wedding and give you, O Hymen and give you, O Hecate, the light a virgin's wedding needs and our traditions demand.

[320]

[310]

[To the Chorus]

Move your feet to the rhythm, raise them high as we dance and cry out with joy, as we did in my father's happiest days. This dance is ordained by the gods. So come, Phoebus, come now, in your shrine among the laurel trees I am preparing sacrifice.²⁰ O Hymen, god of marriage! Hymen! Dance, mother, and laugh, and turn on your feet like me, as you move like this and like this in the rhythms of delightful dancing. Let your voice ring with happy songs and cries of joy for the bride on her wedding day. And come,

you beautifully dressed maids of Troy,

[330]

²⁰Phoebus is another name for Apollo.

sing of my wedding and my husband, the man fated for my marriage bed.

390 [340]

[350]

CHORUS LEADER

She is in an ecstatic fit, my queen. Grab hold of her in case she runs away to the Achaean army.

HECUBA

O Hephaestus, god of fire, you light the wedding torches for mortal men, but flames you nourish here are pitiful, more so than anything I ever could conceive. Alas, my child, I never dreamed we would host your wedding at the sharp end of an Achaean spear. Hand me that torch. You are not holding it 400 the way you should when you move so quickly in your frantic dance. My child, your misfortune has not helped you recover your right mindyou are still as troubled as you were before. You Trojan women, take in these torches, and, rather than singing her a nuptial song, let your eyes weep tears instead.

CASSANDRA

O mother, cover my head with wreaths of victory, and lead me on. If you find I am reluctant, if I hold back, use force to push me there. For if Loxias is indeed a prophet, then Agamemnon, that glorious king of the Achaeans, in marrying me, will have a wife much deadlier than Helen.²¹ For I shall kill him and destroy his home, avenge my father's and my brothers' deaths. But let that be . . . I will not speak about the battle-axe that will slice through my neck and the necks of others, or the struggle that will end up with a mother's murder and the downfall of the house of Atreus. All these things my marriage will bring about. Yes, now I am possessed, but I shall move beyond this frantic ecstasy and prove this city is far happier than those of the Achaeans, who, for the sake of

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²¹Loxias is another name for Apollo.

a single woman and a single passion, slaughtered many thousands, chasing Helen. Their wise commander lost what he loved most, [370] the joys of having children in his house, 430 for the sake of what he loathed—he gave in to his brother over Helen, who left home willingly enough—there was no force involved. From the day they reached Scamander's banks, they began to die.²² No one had raided their borders or disturbed the high-walled towns of their native land. Those men snatched away by Ares, god of battle, never saw their children any more, nor were there shrouds draped over them by hands of loving wives. 440 They lie in a foreign land. Things back home were much the same. Wives were dying widows, and couples had no children in the house. [380] The sons they reared were now with other people, and none were left to make blood offerings to the earth in those rites we owe the dead. One can commend the Achaean army and praise it for achievements of this sort. About their shameful acts it is far better to keep silent. May my poetic muse 450 never sing of the evil acts they did. But what is most important, Trojans died fighting for their country. There is no fame more beautiful than that. Those killed in war had their bodies carried home by friends and were buried in the earth, in the embrace of their own native soil. The proper rites were duly carried out by willing hands. [390] Any Phrygian who did not die in battle lived every day with his wife and children, 460 pleasures the Achaeans had left behind. As for Hector, he brought you great sorrow. But listen to the facts. He is dead and gone, but he is famous as the very best of men. That happened because the Achaeans came. If they had stayed at home, then nobody would know a thing about his excellence. And Paris married one of Zeus's daughters.²³ If he had not done that, his family and their connections would be forgotten. 470

²²Scamander is the name of the river close to Troy.

²³Paris is a son of Hecuba and a brother to Hector. He ran off with Helen, wife of Menelaus, king of Sparta. Helen was a daughter of Zeus.

A man with sense should flee from making war, [400] but if war comes, a noble death will crown his city, and his death is no disgrace. A coward's death brings nothing but great shame. And so, mother, you must not feel pity for our country or my bed: with this marriage I shall destroy those you and I most hate.

CHORUS LEADER

How happily you smile at the disasters facing your family, chanting a story that may well prove you wrong.

TALTHYBIUS

If Apollo 480 had not filled your mind with Bacchic frenzy, you would not have sent our generals home with such prophecies without paying the price. [410] But it seems that men who are considered intelligent and wise are no better than those who have no qualities like these. The great king of all Hellenic forces, the dear son of Atreus, has conceived a passion for the maddened girl he chose. I may not be rich, but I would never take 490 a wife like her. As for you, since your wits are skewed, I will cast all your insults against the Argives and your praise of Troy into the winds to be carried away. Now follow me to the ships—a lovely bride [420] for our commander.

[Turning to address Hecuba]

You follow as well wherever the son of Laertes wishes.24 You will be a servant to a mistress known by all the Greeks who came to Troy as a discreet and truly prudent lady.²⁵

CASSANDRA

This hired servant is a marvellous man! Why do they give such men the name "Herald"? All men share a common hatred of those

²⁴The son of Laertes is Odysseus, the warrior to whom Hecuba has been given.

²⁵The lady is the wife of Odysseus, Penelope.

who attend on kings or city governments. You say my mother Hecuba will reach Odysseus' home. But then what about those words Apollo uttered—their meaning was very clear to me. They prophesied she would die in Troy. I will not criticize [430] the other things you said. Poor Odysseus, 510 he has no idea how much suffering lies in wait for him or how those evils the Phrygians and I are going through will one day seem to him like precious gold. For after the ten long years spent at Troy, he will endure another ten full years, and when he gets home, he will be alone. [He will be threatened many times with death]²⁶: where terrible Charybdis has her home in a narrow channel among the rocks, 520 and sailing past that mountain-ranging Cyclops, who eats men's flesh, by Ligurian Circe, who turns men into swine, by many shipwrecks on the briny sea, by passionate desire to eat the lotus fruit, and by the herd [440] of Helios' sacred cattle, whose flesh will later utter human speech, a voice painful for Odysseus to hear. And then, to sum things up, he will, while still alive, go down to Hades, escape the raging sea, 530 and when he gets back, he will discover a thousand troubles waiting in his home. But why am I talking of the ordeals Odysseus will face? Lead on at once, so I can get married to my husband in Hades. O Agamemnon, you are an evil man, and you will be buried in an evil way, not in the daylight, but at night. O you commander-in-chief of the Danaan forces, you believe 540 that your accomplishments are truly grand! And what of me, a servant of Apollo? My naked corpse will be tossed in a ravine, and a winter flood near my husband's grave will give my body over to wild beasts [450] for them to eat.

[Cassandra begins to tear off her prophet's insignia]

²⁶Something is apparently missing from the text here. I have added a line of my own (in square brackets) to make the transition to the summary of some of Odysseus's adventures easier to follow.

550

570

O you sacred garlands of the god most dear to me, farewell, you splendid prophetic gifts! I am done with your festivals, which, in earlier days, gave me such delight. Go! I will rip you from my skin, so that, while my body is still pure, I can cast them all away to the restless winds to carry to you, my lord of prophecy.

[Cassandra turns to Talthybius.]

Where is the ship with your commander? Where should I go to take my place on board? You should give up waiting for a gentle breeze to fill the sails, for you are carrying me, one of three avenging Furies, away from Ilion.²⁷

[Cassandra turns to Hecuba.]

Rejoice for me, mother, and no more tears.

O my dear native land! And my brothers
underneath the earth and my father,
before long you will be welcoming me.

When I arrive in the land of the dead,
I will bring victory: I shall have destroyed
our destroyers—the house of Atreus.

[Cassandra leaves with Talthybius and his escort. Hecuba collapses.]

CHORUS LEADER

Those of you attending on old Hecuba, can you not see how your queen has fallen and is lying there speechless on the ground? Can you not help her out? You useless slaves, will you just let the old woman lie there? Lift her body up. Set her on her feet.

HECUBA

Leave me be, you girls, resting where I fell—what is not welcome is not very kind.
Those troubles I have suffered in the past, those I am undergoing now, and those I have yet to face, all make this position—

²⁷The Furies are the goddesses of blood revenge, especially within the family.

down on the ground—particularly apt. O you gods! . . . I am calling on my allies, who are quite useless. But there is something 580 [470] to be said for invoking deities when any of us falls on evil days. So to begin with, I will sing about the wonderful and happy life I had in this way I shall arouse more pity for these misfortunes now. I was born to royal parents, and I got married to a powerful king, then I gave birth to many excellent sons—not just sons, but the very finest of the Phrygians-590 no Trojan, Greek, or barbarian mother could ever boast aloud of sons like mine.²⁸ I have seen them killed by Hellenic spears. I have shorn my head at their burial mounds. [480] With my own eyes, I saw Priam, their father, slaughtered by the altar in his own home and our city fall into enemy hands. I did not hear these things from someone else. I raised daughters, too, girls who deserved to be chosen in a noble marriage. 600 But I raised them for strangers—they were snatched from my own hands, and I have lost all hope that they will see me. And in days to come my eyes will never see them anymore. Finally, to top off my miseries, I, an old slave woman, am to be sent [490] to Hellas where they will demand of me work inappropriate to my old age. I, Hector's mother, will be watching gates, or guarding keys, or baking bread for them. 610 I will lay my wrinkled body on the ground not in a royal bed, with tattered rags covering my worn-out skin, so shameful for those who have been rich. I find it so demeaning! And this is what I am and what I shall be, all because one woman wanted to get married! O Cassandra, [500] my child, summoned by the gods to join their frantic ecstasy, what sort of fate is this that ends your chastity? And you, 620

²⁸The Greek has the word "children" rather than "sons." I have used "sons" because what Hecuba is saying here does not apply to her daughters (not all of whom are dead) and because she discusses her daughters a few lines further on.

Polyxena, my poor unhappy girl, where are you? Where? Not one of my children, the many sons and daughters I have borne, is here to help their suffering mother.

Why then lift me back up on my feet?

What sort of hope is left? There was a time

I used to walk through Troy with graceful steps, but now I am a slave. Take me to bed, where, after I am worn out with weeping,

I can collapse close to some stony ridge, hurl myself from the rocks, and perish.

Never consider any rich man happy until after he is dead.

630

[510]

CHORUS

Sing for me, muse,
a tale of Ilion, a new tearful song
of lamentation, for now I will cry out
a choral chant on behalf of Troy
and sing how a horse on a four-wheeled cart
was hauled up and left at our city gates
by the Achaeans. That horse was my downfall—
it ruined me, made me a prisoner.
There was a tremendous noise and its sides
were draped in gold, its belly full of spears.
The Trojans standing on the high rock walls
shouted out:

640

[520]

"Those of you whose work is over, go, haul this sacred image to the shrine of Athena, the Zeus-begotten goddess of Ilion."²⁹

Then every young girl came out of her home, every old man, too, and singing with joy, dragged inside the walls that lethal treacherous bait. All of Troy rushed to the gates to bring up that horse built of polished mountain pine and hiding a band of Argive warriors inside, as an offering to the virgin goddess and her immortal horses, a fine gift that brought fatal ruin to Dardanians. They wrapped a web of cord ropes around it,

[530]

²⁹Athena is frequently called "Zeus begotten" because she had no mother but sprang fully formed out of Zeus's head.

as if it were the black hull of a ship, dragged it to Pallas's stone shrine, and set it [540] on level ground sacred to the goddess, 660 soon to be covered with our country's blood. But as they worked on and celebrated, dark night fell. Libyan flutes were playing, people started singing Phrygian songs, while young girls raised their feet high in the air and stamped the ground in their jubilation. In the homes, fiery torches cast shadows from dying embers on sleep-laden eyes. [550] At that moment I was at home rejoicing singing and dancing to that child of Zeus, 670 the maiden of the mountains, when a cry, a blood-red scream, echoed through the city and filled all homes in Pergamum.³⁰ Babies were terrified and clenched their mother's clothes in tiny fists, as Ares, god of war, [560] and his hidden band of warriors emerged from their hiding place, following the plan of maiden goddess Pallas. The altars were soaked with Trojan blood, in the bedrooms desolation—young men with heads hacked off, 680 a splendid prize for youth-nurturing Hellas, but for our Phrygian homeland bitter grief.

[Enter Andromache with her young child Astyanax in a wagon, guarded by Greek soldiers. Hector's weapons and armour are piled in the wagon.]

CHORUS LEADER

Hecuba, do you see Andromache
being carried here in an Argive wagon?
Close to her beating heart she is clasping
Hector's son, our beloved Astyanax.³¹
Where are you being taken, you poor widow,
in the back of that cart, with all that loot—
Hector's bronze armour and spoils from Phrygia—
all hunted down and captured by the spear,
so that Achilles' son, once home from Troy,
can decorate his Phthian shrines with them?

ANDROMACHE

My Argive masters are taking me away.

³⁰The maiden of the mountains is a reference to the goddess Artemis. Pergamum was the name of the citadel in Troy. It is commonly used in poetry to refer to the entire city.

³¹The infant Astyanax (whose name means "lord of the city") was the son of Hector, Troy's greatest fighter. The name was given to him by the citizens of Troy, who considered him important to the survival of the city.

HECUBA O no!	
ANDROMACHE Why are you muttering a dirge for me?	
HECUBA Alas for Troy!	
ANDROMACHE And for this suffering!	
HECUBA O Zeus	[580]
ANDROMEDA And for this disaster!	
HECUBA My children	
ANDROMACHE Our days are done.	
HECUBA Our joy is gone Troy is no more	
ANDROMACHE Such misery	
HECUBA All my noble sons.	
ANDROMACHE Alas!	
HECUBA Yes, alas for my	
ANDROMACHE So many evils.	
HECUBA Such a piteous fate	700
ANDROMACHE	

For our city.

HECUBA

Which has been reduced to ash.

ANDROMACHE

O my dear husband, come for me!

HECUBA

My poor lady, you are summoning my son, who is in Hades.

ANDROMACHE

Protector of your wife . . . [590]

HECUBA

O Hector, you who in earlier days brought so much anguish to the Achaeans, the finest of all my children, the eldest of all the sons I bore to Priam, come and lead me to my sleep in Hades.

710

ANDROMACHE

Those huge regrets . . .

HECUBA

Unhappy lady,

the agonies we bear!

ANDROMACHE

Our city lies in ruins.

HECUBA

Pain piled on pain.

ANDROMACHE

By the malicious gods, since the time that son of yours escaped death and for the sake of that hateful marriage destroyed the citadel in Troy, where bodies of bloody dead lie by Athena's shrine, scattered there for vultures to carry off, and Troy now bears the yoke of slavery.³²

[600]

HECUBA

O my unhappy country . . .

³²The son who escaped death is a reference to Hecuba's son Paris, who was exposed and left to die as an infant, because of a prophecy that he would be the destruction of Troy. But Paris was rescued by shepherds.

ANDROMACHE

I weep for you—

720

left behind like this . . .

HECUBA

Now you are witnessing

the painful end.

ANDROMACHE

And my home,

the place where I gave birth.

HECUBA

O my children,

your mother has lost her city, and now she is losing you . . . how sad that is . . . so much sorrow . . . in our homes tears and still more tears. Only the dead forget their pain and do not weep.

CHORUS LEADER

For those who have suffered such disasters, what sweet relief there is in shedding tears, in mourning, and in chanting their laments that speak of pain.

730

[610]

ANDROMACHE

You are Hector's mother,

the man who with his spear once slaughtered so many Argives. Are you witnessing

what is going on?

HECUBA

I see all this

as the work of the gods—they raise up high things that we mortals consider nothing and demolish those we most admire.

ANDROMACHE

That is why I am being carried off as spoils—me and my child—the nobly born

turned into slaves—a brutal change.

HECUBA

It is

the fearful power of necessity.

Just moments ago Cassandra was torn

from me by force and taken away.

ANDROMACHE

Alas! Alas! It seems another Ajax has appeared to harm a second daughter.³³ But there are other reasons for your grief.

HECUBA

Yes, my sufferings cannot be measured—they are numberless. My afflictions vie with one another, all competing to be the worst.

[620]

750

ANDROMACHE

Your daughter Polyxena is dead, sacrificed at Achilles' tomb, an offering to his lifeless corpse.

HECUBA

O no! Another misery for me! This is the riddle Talthybius uttered when he spoke to me some time ago. What he said was not entirely clear, but now it has come true.³⁴

ANDROMACHE

I saw her myself.

I climbed down from the wagon, then covered her body with a cloak, and beat my chest 760 in mourning.

HECUBA

Alas, for your unholy sacrifice! Alas, once more, for your disgraceful death.

ANDROMACHE

However she died, Polyxena is gone. But her death was a more fortunate fate than mine, since I am still alive.

[630]

HECUBA

My child, living and dying are not the same. One is nothingness; the other offers hope.

³³The first Ajax to assault a daughter of Hecuba was the lesser Ajax, who attacked Cassandra. See line 90 above.

³⁴This is a reference to Talthybius's remarks when Hecuba asked about Polyxena earlier (see line 300 ff. above)

ANDROMACHE

O mother of so many children, listen to some reassuring words, so that I may inspire your heart with joy. I maintain 770 that never to have been born and to die are both the same, but to be dead is better than a life of misery. For the dead feel no physical pain and have no sense of sorrow. But when a prosperous man falls into misfortune, his heart wanders from from the memory of happier days. [640] Now that your child is dead, it is as if she had never gazed upon the sunlight, and now she knows nothing of her suffering. 780 But I, who strove to win a virtuous name, failed to hit the target, though my fortune was better than most women's. In Hector's home I worked hard to do all those things that mark a woman as a prudent, modest wife. First of all, I remained inside my home. Whether or not a woman should be blamed for going out, the fact she is not home can have dire consequences. And so I abandoned such desires and stayed at home. 790 [650] I would not permit clever female gossip in my house, for I had in my own mind a wise teacher, and I found that was enough. With my husband, I kept my tongue silent and my eyes subdued, for I understood where I could win an argument with him and when it was better to let him prevail. News of me reached the Achaean army, and that was my downfall. When I was captured, the son of Achilles wished to take me 800 as his wife, and I must serve as a slave [660] in that house of murderers. If I suppress my love for Hector and open up my heart to this new husband, it will look as if I have betrayed the dead. But then if I despise him, he will despise me, too. People say that one night in a man's bed removes the hate a woman feels for him, but I detest the woman who rejects her former husband for another's bed 810 and loves him instead. A horse, if parted from a familiar long-time stable mate, will not find it easy to pull the yoke. [670]

Yet such beasts have no speech or reasoning, and their nature is inferior to our own. O my dear Hector, in you I found a man who was the match for me—intelligent, of noble birth, prosperous, brave, and strong. When you took me from my father's home, I was a virgin bride. You were the first to make this chaste young girl a married wife. Now you are dead, and I am sailing off to Greece a captive, under slavery's yoke. Surely the dead Polyxena, for whom you grieve so much, faces fewer troubles than I do. For I have no hope left, the last thing that remains in every man and woman. Nor do I deceive my heart with hopes of joyful news, although to think of that can often bring one pleasure.

[680]

820

830

CHORUS LEADER

Our situations are the same. Your grief for what has happened to you speaks to me of my own misfortune.

HECUBA

I have never set foot on a ship's deck, but I have seen pictures and, by listening to others, have learned some things about them. In a storm of moderate strength, sailors are eager and work very hard to save themselves one man stands by the tiller, another works the sails, a third bails out the hold. But when the sea is truly violent, they surrender to their fate and commit their bodies to the driving waves. And that is how I feel with my countless troubles— I am speechless and cannot say a word. These waves of misery sent from the gods are overpowering me. My dear child, you must stop talking about Hector's fate. None of the tears you shed can save him now. Honour your new master. Show him affection, and use your demeanor to lure him in. If you do that, you will cheer up your friends and yourself as well, and then you can raise this son of my son to be a great help

to Troy, so that, in due time, your children

[690]

840

840 [700]

may establish Ilion once again, and our city still live on.

[Hecuba notices Talthybius approaching.]

But we must end

conversation and talk of something else. Who is that Achaean servant I see walking here with news of some new plan?

850

[Enter Talthybius with an armed escort.]

TALTHYBIUS

Andromache, former wife of Hector, the very finest of the Phrygians, do not consider me despicable, for I am not a willing messenger. The Danaans and the sons of Pelops both insist...³⁵

[710]

ANDROMACHE

What is it? Your opening words suggest the start of something ominous.

TALTHYBIUS

It has been resolved that this boy here . . . How can I say the words?

ANDROMACHE

Is he to have a master other than myself? Surely not.

860

TALTHYBIUS

No Achaean will ever be his master.

ANDROMACHE

Are they going to leave him here as a relic of the Phrygian people?

TALTHYBIUS

I know no easy way to tell you the bad news.

ANDROMACHE

I commend you

³⁵The Danaans is a reference to the Greek forces (Danaos was a legendary figure in the history of Argos). The sons of Pelops are Menelaus and Agamemnon, descendants of Pelops.

for considering my feelings, unless you have some good news to report.

TALTHYBIUS

You will hear dreadful news about your son—they are going to kill him.

ANDROMACHE

O no! This news is so much worse than my forced marriage!

[720]

TALTHYBIUS

There was a meeting of all the Hellenes. Odysseus spoke, and what he said prevailed.

870

ANDROMACHE

Alas, once more! These evils that I suffer are unendurable!

TALTHYBIUS

He told them all they should not raise the son of such a father, one of the best . . .

ANDROMACHE

I hope that his advice will win the day with children of his own!

TALTHYBIUS

He must be thrown from the battlements of Troy. Let that happen—that would be for you the wisest course. Do not hang on to him. Bear your pain with nobility of heart. Do not think that you have any power, for you are weak. You have no influence. You must bear in mind these facts: your city and your husband are both gone, and now you are in our power. I am fit enough to fight against one woman on my own. And so for all these reasons, you must not be eager for a fight, or do anything that would shame you or upset the Argives, and I would not like to hear you hurling curses at the Greeks. If you say anything to make the army angry, then this child will have no burial rites or pity. But if you are quiet and accept your fate,

880

890

[730]

your son's body will not go unburied, and the Argives will be kinder to you.

ANDROMACHE

O my dear boy, my brilliant, precious son, [740] our enemies will kill you. You must leave your pitiful mother. The noble nature your father had, which saved lives of others, 900 has destroyed you. Your father's excellence has been no benefit at all to you. O my unfortunate bed and marriage, that one day brought me here, to Hector's home, to bear a son who would rule fertile Asia, not one who would be killed by the Danaans. O my son, you are crying. Do you sense the evil fate awaiting you? Why grab me with those fists of yours? Why cling to my robe, [750] like a young bird nestling beneath my wing, 910 seeking shelter there? Glorious Hector is not about to rise up from the earth clutching his famous spear and rescue you. None of your father's family will come, nor any Phrygian force. A fatal leap headfirst from the high walls and you will fall and die, with no one there to pity you. O to hold you in my arms again, a mother's greatest joy! O this body it smells so sweet! When you wore swaddling clothes, 920 these breasts provided nourishment for you. But all in vain. I used to grow weary [760] and wear myself out looking after you. And all for nothing! Now for the last time, hug your mother, hug the one who bore you, wrap your arms around my neck and kiss me! O you Hellenes are true barbarians, always searching for new forms of savagery! Why kill this completely innocent child? O daughter of Tyndareus, you are 930 no child of Zeus.³⁶ No. You are the daughter born from numerous fathers—first of all, from some avenging deity, and then from Envy, Murder, Death, and every form of evil that this earth fosters. I proclaim Zeus never was your father. You brought doom [770]

³⁶This is a reference to Helen of Troy, whose elopement with Paris to Troy was the immediate short-term cause of the Trojan War.

to many Hellenes and barbarians. I hope you are killed! Those beautiful eyes of yours have brought appalling desolation to the glorious lands of Troy.

[She turns her attention to Talthybius and gives him Astyanax]

Take him.

940

Carry him off and throw him from the walls, if that seems right. Then feast upon his flesh! It is the will of the gods that all of us are utterly destroyed, and I cannot protect my child from death. Hide me away! Throw my wretched body in the ship's hold. For I am going to a lovely wedding now that I have lost my child!

CHORUS LEADER

Unhappy Troy,

[780]

countless citizens of yours have perished, for that one woman and her hateful bed.

950

TALTHYBIUS

Come, my boy, no more hugging your poor mother. You must now climb your ancestral towers right to the top and there draw your last breath, as was determined by our vote.

[To the armed escort]

Take him away.

The man who must perform a herald's work should love brutality and ruthlessness more than my nature does.

[Talthybius and his armed escort leave, taking Astyanax with them.]

HECUBA

O Astyanax,

[790]

960

son of my ill-fated boy, your mother and I have been unjustly robbed of you by fate. Why am I suffering? Poor lad, what can I do for you? I offer you these blows to my own head and to my chest—that is all the power I still possess.

Alas for the city! Alas for you!

What miseries do we not have to face?

What do we lack to complete our ruin, our total and immediate destruction?

CHORUS

O Telamon, ruler of Salamis, land that nurtures bees, you who inhabit an island washed on all side by the sea, in a home lying near the sacred hills where Athena for the very first time revealed the blue-green olive shoots, a crown for heavenly gods and an adornment for fruitful Athens. You came here, Telamon, you came with your excellent companion, that archer Hercules, Alcmene's son, in earlier days, when you sailed from Hellas to devastate our city, Ilion.

970

980

990

[800]

Upset at being cheated of his horses,
Hercules led a group of warriors—
the finest flower of men from Hellas,
to the banks of the lovely Simois stream.³⁷
There he tied up his ship, lashing cables
to the stern of the sea-going vessel,
and took from it his unerring arrows,
preparing for the death of Laomedon.
Then with fire's crimson breath he assaulted
the stone walls Apollo had aligned with care,
and laid waste the lands of Troy. And so twice,
in two onslaughts, our Dardanian walls
have been demolished by blood-spattered spears.

[810]

O Ganymede, child of Laomedon's Troy, you walk among the goblets made of gold, Zeus's favourite slave, who fills his cup brimful of wine, a most delightful task. But your work is all in vain—your country, the land where you were born, is burning up. The seashore is crying out, like a bird wailing for its young or our sad laments for husbands, children, and aged mothers. The dew-fed places where you exercised and the racing track have disappeared, but you sit there beside the throne of Zeus

[820]

1000 [830]

³⁷Laomedon, king of Troy, had offered Hercules a gift of horses if he would destroy a sea monster. When Hercules completed the task Laomedon refused to give him the gift. In response Hercules attacked Troy. Simois was a river near Troy.

with a tranquil smile on your lovely face, while the spear of Hellas has overwhelmed the land of Priam.

Eros, O Eros, [840] who once came to the home of Dardanus, a place well loved by the heavenly gods, how grand you made Troy's towers then, 1010 linking us with gods! I will no longer speak of Zeus's shame, for white-winged Dawn, whose light we mortals love, watched our land while it was being destroyed and witnessed [850] the ruin of our citadel, even though it was here in Troy she found a husband who could make love with her in her own rooms and give her children, a man snatched up and carried to her in a chariot of golden stars, a sign that gave great hope 1020 to his native home. But all affection the gods once had for Troy has vanished.³⁸

Enter Menelaus with an armed escort.

MENELAUS

O you magnificent and blazing sun [860] by whose light I shall recapture Helen, for whom I and the Achaean army have gone to all this trouble here in Troy. I did not come, as people now assume, because of her, but to punish the man who had betrayed my hospitality by stealing my wife out of my own home. 1030 Thanks to the gods, that man has paid the price he and his country have been extinguished by our Hellenic spears. I have come here to fetch that woman—I get no pleasure [870] calling her my wife, though there was a time when she was mine. She is now included among the female Trojan prisoners who share these huts. Those warriors who fought so hard to win her with the spear have said

³⁸The overall sense of this section of the chorus is that the gods no longer care for Troy, although in the past the gods have benefited a great deal from their interactions with the city. The first part of the chorus refers to the fact the the gods have destroyed Troy's walls twice. The second part refers to Ganymede, a young Trojan lad, who was so beautiful that Zeus wanted him as his cup bearer on Olympus and abducted him. Now Ganymede seems to have forgotten Troy. The third part of the chorus refers to the goddess of Dawn (Aurora) who fell in love with a Trojan, Tithonus, and took him to live with her as her husband in heaven. In spite of that, the goddess now seems indifferent to Troy's fate.

I have the right to kill her, or, if I prefer, to spare her and take her back with me to the land of Argos. So I propose to spare Helen's life in Troy, take her back in my seaworthy ship to Hellas, and there to hand her over for her execution, as payment to all those whose families had someone killed at Troy.

1040

[Turning to his armed followers]

You attendants,

[880]

go in the hut and drag that woman out. Pull her by her hair, which stinks of slaughter. As soon as we get favourable winds, we will take her with us back to Hellas.

1050

[Some of Menelaus's attendants go into a hut to get Helen.]

HECUBA

O you who sustains the earth and rests enthroned upon it, whoever you are, an unfathomable riddle, O Zeus, whether you are natural necessity or in the intellect of mortal men, I offer prayers to you, for though you tread a silent path, you lead all human acts toward justice.

MENELAUS

What are you babbling about? Your prayer to the gods is new and strange.

1060

HECUBA

I will congratulate you, Menelaus, if you kill your wife. But you must take care not to look at her, in case she tempts you and rouses your passion for her once again. For she ensnares the eyes of men and then destroys their cities and burns down their homes, so potent is her evil magic! I know her, so do you, and so do her victims, too.

[890]

[Helen enters, dragged out of the hut by Menelaus's attendants.]

HELEN

Menelaus, this is not a good way to begin—it makes me apprehensive—

to have me dragged out here by your servants, against my will, in front of all these huts. I assume you hate me, but I wish to ask what you and the Hellenes have determined about my life.

[900]

MENELAUS

There was no real debate. Since I was the one you hurt, the entire army said they would give you to me to be killed.

HELEN

Will I be permitted to say something challenging this decision and showing that, if I die, that death would be unjust.

1080

MENELAUS

I did not come to have an argument, but to kill you.

HECUBA

Listen to her, Menelaus.

Do not let her die without a hearing.

But let me speak in opposition to her.

You know nothing of the evil things she did right here in Troy, and everything I say, when added up, will ensure that she is killed—she will never have a chance to get away.

[910]

MENELAUS

That is a favour that requires some time. However, if she wishes to speak, she can. I will grant her this, not for her sake, but because of what you said. I want her to hear your words and learn something.

1090

HELEN

Whether what I have to say seems good or not, you probably will not give me an answer, for you consider me an enemy.

Nonetheless, I will set down the charges, yours and mine, and compare them. After that, I shall respond to all those accusations I assume that you will raise against me. First, this woman here was the origin of all these troubles, for she was the one who gave birth to Paris. Second, old Priam did not kill his new-born infant long ago—

1100

[920]

that ominous dream image of a firebrand, Alexander.³⁹ And so Priam ruined Troy and me, as well. Listen to what followed. Paris was the judge in a competition between three goddesses to determine the most beautiful. Pallas offered him 1110 a bribe—he would become commander of the Phrygians and destroy Hellas. Hera promised him that if he chose her, he would become the ruler of all Asia and the outer boundaries of Europe. Aphrodite, amazed that my body [930] was so beautiful, promised Paris he could have me as a present, if she prevailed over the other goddesses. Now consider what happened after that. 1120 Aphrodite defeated the other two, and up to now my marriage to Paris has proved a great benefit to Hellasyou have not been conquered by barbarians, or beaten in battle, or ruled by tyrants. But what was good for Hellas ruined me because I was so beautiful, I was sold, and now I am reviled for what I did, when they should put a garland on my head. But you will say I have not yet spoken 1130 about what matters—how I slipped away and left your home in secret. That spirit of revenge—you can call him what you wish, Paris or Alexander—came to us with Aphrodite, no trifling goddess, [940] at his side, and you, you detestable man, sailed off to the land of Crete, leaving him in Sparta—in your home. And that was that. for what happened next, there is no point in asking you—I need to ask myself: 1140 What was I thinking when I left your house, following a stranger, betraying my country and my home? You should punish the goddess show that you are even mightier than Zeus, who, though he is stronger than the other gods, is Aphrodite's slave, and then pardon me. [950] Now, from this you might make a specious case

³⁹Alexander is an alternative name for Paris. The "dream image of a fire brand" is a reference to a dream Hecuba had shortly before giving birth to Paris: she dreamed that she was giving birth to a flaming piece of wood. When Paris was born, the prophets advised that the infant should be killed or else the boy would bring disaster to Troy. But Priam refused to permit the killing.

[960]

1170

against me-after Alexander died and made his way down to the underworld, the gods lost any interest in my marriage, 1150 and so I should have left his house and gone to the Argive ships. I was keen to do that. The soldiers in the towers and the lookouts on the walls are my witnesses. Those men often found me trying to steal away, using rope to lower my body from the battlements. And Deiphobus, my new husband, was there. Against my will, he seized me and forced me to be his wife, even though the Trojans did not approve. 40 1160 How then, my husband, would there be justice if you had me killed? Would that act be fair, considering he forced me into marriage and my mind has become a bitter slave instead of winning a great victory? If you wish to overpower the gods, that desire reveals your ignorance.

CHORUS LEADER

My queen, defend your children and your native land.
Demolish her persuasive arguments, for though she is a shameless criminal, she reasons well, and that is dangerous.

HECUBA

First, I will defend those three goddesses and show how Helen does not speak the truth. [970] For I simply cannot imagine Hera and virgin Pallas would be so stupid the first to sell Argos to barbarians and Pallas to make Athenians the slaves of Phrygians. If they came to Ida for a beauty competition, that was just a childish game. Would goddess Hera 1180 really care that much about the prize? Did she wish to win a finer husband than great Zeus? Or was Athena hunting for a husband among the gods, when she, despising marriage, had asked her father [980] to let her forever stay a virgin?

⁴⁰Deïphobus was a Trojan prince, a son of Priam and Hecuba. After the death of Paris, Deïphobus married Helen of Troy. In some accounts she was given to him as a gift for his courageous fighting. During the sack of Troy, Deïphobus was killed by Odysseus or Menelaus or Helen herself.

Do not seek to make a goddess foolish, in order to dress up your sordid life. You will not persuade anyone with sense. Then you claimed—and this will prompt much laughter— 1190 that Aphrodite and my son Paris both came to the home of Menelaus. Could she not have quietly remained in heaven and brought you to Ilion, and all of Amyclae as well?41 My son was a remarkably good-looking man, and as soon as you laid eyes on Paris your mind made you think of Aphrodite, for every mortal being lays the blame for his stupidity on Aphrodite, 1200 and her very name quite correctly starts [990] like aphrosune, which means thoughtlessness. When you saw Paris in his gorgeous clothes exotic, glittering in blazing gold your mind went raving mad. For in Argos you lived a simple public life. You hoped, if you could flee from Sparta, to drown the Phrygian city, which flowed with gold, in your extravagance. You did not find the palace of Menelaus rich enough 1210 for you to live a life of luxury and revel in your wealth. So much for that. You claim my son took you away by force. What Spartan witnessed this? Did you shout and cry for help? Castor was still alive, [1000] a brave young man, and his brother, too. They had not yet been placed among the stars.⁴² And when you came to Troy with the Argives in close pursuit and the deadly war began, if someone told you that Menelaus 1220 had prevailed in battle, you would praise him to annoy my son by making him believe he had a powerful rival for your love. But if the Trojans had the upper hand, then you had no use for Menelaus.

⁴¹Hecuba is presumably making a jest here in order to ridicule Helen's story about what happened in Sparta. If Aphrodite had wanted Paris and Helen to meet, she could have remained in heaven and simply had Helen brought to Troy—and the entire population of a well-known city, as well.

⁴²Castor and his brother Pollux (or Polydeuces) were twin brothers of Helen. Their mother was Leda, but they had different fathers. Like Helen, Pollux was a divine child of Zeus, and Castor was the mortal son of Tyndareus, king of Sparta. When Castor died, Zeus offered Pollux a choice; he could live eternally in heaven or he could give half his immortality to his brother. Pollux chose the latter, and the twins alternated between Hades and mount Olympus and later became stars in the heavens (still known as Gemini, the twins).

You had your eye on Fortune—that habit helped you follow closely in her footsteps. You had no desire to practise virtue. Now, you state that you secretly attempted [1010] to lower your body from the battlements 1230 with twisted rope, since you were unwilling to remain in Troy. But were you ever caught sharpening a sword or putting a noose around your neck, as a noble woman would have done out of regret and love for her former husband? And I warned you many times. I told you, "You must leave here, daughter. My sons will marry other brides. I will help you steal away and get you to the Achaean ships. You must end this war 1240 between us and the Hellenes." But these words just made you angry. For you were living a debauched life in Alexander's home— [1020] you loved having barbarians fall down and worship you. You had a glorious time. Now, after all that, you appear out here, your body dressed in all your finery, to look at the same sky as your husband. You disgusting slut! You should have come submissively—your hair cut very short, 1250 in ragged clothes, and shuddering with fear, as if you were ashamed of your past life instead of flaunting it. Menelaus, listen to the conclusion of my speech: crown Hellas with glory by killing her— [1030] she deserves to die. And set down this law for every other woman: You will die if you betray your husband.

CHORUS LEADER

Menelaus,

do what is worthy of your ancestors and your home! You must get your revenge upon your wife and remove that slur the Hellenes make—that you are much too soft. Let your enemies see your noble heart.

MENELAUS

We share the same opinion in this matter—acting on her own free will, this woman left my home for a stranger's bed, and now she brings in Aphrodite just to boast.

Go! Go to those who will hurl stones at you!

1260

And may your quick death render what is due to the Achaeans for their tiring work and teach you never to bring shame on me.

1270 [1040]

[Helen kneels down and wraps her arms around Menelaus's knees.]

HELEN

No, no! I beg you, by your knees, do not blame me for that sent by gods, sickness and do not kill me.⁴³ You must forgive me!

HECUBA [to Menelaus]

Do not let down your allies who have died because of her. I beg you, for their sake and for my children.

MENELAUS

No more, old lady.

I do not care what happens to her. I'll tell my servants to take her away and get her on the ship she's sailing in.

1280

HECUBA

You two must never sail on the same ship.

[1050]

MENELAUS

But why? Is she heavier than before?

HECUBA

There is no lover who does not love forever.

MENELAUS

That depends upon the hearts of those we love. But I will grant your wish. She will not step onto the same ship as me. What you say is not bad advice. When she reaches Argos, she will be put to death—and shamefully, as she deserves. It will teach all women to be sensible and chaste—no easy task. Her death will throw fear into their foolishness, even though they're more perverse than Helen.

1290

[Exit Menelaus and his attendants, taking Helen with them.]

CHORUS

So then, O Zeus, you have abandoned

[1060]

⁴³Kneeling and holding someone's knees was a gesture made in very urgent requests.

your incense-laden altar and your shrine here in Ilion to the Achaeans, with offerings burning on the altar and smoky myrrh rising to the heavens, and Pergamum, the sacred citadel, and ivy-growing glens of Ida, fed by streams of melting snow, a sacred dwelling place lit by the sun, a boundary, struck first by the sun god's rays.

1300

[1070]

Your burnt offerings have disappeared and the sacred music of the dancers.

Gone, too, the night-long vigils of the gods and all the images carved in gold, and Phrygia's holy festivals, held twelve times a year, at each full moon.

I am concerned, lord Zeus, concerned, whether you, seated on your throne in heaven, understand our city is no more, demolished in a blast of blazing fire.

1310

[1080]

O my beloved husband, you are a wandering shade, your body unburied and unwashed while a swift ship with wings will take me to horse-nurturing Argos, where stone walls made by the Cyclopes reach into the sky. A mass of children gathers at the gates clinging to their mothers' necks, weeping and crying "Alas, mother, I am alone, torn from your sight by the Achaeans, who are taking me to their black ship and with their oars transporting me across the sea to sacred Salamis or to the peak beside the Isthmus that overlooks two harbours, the shrine

1320 [1090]

I wish the sacred blazing thunderbolt [1100] of the Aegean could be hurled with force 1330 and strike the ship of Menelaus,

right in the middle, while he is at sea, he is taking me in my distress away from Troy to serve in Hellas as a slave, while Zeus's daughter holds her golden mirrors, a young girl's delight.

where one can find the gates of Pelops.

[1110]

I hope he never gets back to his home in Laconia or to his father's hearth

or reaches the city of Pitane,
or Athena's shrine with gates of bronze,
for he has taken as his prize the wife
whose shameful marriage was a great disgrace
to all of Hellas and caused great pain
along the flowing streams of Simois.

[Enter Talthybius and attendants, with the dead body of Astyanax being carried on a shield.]

CHORUS LEADER

O no! No! New sorrow for my country comes to replace our still fresh grief. Look, you heartsick wives of Troy, gaze on the corpse of Astyanax, hurled from our battlements and savagely killed by the Danaans.

TALTHYBIUS

Hecuba, only one ship with its oars ready 1350 still remains. It is loaded with treasure, the remaining spoils of Achilles' son, and will soon sail for the shores of Phthia. Neoptolemus himself has already put to sea, for he heard that new troubles are afflicting Peleus—Acastus, son of Pelias, has banished Peleus from Phthia.44 So Neoptolemus, not wishing to delay, left by himself, taking Andromache along with him. 1360 [1130] I shed many tears as she left the shore groaning for her country and crying out to Hector's tomb. She kept on imploring Neoptolemus to let her bury the corpse of Hector's son, who had been thrown from the battlements and lost his life, begging him not to carry Hector's shield, the one he used to hold against his ribs, whose bronze had terrified Achaean ranks. into Peleus' home or the same rooms 1370 where she, Andromache, would be married for she was the mother of the dead child [1140] and it was a truly painful sight to her. She asked if she could bury the child in it, instead of in a coffin made of cedar or a stone tomb, and if she could entrust the corpse to your hands, so you could wrap it

⁴⁴Peleus, king of Phthia, was the father of Achilles and thus the grandfather of Neoptolemus. Pelias was king of Iolcus, and was succeeded by Acastus, his son.

in clothing and garlands, as best you can, given your resources. She has already left. Her master sailed off in such a hurry, 1380 she had no time to inter the child herself. And so, once you have prepared the body, we will pile earth above it and plant a spear. You should carry out this work with all speed. I have already done one task for you— [1150] as I was going across Scamander's stream, I washed the body and then cleansed its wounds. Now I will go and dig a grave for him. If you and I do the work together, we can save time and hasten our trip home. 1390

[Exit Talthybius.]

HECUBA

Put Hector's well-rounded shield down here a distressing sight for me to look at. O you Achaeans, you can take more pride in your spears than in your intelligence. Why were you so terrified of this child, you killed him a way not seen before? [1160] Were you afraid that one day he might come and rebuild fallen Troy? You good for nothings! Though Hector was doing well in battle with thousands of other men as allies, 1400 we were still defeated. Now our city has been conquered and every Phrygian lies dead, but you still fear this little boy. I do not praise the fear of anyone who fears but does not understand the cause. O my dear child, your death was horrible. If you had died fighting for your city, after enjoying your youthful manhood, marriage, and godlike royal authority, you would be blessed, if there is anything 1410 [1170] that can be blessed. Now, after witnessing these things and feeling them deep in your heart, my dear child, you have no idea of them, no use for what is yours inside the house. Poor child, how brutally your father's walls, those towers Apollo built, scraped your head, damaging the locks your mother cherished and so often kissed. Through the fractured bones, right there, I see the grinning smirk of murder. But I cannot discuss such shameful things. 1420 O these hands and arms, how sweet the likeness

you bear to your father! Yet you lie there, in front of me, no motion in your limbs. And this dear mouth, so often prattling [1180] your boastful words, is now no more. And yet you were not telling me the truth that day, when, curled up against my robes, you promised "Mother, I will cut off many locks of hair for you, and lead many groups of friends of my own age to your tomb, to give you 1430 a fond farewell." But you are not the one who will be burying me. I am the one who will be burying you, a pitiful corpse, though you are still much younger, while I, an old woman, have lost my home and children. Alas! All those embraces! The nourishment I gave, and going to sleep—all those are gone! What will a poet carve upon your tomb? "Because they feared this child, the Argives killed him." [1190] That epitaph should bring disgrace to Hellas. 1440 Though you have no share in your father's wealth, you do have his bronze-backed wicker shield to honour you in your burial rites. O shield protecting Hector's lovely arms, you have now lost your heroic guardian! How wonderful to see Hector's imprint on the handle, and on the rounded edge the sweat that often dripped down from his brow when, in the heat of battle, he would press this shield against his chin.

[Hecuba turns her attention to the Chorus.]

Come on, then, 1450 [1200]

bring out from those possessions you still have things to adorn this poor, wretched corpse.

[Some members of the Chorus go into the huts to search for suitable things to adorn the corpse of Astyanax.]

Fate offers us no opportunity for lovely presents now, but you will have these offerings from what I have retained. Any mortal being who rejoices because he thinks his fortune is secure is a fool. Fortune has her twists and turns, madly leaping from one man to another, and no one's luck ever remains the same.

1460

[The members of the Chorus return from the huts bringing various things for the burial rites.]

CHORUS LEADER

Here they are, as you requested, bringing Phrygian spoils to decorate the dead. Things are all prepared.

HECUBA

O my dear child,
Hector's mother is now honouring you,
not because you emerged victorious,
besting those of your own age with horses
or in archery, which our traditions
here in Phrygia hold in high esteem,
so long as they are not pursued too far,
with pleasing gifts from what you once possessed.
But Helen, whom the gods abominate,
has robbed you—she has taken your life,
and your whole house she has utterly destroyed.

CHORUS

Alas! Alas! You touch my heart, You touch my heart, you, who in days past was lord and master of the city.

HECUBA [holding up a robe]

You were to wear this on your wedding day, a splendid Phrygian robe, when you married one of the noblest girls in all of Asia. Now I will wrap it around your body. And you, too, the shield that Hector loved, so splendidly triumphant once, mother of countless testaments to victory, accept this garland. You will be sharing this body's tomb, but you will not perish, for you deserve far greater honours than those weapons sly Odysseus won.⁴⁵

CHORUS

Alas! Alas! Such bitter mourning . . . The earth will welcome you, dear child. O mother, weep for him . . .

HECUBA

Alas! 1490

[1210]

1470

1480 [1220]

⁴⁵After Achilles died, the Greek army had a competition to determine which warrior would inherit his weapons. The main contenders were the greater Ajax and Odysseus. The latter prevailed.

CHORUS

A dirge for the dead. [1230]

HECUBA

Alas for me!

CHORUS

Alas indeed, your grief is inconsolable.

HECUBA [tearing strips of cloth]

I will treat your wounds with bandages.
I am a wretched healer, a doctor
only in name, not in the real work.
Your father will take care of this for you,
when you have come among the dead below.

CHORUS

Beat your heads! Beat your heads with your fists! All at once together! Woe, woe is me!

HECUBA [very quietly, almost whispering]
O my dearest women . . .

CHORUS

What is it, Hecuba?

What did you just say?

HECUBA

It's about the gods . . .

the gods . . . they do not care for anything except my suffering, and they despise Troy more than any other city. And so our sacrifices to them have been useless. However, if some god had not turned things upside down and thrown us beneath the earth, no one would know about us, and the Muses could never celebrate us in their songs for future generations to remember.

So go away now, and bury this corpse in his wretched tomb. He has been prepared for the burial rites. It seems to me there is not much difference to the dead

whether they get lavish funerals or not. It is something living people boast about. 1510

[1250]

[1240]

[The Chorus starts to carry of the body of Astyanax on Hector's shield.]

1520

[1270]

CHORUS

Alas! Alas, for your grieving mother, here with your corpse she has seen ripped apart the very noblest hopes she had in life.

Born from the happiest ancestral line, and with a noble lineage, you died a terrible death . . .

[Soldiers appear on the ruined walls of Troy. They are holding lit torches.]

Hold on! Who are those people I see up there, high on the walls of Troy, moving around with torches in their hands? Troy is about to face a new disaster.

[Enter Talthybius with soldiers. He starts shouting at the soldiers on the walls.]

TALTHYBIUS

You captains up there! I'm talking to you!

Your orders are to burn down Priam's city.

Don't just stand there with torches in your hand.

Start spreading the fire. Once we have destroyed the city of Ilion, we can get ready

to leave Troy for a happy voyage home.

[Talthybius turns his attention to Hecuba and the Chorus.]

And you daughters of Troy, for you I have two orders—as soon as the army's leaders give a trumpet signal, you must move out for the Achaean ships and your departure away from here.

[Talthybius turns towards Hecuba.]

And as for you,
you desolate old woman, follow me.
Some servants of Odysseus have come,
looking for you—the lottery assigned you
to be his slave far from your native land.

HECUBA

Alas for me! This the final limit the last of all my sorrows. I must leave the land that is my home, while my city is aflame. But come on, you ancient feet, make a feeble effort to hurry up,

so I can bid this unhappy town farewell. O Troy, among barbarian cities you were so magnificent, but soon no one will even know your splendid name. They are burning you down and leading us, even as I speak, away from our own homes to serve as slaves. O gods! But what's the use of calling on the gods? In earlier days they did not hear us when we called to them. Come, let me run into the flames—to die with my homeland in a destructive fire would be the finest death of all for me.

1550

[1280]

[Hecuba starts to hobble towards the fire. Talthybius stops her.]

TALTHYBIUS

Your grief has made you frantic, poor woman.

[To the soldiers]

Come, lead her away. And do not dawdle. You must hand her over to Odysseus. He must receive his prize.

1560

HECUBA

Aaaaiiii! Son of Cronos, lord of Phrygia, father of our race, are you witnessing how much we suffer? The line of Dardanus does not deserve this.

[1290]

CHORUS LEADER

He sees us.

But our great city is no more a city, and Troy has ceased to be.

HECUBA

No! No! Ilion

on fire! The homes on Pergamum and our soaring walls are all ablaze.

CHORUS

The wings of smoke are curling up to heaven as our country sinks and falls beneath the spear. With blazing speed, houses are overrun by fire and hostile spearmen.

1570

[1300]

HECUBA O this land, nourisher of my children! **CHORUS** Ah . . . Ah . . . **HECUBA** O children, listen. Learn your mother's voice. **CHORUS** Your lament is summoning the dead. **HECUBA** Yes, while I rest my ancient limbs on the ground and with both hands beat the earth. **CHORUS** I'll follow you, kneeling on the ground and summoning from the underworld my unhappy husband. 1580 **HECUBA** I'm being led away, carried off . . . [1310] **CHORUS** That cry was painful . . . so much sorrow. **HECUBA** To live as a slave under his roof . . . **CHORUS** ... and not in my own land. **HECUBA** Alas! O Priam, Priam, you have been killed and lie unburied, without a friend, You know nothing of my fate. **CHORUS** He cannot. For pitch-black death has covered up his eyes, a pious man slain by the ungodly. **HECUBA**

Alas for the houses of our gods

and for the city we love.

1590

CHORUS

Alas, indeed.

HECUBA

You will have to face blood-soaked murder and bands of spearmen.

CHORUS

Soon enough you will fall on the ground you love and be forgotten.

HECUBA

Dust, rising to heaven on wings like smoke, will steal from me the sight of my own home.

[1320]

CHORUS

The name of my country will disappear. Everything has been scattered far and wide, and luckless Troy is now no more.

[There is the noise of a loud crash from behind the walls.]

HECUBA

Did you notice that? Did you hear it?

CHORUS

Yes, 1600

it was the sound of Pergamum collapsing.

HECUBA

The shaking . . . everything is shaking.

CHORUS

Our city will be overwhelmed.

HECUBA

Alasl

These trembling legs of mine must support me. So get moving you ill-fated woman—face the day you start life as a slave.

[1330]

CHORUS

Alas for my unfortunate city. But let us all be on our way and walk to the fleet of the Achaeans.

/Exeunt omnes.]