

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.

# TROJAN WOMEN

## 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 nereïd 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.<sup>1</sup> And now it lies  
in smouldering ruins, overpowered 10  
by Argive spears. For a Phocian man,  
Epeius from Parnassus, with the help 10  
of Pallas Athene's devious advice, [10]  
built a wooden horse, its pregnant belly  
crammed with warriors, a deadly idol,  
and had it hauled inside the city walls.<sup>2</sup>  
Now the sacred groves have been abandoned,  
the temples of the gods drip crimson blood,

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<sup>1</sup>The 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.

<sup>2</sup>In 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.

## TROJAN WOMEN

and beside the altar's foundation stone,  
in front of Zeus, protector of the home, 20  
Priam lies dead.<sup>3</sup> 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.<sup>4</sup>  
So I am leaving famous Ilion 30  
and my altars here.<sup>5</sup> 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.<sup>6</sup>  
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.<sup>7</sup> [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

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<sup>3</sup>Priam was king of Troy and Hecuba's husband.

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

<sup>5</sup>Ilion is another name for Troy.

<sup>6</sup>Scamander is the river that runs near Troy.

<sup>7</sup>The 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.

## TROJAN WOMEN

what gods demand and piety as well.<sup>8</sup>  
And so goodbye, you once wealthy city,  
towers of polished stone. If Athena,  
daughter of Zeus, had not demolished you, 60  
you would stand on firm foundations still.

*[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?<sup>9</sup> [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?

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<sup>8</sup>Apollo 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.

<sup>9</sup>Poseidon is the brother of Zeus, Athena's father.

## TROJAN WOMEN

POSEIDON

Yes, of course I will. 80  
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? 90

POSEIDON

Yes, I have heard about that—it happened [70]  
when Ajax dragged Cassandra off by force.<sup>10</sup>

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?

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<sup>10</sup>Ajax, 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).

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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 [80]  
to hurl at the Achaeans and fire their ships.  
Now for your part. Make the Aegean strait  
roar with overpowering waves and whirlpools, 110  
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.

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 120 [90]  
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.

*[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 *[making up slowly]*

You wretched woman, 130

## TROJAN WOMEN

lift your head up from the ground. Bend your neck.  
This is no longer Troy—nor am I still queen [100]  
in Ilium. 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 Ilium, 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.<sup>11</sup> 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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<sup>11</sup>Helen 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.

## TROJAN WOMEN

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

O you women, 170  
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 [150]  
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? 180  
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? [160]

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. 190  
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.



## TROJAN WOMEN

*[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 [170]  
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 [180]  
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 210  
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. [190]  
To whom, I wonder, and in what land?  
Me, a paltry, withered, miserable crone,  
the image of a corpse or fleeting shade 220

## TROJAN WOMEN

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.<sup>12</sup> [200]

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

I will have to bear such great misery— 230  
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.<sup>13</sup>

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, 240  
the man whose fist obliterated Troy.<sup>14</sup>

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.<sup>15</sup>

I have also heard Hephaestus' home [220]  
facing Phoenicia, close to mount Etna, 250  
the mother of all Sicilian mountains,  
is famous for the crowns of victory  
it awards its citizens for excellence.<sup>16</sup>

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

<sup>13</sup>The fountain of Peirene was located in Corinth.

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

<sup>15</sup>Theseus was a legendary hero of Athens.

<sup>16</sup>Hephaestus is the artistic god of forge. Mount Etna is a volcano in Sicily.

## TROJAN WOMEN

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. 260 [230]  
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. 270

### TALTHYBIUS

If your fears are about the lottery,  
it has already taken place. [240]

### 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?

## TROJAN WOMEN

Which of these daughters of Ilos can expect  
a prosperous fate?<sup>17</sup>

TALTHYBIUS

That I know. But ask me  
about each one in turn, not all at once. 280

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?<sup>18</sup> [250]  
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? 290

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?

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<sup>17</sup>Ilos was a legendary founder of Troy.

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

## TROJAN WOMEN

HECUBA

What have you done  
with that child you took away from me [260]  
just recently? Where is she now?

TALTHYBIUS

You mean  
Polyxena? Or is it someone else? 300

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, 310 [270]  
and she has been released from suffering.

HECUBA

What about poor Andromeda, the wife  
of that skilled warrior Hector?<sup>19</sup> 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?

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<sup>19</sup>Hector, 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.

## TROJAN WOMEN

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! 320 [280]  
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. [290]  
I have fallen on a miserable fate. 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? 340  
Are Trojan women burning every nook, [300]  
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. 350

HECUBA

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

## TROJAN WOMEN

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, [310]  
lord of marriage, blessed is the groom!  
And blessed, too, am I, about to share  
a royal bed in Argos!  
O Hymen! Lord Hymen! 360

Since you, my mother,  
are in mourning,  
crying and groaning  
for my dead father  
and our beloved native land,  
I have kindled fiery light [320]  
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 370  
and our traditions demand.

*[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 [330]  
I am preparing sacrifice.<sup>20</sup>  
O Hymen, god of marriage! Hymen! 380  
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,

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<sup>20</sup>Phoebus is another name for Apollo.

## TROJAN WOMEN

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

390 [340]

### 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  
the way you should when you move so quickly  
in your frantic dance. My child, your misfortune  
has not helped you recover your right mind—  
you 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.

400

[350]

### 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.<sup>21</sup>  
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

410

420

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<sup>21</sup>Loxias is another name for Apollo.



## TROJAN WOMEN

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.<sup>22</sup> 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.<sup>23</sup>  
If he had not done that, his family  
and their connections would be forgotten. 470

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<sup>22</sup>Scamander is the name of the river close to Troy.

<sup>23</sup>Paris 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.

## TROJAN WOMEN

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.<sup>24</sup>  
You will be a servant to a mistress  
known by all the Greeks who came to Troy  
as a discreet and truly prudent lady.<sup>25</sup> 500

### 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

---

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

<sup>25</sup>The lady is the wife of Odysseus, Penelope.

## TROJAN WOMEN

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]<sup>26</sup>:  
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]*

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<sup>26</sup>Something 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.

## TROJAN WOMEN

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.<sup>27</sup>

*[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—

---

<sup>27</sup>The Furies are the goddesses of blood revenge, especially within the family.

TROJAN WOMEN

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.<sup>28</sup>  
 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

<sup>28</sup>The 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.

## TROJAN WOMEN

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, 630  
hurl myself from the rocks, and perish.  
Never consider any rich man happy [510]  
until after he is dead.

### 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. 640  
There was a tremendous noise and its sides [520]  
were draped in gold, its belly full of spears.  
The Trojans standing on the high rock walls  
shouted out:

“Those of you whose work is over,  
go, haul this sacred image to the shrine  
of Athena, the Zeus-begotten goddess  
of Ilion.”<sup>29</sup>

Then every young girl  
came out of her home, every old man, too,  
and singing with joy, dragged inside the walls [530]  
that lethal treacherous bait. All of Troy 650  
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,

---

<sup>29</sup>Athena is frequently called “Zeus begotten” because she had no mother but sprang fully formed out of Zeus’s head.

## TROJAN WOMEN

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.<sup>30</sup> 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 [570]  
Hector's son, our beloved Astyanax.<sup>31</sup>  
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, 690  
so that Achilles' son, once home from Troy,  
can decorate his Phthian shrines with them?

### ANDROMACHE

My Argive masters are taking me away.

---

<sup>30</sup>The 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.

<sup>31</sup>The 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.

TROJAN WOMEN

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!

Alas!

HECUBA

Yes, alas for my . . .

ANDROMACHE

So many evils.

HECUBA

Such a piteous fate . . .

700

ANDROMACHE

For our city.



TROJAN WOMEN

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, [600]  
and Troy now bears the yoke of slavery.<sup>32</sup>

HECUBA

O my unhappy country . . .

---

<sup>32</sup>The 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.

TROJAN WOMEN

ANDROMACHE

I weep for you—  
left behind like this . . .

720

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

ANDROMACHE

You are Hector's mother,  
the man who with his spear once slaughtered  
so many Argives. Are you witnessing  
what is going on?

[610]

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.

740

HECUBA

It is  
the fearful power of necessity.  
Just moments ago Cassandra was torn

## TROJAN WOMEN

from me by force and taken away.

ANDROMACHE

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

HECUBA

Yes, my sufferings cannot be measured— [620]  
they are numberless. My afflictions vie  
with one another, all competing 750  
to be the worst.

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.<sup>34</sup>

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. [630]  
But her death was a more fortunate fate  
than mine, since I am still alive.

HECUBA

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

---

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

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

## TROJAN WOMEN

### 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  
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]

## TROJAN WOMEN

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 820  
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 [680]  
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. 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 [690]  
works the sails, a third bails out the hold. 840  
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, 840 [700]  
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

## TROJAN WOMEN

may establish Ilium 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, [710]  
for I am not a willing messenger.  
The Danaans and the sons of Pelops  
both insist . . .<sup>35</sup>

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

---

<sup>35</sup>The 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.

TROJAN WOMEN

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. 870  
Odysseus spoke, and what he said prevailed.

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. 880  
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 [730]  
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 890  
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,

## TROJAN WOMEN

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.<sup>36</sup> 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]

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



## TROJAN WOMEN

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]  
son of my ill-fated boy, your mother  
and I have been unjustly robbed of you  
by fate. Why am I suffering? Poor lad, 960  
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?

## TROJAN WOMEN

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 [800]  
an island washed on all side by the sea, 970  
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.

Upset at being cheated of his horses, 980  
Hercules led a group of warriors—  
the finest flower of men from Hellas,  
to the banks of the lovely Simois stream.<sup>37</sup> [810]  
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, 990  
in two onslaughts, our Dardanian walls  
have been demolished by blood-spattered spears.

O Ganymede, child of Laomedon's Troy, [820]  
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 1000 [830]  
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

---

<sup>37</sup>Laomedon, 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.

## TROJAN WOMEN

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.<sup>38</sup>

*[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  
calling her my wife, though there was a time [870]  
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

---

<sup>38</sup>The 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.



## TROJAN WOMEN

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. 1090  
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.

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. 1100  
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— [920]

## TROJAN WOMEN

that ominous dream image of a firebrand,  
Alexander.<sup>39</sup> 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  
a bribe—he would become commander  
of the Phrygians and destroy Hellas. 1110  
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 Hellas—  
you 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

---

<sup>39</sup>Alexander 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.

## TROJAN WOMEN

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 Deïphobus, [960]  
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.<sup>40</sup> 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, 1170  
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?

---

<sup>40</sup>Deïphobus 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.

## TROJAN WOMEN

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?<sup>41</sup> 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  
like *aphrosune*, which means *thoughtlessness*. [990]  
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.<sup>42</sup>  
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.

---

<sup>41</sup>Hecuba 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.

<sup>42</sup>Castor 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).



## TROJAN WOMEN

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 1260  
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!

## TROJAN WOMEN

And may your quick death render what is due  
to the Achaeans for their tiring work 1270 [1040]  
and teach you never to bring shame on me.

*[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.<sup>43</sup> 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. 1290  
Her death will throw fear into their foolishness,  
even though they're more perverse than Helen.

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

CHORUS

So then, O Zeus, you have abandoned [1060]

---

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

## TROJAN WOMEN

your incense-laden altar and your shrine  
here in Ilium 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, 1300  
a sacred dwelling place lit by the sun,  
a boundary, struck first by the sun god's rays. [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, 1310  
understand our city is no more,  
demolished in a blast of blazing fire. [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 1320 [1090]  
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  
where one can find the gates of Pelops.

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. [1110]  
I hope he never gets back to his home  
in Laconia or to his father's hearth

## TROJAN WOMEN

or reaches the city of Pitane,  
or Athena's shrine with gates of bronze, 1340  
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 Talthibijs 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 1120  
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.<sup>44</sup> 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

---

<sup>44</sup>Peleus, 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.

## TROJAN WOMEN

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

## TROJAN WOMEN

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.]*

## TROJAN WOMEN

### 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 [1210]  
here in Phrygia hold in high esteem,  
so long as they are not pursued too far,  
with pleasing gifts from what you once possessed. 1470  
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. 1480 [1220]  
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.<sup>45</sup>

### CHORUS

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

### HECUBA

Alas! 1490

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<sup>45</sup>After 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.

## TROJAN WOMEN

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?

1500

What did you just say?

HECUBA

It's about the gods . . .

the gods . . . they do not care for anything

[1240]

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.

1510

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.

[1250]

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



## TROJAN WOMEN

### 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, 1520  
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 Talthymbius with soldiers. He starts shouting at the soldiers on the walls.]*

### TALTHYBIUS

You captains up there! I'm talking to you! 1260  
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 1530  
to leave Troy for a happy voyage home.

*[Talthymbius 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.

*[Talthymbius turns towards Hecuba.]*

And as for you,  
you desolate old woman, follow me.  
Some servants of Odysseus have come, 1270  
looking for you—the lottery assigned you  
to be his slave far from your native land. 1540

### 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,

## TROJAN WOMEN

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, 1550  
even as I speak, away from our own homes  
to serve as slaves. O gods! But what's the use [1280]  
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.

*[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. 1560  
He must receive his prize.

HECUBA

Aaaaiiii! Son of Cronos, lord of Phrygia,  
father of our race, are you witnessing  
how much we suffer? The line of Dardanus [1290]  
does not deserve this.

CHORUS LEADER

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

HECUBA

No! No! Ilium  
on fire! The homes on Pergamum  
and our soaring walls are all ablaze.

CHORUS

The wings of smoke are curling up to heaven 1570  
as our country sinks and falls beneath the spear.  
With blazing speed, houses are overrun [1300]  
by fire and hostile spearmen.

TROJAN WOMEN

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 1590  
and for the city we love.

TROJAN WOMEN

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, [1320]  
will steal from me the sight of my own home.

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

Alas!  
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.]*