

415 BC

THE TROJAN WOMEN

Euripides

Euripides (~480-406 BC) - Ranked with Aeschylus and Sophocles as one of the greatest Greek dramatists, he enjoyed the least success of the three. Known even by the ancients as “the philosopher of the stage,” he is admired today for his belief in the individual and his keen insight into the human psyche. Trojan Women (415 BC) - This play depicts the horrors of war in what is often called a near approach to the character of melodrama. It is the story of Hecuba, Andromache, and Cassandra and their sorrows after Troy’s capture.

Characters in the Play

Poseidon

Athena

Hecuba

Chorus of Captive Trojan Women

Talthybius

Cassandra

Andromache

Menelaus

Helen

TROJANWOMEN

Before Agamemnon's Tent in the Camp near Troy. HECUBA asleep. Enter POSEIDON.

POSEIDON

Lo! from the depths of salt Aegean floods I, Poseidon, come, where choirs of Nereids trip in the mazes of the graceful dance; for since the day that Phoebus and myself with measurement exact set towers of stone about this land of Troy and ringed it round, never from my heart hath passed away a kindly feeling for my Phrygian town, which now is smouldering and o'erthrown, a prey to Argive prowess. For, from his home beneath Parnassus, Phocian Epeus, aided by the craft of Pallas, framed a horse to bear within its womb an armed host, and sent it within the battlements, fraught with death; whence in days to come men shall tell of "the wooden horse," with its hidden load of warriors. Groves forsaken stand and temples of the gods run down with blood, and at the altar's very base, before the god who watched his home, lies Priam dead. While to Achaean ships great store of gold and Phrygian spoils are being conveyed, and they who came against this town, those sons Of Hellas, only wait a favouring breeze to follow in their wake, that after ten long years they may with joy behold their wives and children. Vanquished by Hera, Argive goddess, and by Athena, who helped to ruin Phrygia, I am leaving Ilium, that famous town, and the altars that I love; for when drear desolation seizes on a town, the worship of the gods decays and tends to lose respect. Scamander's banks re-echo long and loud the screams of captive maids, as they by lot receive their masters. Arcadia taketh some, and some the folk of Thessaly; others are assigned to Theseus' sons, the Athenian chiefs. And such of the Trojan dames as are not portioned out, are in these tents, set apart for the leaders of the host; and with them Spartan Helen, daughter of Tyndarus, justly counted among the captives. And wouldst thou see that queen of misery, Hecuba, thou canst; for there she lies before the gates, weeping many a bitter tear for many a tribulation; for at Achilles' tomb-though she knows not this-her daughter Polyxena has died most piteously; likewise is Priam dead, and her children too; Cassandra, whom the king Apollo left to be a virgin, frenzied maid, hath Agamemnon, in contempt of the god's ordinance and of piety, forced to a dishonoured wedlock. Farewell, O city prosperous once! farewell, ye ramparts of hewn stone! had not Pallas, daughter of Zeus, decreed thy ruin, thou wert standing firmly still.

Enter ATHENA.

ATHENA

May I address the mighty god whom Heaven reveres and who to my own sire is very nigh in blood, laying aside our former enmity?

POSEIDON

Thou mayst; for o'er the soul the ties of kin exert no feeble spell, great queen Athena.

ATHENA

For thy forgiving mood my thanks! Somewhat have I to impart affecting both thyself and me, O king.

POSEIDON

Bringst thou fresh tidings from some god, from Zeus, or from some lesser power?

ATHENA

From none of these; but on behalf of Troy, whose soil we tread, am I come to seek thy mighty aid, to make it one with mine.

POSEIDON

What! hast thou laid thy former hate aside to take compassion on the town now that it is burnt to ashes?

ATHENA

First go back to the former point; wilt thou make common cause with me in the scheme I purpose?

POSEIDON

Ay surely; but I would fain learn thy wishes, whether thou art come to help Achaens or Phrygians.

ATHENA

I wish to give my former foes, the Trojans, joy, and on the Achaean host impose a return that they will rue.

POSEIDON

Why leap'st thou thus from mood to mood? Thy love and hate both go too far, on whomsoever centred.

ATHENA

Dost not know the insult done to me and to the shrine I love?

POSEIDON

Surely, in the hour that Aias tore Cassandra thence.

ATHENA

Yea, and the Achaeans did naught, said naught to him.

POSEIDON

And yet 'twas by thy mighty aid they sacked Ilium.

ATHENA

For which cause I would join with thee to work their bane.

POSEIDON

My powers are ready at thy will. What is thy intent?

ATHENA

A returning fraught with woe will I impose on them.

POSEIDON

While yet they stay on shore, or as they cross the briny deep?

ATHENA

When they have set sail from Ilium for their homes. On them will Zeus also send his rain and fearful hail, and inky tempests from the sky; yea, and he promises to grant me his levin-bolts to hurl on the Achaeans and fire their ships. And do thou, for thy part, make the Aegean strait to roar with mighty billows and whirlpools, and fill Euboea's hollow bay with corpses, that Achaeans may learn henceforth to reverence my temples and regard all other deities.

POSEIDON

So shall it be, for the boon thou cravest needs but few words. I will vex the broad Aegean sea; and the beach of Myconus and the reefs round Delos, Scyros and Lemnos too, and the cliffs of Caphareus shall be strown with many a corpse. Mount thou to Olympus, and taking from thy father's hand his lightning bolts, keep careful watch against the hour when Argos' host lets slip its cables. A fool is he who sacks the towns of men, with shrines and tombs, the dead man's hallowed home, for at the last he makes a desert round himself, and dies. Exeunt.

HECUBA (Awakening)

Lift thy head, unhappy lady, from the ground; thy neck upraise; this is Troy no more, no longer am I queen in Ilium. Though fortune change, endure thy lot; sail with the stream, and follow fortune's tack, steer not thy barque of life against the tide, since chance must

guide thy course. Ah me! ah me! What else but tears is now my hapless lot, whose country, children, husband, all are lost? Ah! the high-blown pride of ancestors! how cabined now how brought to nothing after all What woe must I suppress, or what declare? What plaintive dirge shall I awake? Ah, woe is me! the anguish I suffer lying here stretched upon this pallet hard! O my head, my temples, my side! Ah! could I but turn over, and he now on this, now on that, to rest my back and spine, while ceaselessly my tearful wail ascends. Fore 'en this is music to the wretched, to chant their cheerless dirge of sorrow.

Ye swift-prowed ships, rowed to sacred Ilium o'er the deep dark sea, past the fair havens of Hellas, to the flute's ill-omened music and the dulcet voice of pipes, even to the bays of Troyland (alack the day!), wherein ye tied your hawsers, twisted handiwork from Egypt, in quest of that hateful wife of Menelaus, who brought disgrace on Castor, and on Eurotas foul reproach; murderess she of Priam, sire of fifty children, the cause why I, the hapless Hecuba, have wrecked my life upon this troublous strand. Oh that I should sit here o'er against the tent of Agamemnon Forth from my home to slavery they hale my aged frame, while from my head in piteous wise the hair is shorn for grief. Ah! hapless wives of those mail-clad sons of Troy! Ah! poor maidens, luckless brides, come weep, for Ilium is now but a ruin; and I, like some mother-bird that o're her fledglings screams, will begin the strain; how different from that song I sang to the gods in days long past, as I leaned on Priam's staff, and beat with my foot in Phrygian time to lead the dance!

Enter CHORUS OF CAPTIVE TROJAN WOMEN.

SEMI-CHORUS I

O Hecuba why these cries, these piercing shrieks? What mean thy words? For I heard thy piteous wail echo through the building, and a pang terror shoots through each captive Trojan's breast, as pent within these walls they mourn their slavish lot.

HECUBA

My child, e'en now the hands of Argive rowers are busy at their ships.

SEMI-CHORUS I

Ah, woe is me! what is their intent? Will they really bear me hence in sorrow from my country in their fleet?

HECUBA

I know not, though I guess our doom.

SEMI-CHORUS I

O misery! woe to us Trojan dames, soon to hear the order given, "Come forth from the house; the Argives are preparing to return."

HECUBA

Oh! do not bid the wild Cassandra leave her chamber, the frantic prophetess, for Argives to insult, nor to my griefs add yet another.

Woe to thee, ill-fated Troy, thy sun is set; and woe to thy unhappy children, quick and dead alike, who are leaving thee behind!

SEMI-CHORUS II

With trembling step, alas! I leave this tent of Agamemnon to learn of thee, my royal mistress, whether the Argives have resolved to take my wretched life, whether the sailors at the prow are making ready to ply their oars.

HECUBA

My child, a fearful dread seized on my wakeful heart and sent me hither.

SEMI-CHORUS II

Hath a herald from the Danaï already come? To whom am I, poor captive, given as a slave?

HECUBA

Thou art not far from being allotted now.

SEMI-CHORUS II

Woe worth the day! What Argive or Phthiotian chief will bear me far from Troy, alas! unto his home, or haply to some island fastness?

HECUBA

Ah me! ah me! Whose slave shall I become in my old age? in what far clime? a poor old drone, the wretched copy of a corpse, set to keep the gate or tend their children, I who once held royal rank in Troy.

CHORUS

Woe, woe is thee! What piteous dirge wilt thou devise to mourn the outrage done thee? No more through Ida's looms shall I-ply the shuttle to and fro. I look my last and latest on my children's bodies; henceforth shall I endure surpassing misery; it may be as the unwilling bride of some Hellene (perish the night and fortune that brings me to this!); it may be as a wretched slave I from Peirene's sacred fount shall draw their store of water.

Oh be it ours to come to Theseus' famous realm, a land of joy!

Never, never let me see Eurotas' swirling tide, hateful home of Helen, there to meet and be the slave of Menelaus, whose hand laid Troyland waste! Yon holy land by Peneus fed, nestling in all its beauty at Olympus' foot, is said, so have I heard, to be a very granary of wealth and teeming fruitage; next to the sacred soil of Theseus, I could wish to reach that land. They tell me too Hephaestus' home, beneath the shadow of Aetna, fronting Phoenicia, the mother of Sicilian hills, is famous for the crowns it gives to worth. Or may I find a home on that shore which lieth very nigh Ionia's sea, a land by Crathis watered, lovely stream, that dyes the hair an auburn tint, feeding with its holy waves and making glad therewith the home of heroes good and true.

But mark! a herald from the host of Danai, with store of fresh proclamations, comes hasting hither. What is his errand? what saith he? List, for we are slaves to Dorian lords henceforth.

Enter TALTHYBIUS.

TALTHYBIUS

Hecuba, thou knowest me from my many journeys to and fro as herald 'twixt the Achaean host and Troy; no stranger I to thee, lady, even aforetime, I Talthybius, now sent with a fresh message.

HECUBA

Ah, kind friends, 'tis come! what I so long have dreaded.

TALTHYBIUS

The lot has decided your fates already, if that was what you feared.

HECUBA

Ah me! What city didst thou say, Thessalian, Phthian, or Cadmean?

TALTHYBIUS

Each warrior took his prize in turn; ye were not all at once assigned.

HECUBA

To whom hath the lot assigned us severally? Which of us Trojan dames doth a happy fortune await?

TALTHYBIUS

I know, but ask thy questions separately, not all at once.

HECUBA

Then tell me, whose prize is my daughter, hapless Cassandra?

TALTHYBIUS

King Agamemnon hath chosen her out for himself.

HECUBA

To be the slave-girl of his Spartan wife? Ah me!

TALTHYBIUS

Nay, to share with him his stealthy love.

HECUBA

What! Phoebus' virgin-priestess, to whom the god with golden locks granted the boon of maidenhood?

TALTHYBIUS

The dart of love hath pierced his heart, love for the frenzied maid.

HECUBA

Daughter, cast from thee the sacred keys, and from thy body tear the holy wreaths that drape thee in their folds.

TALTHYBIUS

Why! is it not an honour high that she should win our monarch's love?

HECUBA

What have ye done to her whom late ye took from me-my child?

TALTHYBIUS

Dost mean Polyxena, or whom dost thou inquire about?

HECUBA

To whom hath the lot assigned her?

TALTHYBIUS

To minister at Achilles' tomb hath been appointed her.

HECUBA

Woe is me! I the mother of a dead man's slave! What custom, what ordinance is this amongst Hellenes, good sir?

TALTHYBIUS

Count thy daughter happy: 'tis well with her.

HECUBA

What wild words are these? say, is she still alive?

TALTHYBIUS

Her fate is one that sets her free from trouble.

HECUBA

And what of mail-clad Hector's wife, sad Andromache? declare her fate.

TALTHYBIUS

She too was a chosen prize; Achilles' son did take her.

HECUBA

As for me whose hair is white with age, who need to hold a staff to be to me a third foot, whose servant am I to be?

TALTHYBIUS

Odysseus, king of Ithaca, hath taken thee to be his slave.

HECUBA

O God! Now smite the close-shorn head! tear your cheeks with your nails. God help me! I have fallen as a slave to a treacherous foe I hate, a monster of lawlessness, one that by his double tongue hath turned against us all that once was friendly in his camp, changing this for that and that for this again. Oh weep for me, ye Trojan dames! Undone! undone and lost! ah woe! a victim to a most unhappy lot!

CHORUS

Thy fate, royal mistress, now thou knowest; but for me, what Hellene or Achaean is master of my destiny?

TALTHYBIUS

Ho, servants! haste and bring Cassandra forth to me here, that I may place her our captain's hands, and then conduct to the rest of the chiefs the captives each hath had assigned. Ha what is the blaze of torches there within? What do these Trojan dames? Are they firing the chambers, because they must leave this land and be carried away to Argos? Are they setting themselves aflame in their longing for death? Of a truth the free bear their troubles in cases like this with a stiff neck. Ho, there! open! lest their deed, which suits them well but finds small favour with the Achaeans, bring blame on me.

HECUBA

'Tis not that they are setting aught ablaze, but my child Cassandra, frenzied maid, comes rushing wildly hither.

Enter CASSANDRA carrying torches

CASSANDRA

Bring the light, uplift and show its flame! I am doing the god's service, see! I making his shrine to glow with tapers bright. O Hymen, king of marriage! blest is the bridegroom; blest am I also, the maiden soon to wed a princely lord in Argos. Hail Hymen, king of marriage! Since thou, my mother, art ever busied with tears and lamentations in thy mourning for my father's death and for our country dear, I at my own nuptials am making this torch to blaze and show its light, in thy honour, O Hymen, king of marriage!

Grant thy light too, Hecate, at the maiden's wedding, as the custom is. Nimbly lift the foot aloft, lead on the dance, with cries of joy, as if to greet my father's happy fate. To dance I hold a sacred duty; come, Phoebus, lead the way, for 'tis in thy temple mid thy bay-trees that I minister. Hail Hymen, god of marriage! Hymen, hail! Come, mother mine, and join the dance, link thy steps with me, and circle in the gladsome measure, now here, now there. Salute the bride on her wedding-day with hymns and cries of joy.

Come, ye maids of Phrygia in raiment fair, sing my marriage with the husband fate ordains that I should wed.

CHORUS

Hold the frantic maiden, royal mistress mine, lest with nimble foot she rush to the Argive army.

HECUBA

Thou god of fire, 'tis thine to light the bridal torch for men, but piteous is the flame thou kindest here, beyond my blackest bodings. Ah, my child! how little did I ever dream that such would be thy marriage, a captive, and of Argos too. Give up the torch to me; thou dost not bear its blaze aright in thy wild frantic course, nor have thy afflictions left thee in thy sober senses, but still art thou as frantic as before. Take in those torches, Trojan friends, and for her wedding madrigals weep your tears instead.

CASSANDRA

O mother, crown my head with victor's wreaths; rejoice in my royal match; lead me to my lord; nay, if thou find me loth at all, thrust me there by force; for if Loxias be indeed a prophet, Agamemnon, that famous king of the Achaeans, will find in me a bride more fraught with woe to him than Helen. For I will slay him and lay waste his home to avenge my father's and my bretheren's death. But of the deed itself I will not speak; nor will I tell of that axe which shall sever my neck and the necks of others, or of the conflict ending in a mother's death, which my marriage shall cause, nor of the overthrow of Atreus' house; but I, for all my frenzy, will so far rise above my frantic fit, that I will prove this city happier far than those Achaeans, who for the sake of one woman and one man's love of her have lost a countless host in seeking Helen. Their captain too, whom men call wise, hath lost for what he hated most what most he prized, yielding to his brother for a woman's sake—and she a willing prize whom no man forced—the joy he had of his own children in his home. For from the day that they did land upon Scamander's strand, their doom began, not for loss of stolen frontier nor yet for fatherland with frowning towers; whomso Ares slew, those never saw their babes again, nor were they shrouded for the tomb by hand of wife, but in a foreign land they lie. At home the case was still the same; wives were dying widows, parents were left childless in their homes, having reared their sons for others, and none is left to make libations of blood upon the ground before their tombs. Truly to such praise as this their host can make an ample claim. 'Tis better to pass their shame in silence by, nor be mine the Muse to tell that evil tale. But the Trojans were dying, first for their fatherland, fairest fame to win; whomso the sword laid low, all these found friends to bear their bodies home and were laid to rest in the bosom of their native land, their funeral rites all duly paid by duteous hands. And all such Phrygians as escaped the warrior's death lived ever day by day with wife and children by them—joys the Achaeans had left behind. As for Hector and his griefs, prithee hear how stands the case; he is dead and gone, but still his fame remains as bravest of the brave, and this was a result of the Achaeans' coming; for had they remained at home, his worth would have gone unnoticed. So too with Paris, he married the daughter of Zeus, whereas, had he never done so, the alliance he made in his family would have been forgotten. Whoso is wise should fly from making war; but if he be brought to this pass, a noble death will crown his city with glory, a coward's end with shame. Wherefore, mother mine, thou shouldst not pity thy country or my spousal, for this my marriage will destroy those whom thou and I most hate.

CHORUS

How sweetly at thy own sad lot thou smilest, chanting a strain, which, spite of thee, may prove thee wrong!

TALTHYBIUS

Had not Apollo turned thy wits astray, thou shouldst not for nothing have sent my chiefs with such ominous predictions forth on their way. But, after all, these lofty minds, reputed wise, are nothing better than those that are held as naught. For that mighty king of all Hellas, own son of Atreus, has yielded to a passion for this mad maiden of all others; though I am poor enough, yet would I ne'er have chosen such a wife as this. As for thee, since thy senses are not whole, I give thy taunts 'gainst Argos and thy praise of Troy to the winds to carry away. Follow me now to the ships to grace the wedding of our chief. And thou too follow, whensoever the son of Laertes demands thy presence, for thou wilt serve a mistress most discreet, as all declare who came to Ilium.

CASSANDRA

A clever fellow this menial! Why is it heralds hold the name they do? All men unite in hating with one common hate the servants who attend on kings or governments. Thou sayest my mother shall come to the halls of Odysseus; where then be Apollo's words, so clear to me in their interpretation, which declare that here she shall die? What else remains, I will not taunt her with. Little knows he, the luckless wight, the sufferings that await him; or how these ills I and my Phrygians endure shall one day seem to him precious as gold. For beyond the ten long years spent at Troy he shall drag out other ten and then come to his country all alone, by the route where fell Charybdis lurks in a narrow channel 'twixt the rocks; past Cyclops the savage shepherd, and Ligurian Circe that turneth men to swine; shipwrecked oft upon the salt sea-wave; fain to eat the lotus, and the sacred cattle of the sun, whose flesh shall utter in the days to come a human voice, fraught with misery to Odysseus. But to briefly end this history, he shall descend alive to Hades, and, though he 'scape the waters' flood, yet shall he find a thousand troubles in his home when he arrives. Enough why do I recount the troubles of Odysseus? Lead on, that I forthwith may wed my husband for his home in Hades' halls. Base thou art, and basely shalt thou be buried, in the dead of night when day is done, thou captain of that host of Danai, who thinkest so proudly of thy fortune! Yea, and my corpse cast forth in nakedness shall the rocky chasm with its flood of wintry waters give to wild beasts to make their meal upon, hard by my husband's tomb, me the handmaid of Apollo. Farewell, ye garlands of that god most dear to me! farewell, ye mystic symbols! I here resign your feasts, my joy in days gone by. Go, I tear ye from my body, that, while yet mine honour is intact, I may give them to the rushing winds to waft to thee, my prince of prophecy I Where is yon general's ship? Whither must I go to take my place thereon? Lose no further time in watching for a favouring breeze to fill thy sails, doomed as thou art to carry from this land one of the three avenging spirits. Fare thee well, mother mine! dry thy tears, O country dear! yet a little while, my brothers sleeping in the tomb and my own father true, and ye shall welcome me; yet shall victory crown my advent 'mongst the dead, when I have overthrown the home of our destroyers, the house of the sons of Atreus.

Exeunt TALTHYBIUS and CASSANDRA

CHORUS

Ye guardians of the grey-haired Hecuba, see how your mistress is sinking speechless to the ground! Take hold of her! will ye let her fall, ye worthless slaves? lift up again, from where it lies, her silvered head.

HECUBA

Leave me lying where I fell, my maidens unwelcome service grows not welcome ever—my sufferings now, my troubles past, afflictions yet to come, all claim this lowly posture. Gods of heaven! small help I find in calling such allies, yet is there something in the form of invoking heaven, whenso we fall on evil days. First will I descant upon my former blessings; so shall I inspire the greater pity for my present woes. Born to royal estate and wedded to a royal lord, I was the mother of a race of gallant sons; no mere ciphers they, but Phrygia's chiefest pride, children such as no Trojan or Hellenic or barbarian mother ever had to boast. All these have I seen slain by the spear of Hellas, and at their tombs have I shorn off my hair; with these my eyes I saw their sire, my Priam, butchered on his own hearth, and my city captured, nor did others bring this bitter news to me. The maidens I brought up to see chosen for some marriage high, for strangers have I reared them, and seen them snatched away. Nevermore can I hope to be seen by them, nor shall my eyes behold them ever in the days to come.

And last, to crown my misery, shall I be brought to Hellas, a slave in my old age. And there the tasks that least befit the evening of my life will they impose on me, to watch their gates and keep the keys, me Hector's mother, or bake their bread, and on the ground instead of my royal bed lay down my shrunken limbs, with tattered rags about my wasted frame. a shameful garb for those who once were prosperous. Ah, woe is me! and this is what I bear and am to bear for one weak woman's wooing! O my daughter, O Cassandra! whom gods have summoned to their frenzied train, how cruel the lot that ends thy virgin days! And thou, Polyxena! my child of sorrow, where, oh! where art thou? None of all the many sons and daughters have I born comes to aid a wretched mother.

Why then raise me up? What hope is left us? Guide me, who erst trod so daintily the streets of Troy, but now am but a slave, to a bed upon the ground, nigh some rocky ridge, that thence I may cast me down and perish, after I have wasted my body with weeping. Of all the prosperous crowd, count none a happy man before he die.

CHORUS

Sing me, Muse, a tale of Troy, a funeral dirge in strains unheard as yet, with tears the while; for now will I uplift for Troy a piteous chant, telling how I met my doom and fell a wretched captive to the Argives by reason of a four-footed beast that moved on wheels, in the hour that Achaea's sons left at our gates that horse, loud rumbling on its way, with its trappings of gold and its freight of warriors; and our folk cried out as they stood upon the rocky citadel, "Up now ye whose toil is o'er, and drag this sacred image to the shrine of the Zeus-born maiden, goddess of our Ilium!" Forth from his house came every youth and every grey-head too; and with songs of joy they took the fatal snare within. Then hastened all the race of Phrygia to the gates, to make the goddess a present of an Argive band ambushed in the polished mountainpine, Dardania's ruin, a welcome gift to be to her, the virgin queen of deathless steeds; and with nooses of cord they dragged it, as it had been a ship's dark hull, to the stone-built fane of the goddess Pallas, and set it on that floor so soon to drink our country's blood.

But, as they laboured and made merry, came on the pitchy night; loud the Libyan flute was sounding, and Phrygian songs awoke, while maidens beat the ground with airy foot, uplifting their gladsome song; and in the halls a blaze of torchlight shed its flickering shadows on sleeping eyes. In that hour around the house was I singing as I danced to that maiden of the hills, the child of Zeus; when lo! there rang along the town a cry of death which filled the homes of Troy, and little babes in terror clung about their mothers' skirts, as forth from their ambush came the warrior-band, the handiwork of maiden Pallas. Anon the altars ran with Phrygian blood, and desolation reigned o'er every bed where young men lay beheaded, a glorious crown for Hellas won, ay, for her, the nurse of youth, but for our Phrygian fatherland a bitter grief.

Look, Hecuba! dost see Andromache advancing hither on a foreign car? and with her, clasped to her throbbing breast, is her dear Astyanax, Hector's child.

Enter ANDROMACHE.

HECUBA

Whither art thou borne, unhappy wife, mounted on that car, side by side with Hector's brazen arms and Phrygian spoils of war, with which Achilles' son will deck the shrines of Phthia on his return from Troy?

ANDROMACHE

My Achaean masters drag me hence.

HECUBA

Woe is thee!

ANDROMACHE

Why dost thou in note of woe utter the dirge that is mine?

HECUBA

Ah me!

ANDROMACHE

For these sorrows.

HECUBA

O Zeus!

ANDROMACHE

And for this calamity.

HECUBA

O my children!

ANDROMACHE

Our day is past.

HECUBA

Joy is fled, and Troy o'erthrown.

ANDROMACHE

Woe is me!

HECUBA

Dead too all my gallant sons!

ANDROMACHE

Alack and well-a-day!

HECUBA

Ah me for my

ANDROMACHE

Misery!

HECUBA

Piteous the fate

ANDROMACHE

Of our city,

HECUBA

Smouldering in the smoke.

ANDROMACHE

Come, my husband, come to me!

HECUBA

Ah hapless wife! thou callest on my son who lieth in the tomb.

ANDROMACHE

Thy wife's defender, come!

HECUBA

Do thou, who erst didst make the Achaeans grieve, eldest of the sons I bare to Priam in the days gone by, take me to thy rest in Hades' halls!

ANDROMACHE

Bitter are these regrets, unhappy mother, bitter these woes to bear; our city ruined, and sorrow evermore to sorrow added, through the will of angry heaven, since the day that son' of thine escaped his doom, he that for a bride accursed brought destruction on the Trojan citadel. There lie the gory corpses of the slain by the shrine of Pallas for vultures to carry off; and Troy is come to slavery's yoke.

HECUBA

O my country, O unhappy land, I weep for thee now left behind; now dost thou behold thy piteous end; and thee, my house, I weep, wherein I suffered travail. O my children! reft of her city as your mother is, she now is losing you. Oh, what mourning and what sorrow! oh, what endless streams of tears in our houses! The dead alone forget their griefs and never shed a tear.

CHORUS

What sweet relief to sufferers 'tis to weep, to mourn, lament, and chant the dirge that tells of grief!

ANDROMACHE

Dost thou see this, mother of that Hector, who once laid low in battle many a son of Argos?

HECUBA

I see that it is heaven's way to exalt what men accounted naught, and ruin what they most esteemed.

ANDROMACHE

Hence with my child as booty am I borne; the noble are to slavery brought-a bitter, bitter change.

HECUBA

This is necessity's grim law; it was but now Cassandra was torn with brutal violence from my arms.

ANDROMACHE

Alas, alas! it seems a second Aias hath appeared to wrong thy daughter; but there be other ills for thee.

HECUBA

Ay, beyond all count or measure are my sorrows; evil vies with evil in the struggle to be first.

ANDROMACHE

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

HECUBA

O woe is me! This is that riddle Talthybius long since told me, a truth obscurely uttered.

ANDROMACHE

I saw her with mine eyes; so I alighted from the chariot, and covered her corpse with a mantle, and smote upon my breast.

HECUBA

Alas! my child, for thy unhallowed sacrifice! and yet again, ah me! for this thy shameful death!

ANDROMACHE

Her death was even as it was, and yet that death of hers was after all a happier fate than this my life.

HECUBA

Death and life are not the same, my child; the one is annihilation, the other keeps a place for hope.

ANDROMACHE

Hear, O mother of children give ear to what I urge so well, that I may cheer my drooping spirit. 'Tis all one, I say, ne'er to have been born and to be dead, and better far is death than life with misery. For the dead feel no sorrow any more and know no grief; but he who has known prosperity and has fallen on evil days feels his spirit straying from the scene of former joys. Now that child of thine is dead as though she ne'er had seen the light, and little she recks of her calamity; whereas I, who aimed at a fair repute, though I won a higher lot than most, yet missed my lick in life.

For all that stamps the wife a woman chaste, I strove to do in Hector's home. In the first place, whether there is a slur upon a woman, or whether there is not, the very fact of her not staying at home brings in its train an evil name; therefore I gave up any wish to do so, and abode ever within my house, nor would I admit the clever gossip women love, but conscious of a heart that told an honest tale I was content therewith. And ever would I keep a silent tongue and modest eye before my lord; and well I knew where I might rule my lord, and where 'twas best to yield to him; the fame whereof hath reached the Achaean host, and proved my ruin; for when I was taken captive, Achilles' son would have me as his wife, and I must serve in the house of murderers. And if I set aside my love for Hector, and ope my heart to this new lord, I shall appear a traitress to the dead, while, if I hate him, I shall incur my master's displeasure. And yet they say a single night removes a woman's dislike for her husband; nay, I do hate the woman who, when she hath lost her former lord, transfers her love by marrying another. Not e'en the horse, if from his fellow torn, will cheerfully draw the yoke; and yet the brutes have neither speech nor sense to help them, and are by nature man's inferiors. O Hector mine! in thee I found a husband amply dowered with wisdom, noble birth and fortune, a brave man and a mighty; whilst thou didst take me from my father's house a spotless bride, thyself the first to make this maiden wife. But now death hath claimed thee, and I to Hellas am soon to sail, a captive doomed to wear the yoke of slavery.

Hath not then the dead Polyxena, for whom thou wailest, less evil to bear than I? I have not so much as hope, the last resource of every human heart, nor do I beguile myself with dreams of future bliss, the very thought whereof is sweet.

CHORUS

Thou art in the self-same plight as I; thy lamentations for thyself remind me of my own sad case.

HECUBA

I never yet have set foot on a ship's deck, though I have seen such things in pictures and know of them from hearsay. Now sailors, if there come a storm of moderate force, are all eagerness to save themselves by toil; one at the tiller stands, another sets himself to work the sheets, a third meantime is baling out the ship; but if tempestuous waves arise to overwhelm them, they yield to fortune and commit themselves to the driving billows. Even so I, by reason of my countless troubles, am dumb and forbear to say a word; for Heaven with its surge of misery is too strong for me. Cease, Oh cease, my darling child, to speak of Hector's fate; no tears of thine can save him; honour thy present lord, offering thy sweet nature as the bait to win him. If thou do this, thou wilt cheer thy friends as well as thyself, and thou shalt rear my Hector's child to lend stout aid to Ilium, that so thy children in the after-time may build her up again, and our city yet be established. But lo! our talk must take a different turn; who is this Achaean menial I see coming hither, sent to tell us of some new design?

Enter TALTHYBIUS.

TALTHYBIUS

Oh hate me not, thou that erst wert Hector's wife, the bravest of the Phrygians! for my tongue would fain not tell that which the Danai and sons of Pelops both command.

ANDROMACHE

What is it? Thy prelude bodeeth evil news.

TALTHYBIUS

'Tis decreed thy son is-how can I tell my news?

ANDROMACHE

Surely not to have a different master from me?

TALTHYBIUS

None of all Achaea's chiefs shall ever lord it over him.

ANDROMACHE

Is it their will to leave him here, a remnant yet of Phrygia's race?

TALTHYBIUS

I know no words to break the sorrow lightly to thee.

ANDROMACHE

I thank thee for thy consideration, unless indeed thou hast good news to tell.

TALTHYBIUS

They mean to slay thy son; there is my hateful message to thee.

ANDROMACHE

O God! this is worse tidings than my forced marriage.

TALTHYBIUS

So spake Odysseus to the assembled Hellenes, and his word prevails.

ANDROMACHE

Oh once again ah me there is no measure in the woes I bear.

TALTHYBIUS

He said they should not rear so brave a father's son.

ANDROMACHE

May such counsels yet prevail about children of his!

TALTHYBIUS

From Troy's battlements he must be thrown. Let it be even so, and thou wilt show more wisdom; cling not to him, but bear thy sorrows with heroic heart, nor in thy weakness deem that thou art strong. For nowhere hast thou any help; consider this thou must; thy husband and thy city are no more, so thou art in our power, and I alone am match enough for one weak woman; wherefore I would not see thee bent on strife, or any course to bring thee shame or hate, nor would I hear thee rashly curse the Achaeans.

For if thou say aught whereat the host grow wroth, this child will find no burial nor pity either. But if thou hold thy peace and with composure take thy fate, thou wilt not leave his corpse unburied, and thyself wilt find more favour with the Achaeans.

ANDROMACHE

My child! my own sweet babe and priceless treasure! thy death the foe demands, and thou must leave thy wretched mother. That which saves the lives of others, proves thy destruction, even thy sire's nobility; to thee thy father's valiancy has proved no boon. O the woeful wedding rites, that brought me erst to Hector's home, hoping to be the mother of a son that should rule o'er Asia's fruitful fields instead of serving as a victim to the sons of Danaus!

Dost weep, my babe? dost know thy hapless fate? Why clutch me with thy hands and to my garment cling, nestling like a tender chick beneath my wing? Hector will not rise again and come gripping his famous spear to bring thee salvation; no kinsman of thy sire appears, nor might of Phrygian hosts; one awful headlong leap from the dizzy height and thou wilt dash out thy life with none to pity thee Oh to clasp thy tender limbs, a mother's fondest joy! Oh to breathe thy fragrant breath! In vain it seems these breasts did suckle thee, wrapped in thy swaddling-clothes; all for naught I used to toil and wore myself away! Kiss thy mother now for the last time, nestle to her that bare thee, twine thy arms about my neck and join thy lips to mine! O ye Hellenes, cunning to devise new forms of cruelty, why slay this child who never wronged any? Thou daughter of Tyndarus, thou art no child of Zeus, but sprung, I trow, of many a sire, first of some evil demon, next of Envy, then of Murder and of Death, and every horror that the earth begets. That Zeus was never sire of thine I boldly do assert, bane as thou hast been to many a Hellene and barbarian too. Destruction catch thee! Those fair eyes of thine have brought a shameful ruin on the fields of glorious Troy. Take the babe and bear him hence, hurl him down if so ye list, then feast upon his flesh! 'Tis heaven's high will we perish, and I cannot ward the deadly stroke from my child. Hide me and my misery; cast me into the ship's hold; for 'tis to a fair wedding I am going, now that I have lost my child!

CHORUS

Unhappy Troy! thy thousands thou hast lost for one woman's sake and her accursed wooing.

TALTHYBIUS

Come, child, leave fond embracing of thy woful mother, and mount the high coronal of thy ancestral towers, there to draw thy parting breath, as is ordained. Take him hence. His should the duty be to do such herald's work, whose heart knows no pity and who loveth ruthlessness more than my soul doth.

Exeunt ANDROMACHE and TALTHYBIUS with ASTYANAX.

HECUBA

O child, son of my hapless boy, an unjust fate robs me and thy mother of thy life. How is it with me? What can I do for thee, my luckless babe? for thee I smite upon my head and beat my breast, my only gift; for that alone is in my power. Woe for my city! woe for thee! Is not our cup full? What is wanting now to our utter and immediate ruin?

CHORUS

O Telamon, King of Salamis, the feeding ground of bees, who hast thy home in a sea-girt isle that lieth nigh the holy hills where first Athena made the grey olive-branch to

appear, a crown for heavenly heads and a glory unto happy Athens, thou didst come in knightly brotherhood with that great archer, Alcmena's son, to sack our city Ilium, in days gone by, on thy advent from Hellas, what time he led the chosen flower of Hellas, vexed for the steeds denied him, and at the fair stream of Simois he stayed his seaborne ship and fastened cables to the stern, and forth therefrom he took the bow his hand could deftly shoot, to be the doom of Laomedon; and with the ruddy breath of fire he wasted the masonry squared by Phoebus' line and chisel, and sacked the land of Troy; so twice in two attacks hath the bloodstained spear destroyed Dardania's walls.

In vain, it seems, thou Phrygian boy, pacing with dainty step amid thy golden chalices, dost thou fill high the cup of Zeus, a service passing fair; seeing that the land of thy birth is being consumed by fire. The shore re-echoes to our cries; and, as a bird bewails its young, so we bewail our husbands or our children, or our greyhaired mothers. The dew-fed springs where thou didst bathe, the course where thou didst train, are now no more; but thou beside the throne of Zeus art sitting with a calm, sweet smile upon thy fair young face, while the spear of Hellas lays the land of Priam waste. Ah! Love, Love, who once didst seek these Dardan halls, deep-seated in the hearts of heavenly gods, how high didst thou make Troy to tower in those days, allying her with deities! But I will cease to urge reproaches against Zeus; for white-winged dawn, whose light to man is dear, turned a baleful eye upon our land and watched the ruin of our citadel, though she had within her bridal bower a husband from this land, whom on a day a car of gold and spangled stars caught up and carried thither, great source of hope to his native country; but all the love the gods once had for Troy is passed away.

Enter MENELAUS.

MENELAUS

Hail! thou radiant orb by whose fair light I now shall capture her that was my wife, e'en Helen; for I am that Menelaus, who hath toiled so hard, I and Achaea's host. To Troy I came, not so much as men suppose to take this woman, but to punish him who from my house stole my wife, traitor to my hospitality. But he, by heaven's will, hath paid the penalty, ruined, and his country too, by the spear of Hellas. And I am come to bear that Spartan woman hence-wife I have no mind to call her, though she once was mine; for now she is but one among the other Trojan dames who share these tents as captives. For they-the very men who toiled to take her with the spear-have granted her to me to slay, or, if I will, to spare and carry back with me to Argos. Now my purpose is not to put her to death in Troy, but to carry her to Hellas in my seaborne ship, and then surrender her to death, a recompense to all whose friends were slain in Ilium. Ho! my trusty men, enter the tent, and drag her out to me by her hair with many a murder foul; and when a favouring breeze shall blow, to Hellas will we convey her.

HECUBA

O thou that dost support the earth and restest thereupon, whosoe'er thou art, a riddle past our ken! be thou Zeus, or natural necessity, or man's intellect, to thee I pray; for, though thou treadest o'er a noiseless path, all thy dealings with mankind are by justice guided.

MENELAUS

How now? Strange the prayer thou offerest unto heaven!

HECUBA

I thank thee, Menelaus, if thou wilt slay that wife of thine. Yet shun the sight of her, lest she smite thee with regret. For she ensnares the eyes of men, o'erthrows their towns, and burns their houses, so potent are her witcheries! Well I know her; so dost thou and those her victims too.

Enter HELEN.

HELEN

Menelaus! this prelude well may fill me with alarm; for I am haled with violence by thy servants' hands and brought before these tents. Still, though I am well-nigh sure thou hatest me, yet would I fain inquire what thou and Hellas have decided about my life.

MENELAUS

To judge thy case required no great exactness; the host with one consent—that host whom thou didst wrong-handed thee over to me to die.

HELEN

May I answer this decision, proving that my death, if to die I am, will be unjust?

MENELAUS

I came not to argue, but to slay thee.

HECUBA

Hear her, Menelaus; let her not die for want of that, and let me answer her again, for thou knowest naught of her villainies in Troy; and the whole case, if thus summed up, will insure her death against all chance of an escape.

MENELAUS

This boon needs leisure; still, if she wishes to speak, the leave is given. Yet will I grant her this because of thy words, that she may hear them, and not for her own sake.

HELEN

Perhaps thou wilt not answer me, from counting me a foe, whether my words seem good or ill. Yet will I put my charges and thine over against each other, and then reply to the accusations I suppose thou wilt advance against me. First, then, she was the author of these troubles by giving birth to Paris; next, old Priam ruined Troy and me, because he did not slay his babe Alexander, baleful semblance of a fire-brand, long ago. Hear what followed. This Paris was to judge the claims of three rival goddesses; so Pallas offered

him command of all the Phrygians, and the destruction of Hellas; Hera promised he should spread his dominion over Asia, and the utmost bounds of Europe, if he would decide for her; but Cypris spoke in rapture of my loveliness, and promised him this boon, if she should have the preference o'er those twain for beauty; now mark the inference I deduce from this; Cypris won the day o'er them, and thus far hath my marriage proved of benefit to Hellas, that ye are not subject to barbarian rule, neither vanquished in the strife, nor yet by tyrants crushed. What Hellas gained, was ruin to me, a victim for my beauty sold, and now am I reproached for that which should have set a crown upon my head.

But thou wilt say I am silent on the real matter at issue, how it was I started forth and left thy house by stealth. With no mean goddess at his side he came, my evil genius, call him Alexander or Paris, as thou wilt; and him didst thou, thrice guilty wretch, leave behind thee in thy house, and sail away from Sparta to the land of Crete.

Enough of this! For all that followed I must question my own heart, not thee; what frantic thought led me to follow the stranger from thy house, traitress to my country and my home? Punish the goddess, show thyself more mighty e'en than Zeus, who, though he lords it o'er the other gods, is yet her slave; wherefore I may well be pardoned. Still, from hence thou mightest draw a specious argument against me; when Paris died, and Earth concealed his corpse, I should have left his house and sought the Argive fleet, since my marriage was no longer in the hands of gods. That was what I fain had done; yea, and the warders on the towers and watchmen on the walls can bear me witness, for oft they found me seeking to let myself down stealthily by cords from the battlements; but there was that new husband, Deiphobus, that carried me off by force to be his wife against the will of Troy. How then, my lord, could I be justly put to death by thee, with any show of right, seeing that he wedded me against my will, and those my other natural gifts have served a bitter slavery, instead of leading on to triumph? If 'tis thy will indeed to master gods, that very wish displays thy folly.

CHORUS

O my royal mistress, defend thy children's and thy country's cause, bringing to naught her persuasive arguments, for she pleads well in spite of all her villainy; 'tis monstrous this!

HECUBA

First will I take up the cause of those goddesses, and prove how she perverts the truth. For I can ne'er believe that Hera or the maiden Pallas would have been guilty of such folly, as to sell, the one, her Argos to barbarians, or that Pallas e'er would make her Athens subject to the Phrygians, coming as they did in mere wanton sport to Ida to contest the palm of beauty. For why should goddess Hera set her heart so much on such a prize? Was it to win a nobler lord than Zeus? or was Athena bent on finding 'mongst the gods a husband, she who in her dislike of marriage won from her sire the boon of remaining unwed? Seek not to impute folly to the goddesses, in the attempt to gloze o'er thy own sin; never wilt thou persuade the wise. Next thou hast said-what well may make men jeer-that Cypris came with my son to the house of Menelaus.

Could she not have stayed quietly in heaven and brought thee and Amyclae to boot to Ilium? Nay! my son was passing fair, and when thou sawest him thy fancy straight became thy Cypris; for every sensual act that men commit, they lay upon this goddess, and rightly does her name of Aphrodite begin the word for "senselessness"; so when

thou didst catch sight of him in gorgeous foreign garb, ablaze with gold, thy senses utterly forsook thee. Yea, for in Argos thou hadst moved in simple state, but, once free of Sparta, 'twas thy fond hope to deluge by thy lavish outlay Phrygia's town, that flowed with gold; nor was the palace of Menelaus rich enough for thy luxury to riot in. Ha! my son carried thee off by force, so thou savest; what Spartan saw this? what cry for help didst thou ever raise, though Castor was still alive, a vigorous youth, and his brother also, not yet amid the stars? Then when thou wert come to Troy, and the Argives were on thy track, and the mortal combat was begun, whenever tidings came to thee of Menelaus' prowess, him wouldst thou praise, to grieve my son, because he had so powerful a rival in his love; but if so the Trojans prospered, Menelaus was nothing to thee. Thy eye was fixed on Fortune, and by such practice wert thou careful to follow in her steps, careless of virtue's cause. And then, in spite of all, thou dost assert that thou didst try to let thyself down from the towers by stealth with twisted cords, as if loth to stay? Pray then, wert thou ever found fastening the noose about thy neck, or whetting the knife, as noble wife would have done in regret for her former husband? And yet full oft I advised thee saying, "Get thee gone, daughter, and let my sons take other brides; I will help thee to steal away, and convey thee to the Achaean fleet; oh end the strife 'twixt us and Hellas!" But this was bitter in thy ears. For thou wert wantoning in Alexander's house, fain to have obeisance done thee by barbarians. Yes, 'twas a proud time for thee; and now after all this thou hast bedizened thyself, and come forth and hast dared to appear under the same sky as thy husband, revolting wretch! Better hadst thou come in tattered raiment, cowering humbly in terror, with hair shorn short, if for thy past sins thy feeling were one of shame rather than effrontery. O Menelaus, hear the conclusion of my argument; crown Hellas by slaying her as she deserves, and establish this law for all others of her sex, e'en death to every traitress to her husband.

CHORUS

Avenge thee, Menelaus, on thy wife, as is worthy of thy home and ancestors, clear thyself from the reproach of effeminacy at the lips of Hellas, and let thy foes see thy spirit.

MENELAUS

Thy thoughts with mine do coincide, that she, without constraint, left my palace, and sought a stranger's love, and now Cypris is introduced for mere bluster. Away to those who shall stone thee, and by thy speedy death requite the weary toils of the Achaeans, that thou mayst learn not to bring shame on me!

HELEN

Oh, by thy knees, I implore thee, impute not that heaven-sent affliction to me, nor slay me; pardon, I entreat!

HECUBA

Be not false to thy allies, whose death this woman caused; on their behalf, and for my children's sake, I sue to thee.

MENELAUS

Peace, reverend dame; to her I pay no heed. Lo! I bid my servants take her hence, aboard the ship, wherein she is to sail.

HECUBA

Oh never let her set foot within the same ship as thee.

MENELAUS

How now? is she heavier than of yore?

HECUBA

Who loveth once, must love alway.

MENELAUS

Why, that depends how those we love are minded. But thy wish shall be granted; she shall not set foot upon the same ship with me; for thy advice is surely sound; and when she comes to Argos she shall die a shameful death as is her due, and impress the need of chastity on all her sex; no easy task; yet shall her fate strike their foolish hearts with terror, e'en though they be more lost to shame than she.

Exit MENELAUS, dragging HELEN with him.

CHORUS

So then thou hast delivered into Achaea's hand, O Zeus, thy shrine in Ilium and thy fragrant altar, the offerings of burnt sacrifice with smoke of myrrh to heaven uprising, and holy Pergamos, and glens of Ida tangled with ivy's growth, where rills of melting snow pour down their flood, a holy sunlit land that bounds the world and takes the god's first rays! Gone are thy sacrifices! gone the dancer's cheerful shout! gone the vigils of the gods as night closed in! Thy images of carven gold are now no more; and Phrygia's holy festivals, twelve times a year, at each full moon, are ended now. 'Tis this that filleth me with anxious thought whether thou, O king, seated on the sky, thy heavenly throne, carest at all that my city is destroyed, a prey to the furious fiery blast. Ah! my husband, fondly loved, thou art a wandering spectre; unwashed, unburied lies thy corpse, while o'er the sea the ship sped by wings will carry me to Argos, land of steeds, where stand Cycloped walls of stone upreared to heaven. There in the gate the children gather, hanging round their mothers' necks, and weep their piteous lamentation, "O mother, woe is me! torn from thy sight Achaeans bear me away from thee to their dark ship to row me o'er the deep to sacred Salamis or to the hill' on the Isthmus, that o'erlooks two seas, the key to the gates of Pelops." Oh may the blazing thunderbolt, hurled in might from its holy home, smite the barque of Menelaus full amidstships as it is crossing the Aegean main, since he is carrying me away in bitter sorrow from the shores of Ilium to be a slave in Hellas, while the daughter of Zeus still keeps her golden mirrors, delight-of maidens' hearts. Never may he reach his home in Laconia or his father's hearth and home, nor come to the town of Pitane or the temple of the goddess' with the gates of bronze, having taken as his captive her whose marriage brought

disgrace on Hellas through its length and breadth and woful anguish on the streams of Simois! Ah me! ah me! new troubles on my country fall, to take the place of those that still are fresh! Behold, ye hapless wives of Troy, the corpse of Astyanax! whom the Danai have cruelly slain by hurling him from the battlements.

Enter TALTHYBIUS and attendants, bearing the corpse of ASTYANAX on HECTOR's shield.

TALTHYBIUS

Hecuba, one ship alone delays its plashing oars, and it is soon to sail to the shores of Phthia freighted with the remnant of the spoils of Achilles' son; for Neoptolemus is already out at sea, having heard that new calamities have befallen Peleus, for Acastus, son of Pelias, hath banished him the realm. Wherefore he is gone, too quick to indulge in any delay, and with him goes Andromache, who drew many a tear from me what time she started hence, wailing her country and crying her farewell to Hector's tomb. And she craved her master leave to bury this poor dead child of Hector who breathed his last when from the turrets hurled, entreating too that he would not carry this shield, the terror of the Achaeans-this shield with plates of brass wherewith his father would gird himself-to the home of Peleus or to the same bridal bower whither she, herself the mother of this corpse, would be led, a bitter sight to her, but let her bury the child therein instead of in a coffin of cedar or a tomb of stone, and to thy hands commit the corpse that thou mayst deck it with robes and garlands as best thou canst with thy present means; for she is far away and her master's haste prevented her from burying the child herself. So we, when thou the corpse hast decked, will heap the earth above and set thereon a spear; but do thou with thy best speed perform thy allotted task; one toil however have I already spared thee, for I crossed Scamander's stream and bathed the corpse and cleansed its wounds. But now will I go to dig a grave for him, that our united efforts shortening our task may speed our ship towards home.

Exit TALTHYBIUS.

HECUBA

Place the shield upon the ground, Hector's shield so deftly rounded, a piteous sight, a bitter grief for me to see. O ye Achaeans, more reason have ye to boast of your prowess than your wisdom I Why have ye in terror of this child been guilty of murder never matched before? Did ye fear that some day he would rear again the fallen walls of Troy? it seems then ye were nothing after all, when, though Hector's fortunes in the war were prosperous and he had ten thousand other arms to back him, we still were daily overmatched; and yet, now that our city is taken and every Phrygian slain, ye fear a tender babe like this! Out upon his fear! say I, who fears, but never yet hath reasoned out the cause. Ah! my beloved, thine is a piteous death indeed! Hadst thou died for thy city, when thou hadst tasted of the sweets of manhood, of marriage, and of godlike power o'er others, then wert thou blest, if aught herein is blest. But now after one glimpse, one dream thereof thou knowest them no more, my child, and hast no joy of them, though heir to all. Ah, poor babe! how sadly have thy own father's walls, those towers that Loxias reared, shorn from thy head the locks thy mother fondled, and so oft caressed, from which through fractured bones the face of murder grins-briefly to dismiss my shocking theme. O hands, how sweet the likeness ye retain of his father, and yet ye lie limp in your sockets before me!

Dear mouth, so often full of words of pride, death hath closed thee, and thou hast not kept the promise thou didst make, when nestling in my robe, "Ah, mother mine, many a lock of my hair will I cut off for thee, and to thy tomb will lead my troops of friends, taking a fond farewell of thee." But now 'tis not thy hand that buries me, but I, on whom is come old age with loss of home and children, am burying thee, a tender child untimely slain. Ah me! those kisses numberless, the nurture that I gave to thee, those sleepless nights-they all are lost! What shall the bard inscribe upon thy tomb about thee? "Argives once for fear of him slew this child!" Foul shame should that inscription be to Hellas. O child, though thou hast no part in all thy father's wealth, yet shalt thou have his brazen shield wherein to find a tomb. Ah! shield that didst keep safe the comely arm of Hector, now hast thou lost thy valiant keeper! How fair upon thy handle lies his imprint, and on the rim, that circles round the targe, are marks of sweat, that trickled oft from Hector's brow as he pressed it 'gainst his beard in battle's stress. Come, bring forth, from such store as we have, adornment for the hapless dead, for fortune gives no chance now for offerings fair; yet of such as I possess, shalt thou receive these gifts. Foolish mortal he! who thinks his luck secure and so rejoices; for fortune, like a madman in her moods, springs towards this man, then towards that; and none ever experiences the same unchanging luck.

CHORUS

Lo! all is ready and they are bringing at thy bidding from the spoils of Troy garniture to put upon the dead.

HECUBA

Ah! my child, 'tis not as victor o'er thy comrades with horse or bow-customs Troy esteems, without pursuing them to excess-that Hector's mother decks thee now with ornaments from the store that once was thine, though now hath Helen, whom the gods abhor, reft thee of thine own, yea, and robbed thee of thy life and caused thy house to perish root and branch.

CHORUS

Woe! thrice woe! my heart is touched, and thou the cause, my mighty prince in days now passed!

HECUBA

About thy body now I swathe this Phrygian robe of honour, which should have clad thee on thy marriage-day, wedded to the noblest of Asia's daughters. Thou too, dear shield of Hector, victorious parent of countless triumphs past, accept thy crown, for though thou share the dead child's tomb, death cannot touch thee; for thou dost merit honours far beyond those arms' that the crafty knave Odysseus won.

CHORUS

Alas! ah me! thee, O child, shall earth take to her breast, a cause for bitter weeping. Mourn, thou mother!

HECUBA

Ah me!

CHORUS

Wail for the dead.

HECUBA

Woe is me!

CHORUS

Alas! for thy unending sorrow!

HECUBA

Thy wounds in part will I bind up with bandages, a wretched leech in name alone, without reality; but for the rest, thy sire must look to that amongst the dead.

CHORUS

Smite, oh smite upon thy head with frequent blow of hand. Woe is me!

HECUBA

My kind, good friends!

CHORUS

Speak out, good the word that was on thy lips.

HECUBA

It seems the only things that heaven concerns itself about are my troubles and Troy hateful in their eyes above all other cities. In vain did we sacrifice to them. Had not the god caught us in his grip and plunged us headlong 'neath the earth, we should have been unheard of, nor ever sung in Muses' songs, furnishing to bards of after-days a subject for their minstrelsy. Go, bury now in his poor tomb the dead, wreathed all duly as befits a corpse. And yet I deem it makes but little difference to the dead, although they get a gorgeous funeral; for this is but a cause of idle pride to the living.

The corpse is carried off to burial -

CHORUS

Alas! for thy unhappy mother, who o'er thy corpse hath closed the high hopes of her life! Born of a noble stock, counted most happy in thy lot, ah! what a tragic death is thine! Ha! who are those I see on yonder pinnacles darting to and fro with flaming torches in their hands? Some new calamity will soon on Troy alight. Enter

TALTHYBIUS

above. Soldiers are seen on the battlements of Troy, torch in hand.

TALTHYBIUS

Ye captains, whose allotted task it is to fire this town of Priam, to you I speak. No longer keep the firebrand idle in your hands, but launch the flame, that when we have destroyed the city of Ilium we may set forth in gladness on our homeward voyage from Troy. And you, ye sons of Troy-to let my orders take at once a double form-start for the Achaean ships for your departure hence, soon as ever the leaders of the host blow loud and clear upon the trumpet. And thou, unhappy grey haired dame, follow; for yonder come servants from Odysseus to fetch thee, for to him thou art assigned by lot to be a slave far from thy country.

HECUBA

Ah, woe is me! This surely is the last, the utmost limit this, of all my sorrows; forth from my land I go; my city is ablaze with flame. Yet, thou aged foot, make one painful struggle to hasten, that I may say a farewell to this wretched town. O Troy, that erst hadst such a grand career amongst barbarian towns, soon wilt thou be reft of that splendid name. Lo! they are burning thee, and leading us e'en now from our land to slavery. Great gods! Yet why call on the gods? They did not hearken e'en aforesaid to our call.

Come, let us rush into the flames, for to die with my country in its blazing ruin were a noble death for me.

TALTHYBIUS

Thy sorrows drive thee frantic, poor lady. Go, lead her hence, make no delay, for ye must deliver her into the hand of Odysseus, conveying to him his prize.

HECUBA

O son of Cronos, prince of Phrygia, father of our race, dost thou behold our sufferings now, unworthy of the stock of Dardanus?

CHORUS

He sees them, but our mighty city is a city no more, and Troy's day is done.

HECUBA

Woe! thrice woe upon me! Ilium is ablaze; the homes of Pergamos and its towering walls are now one sheet of flame.

CHORUS

As the smoke soars on wings to heaven, so sinks our city to the 'ground before the spear. With furious haste both fire and foeman's spear devour each house.

HECUBA

Hearken, my children, hear your mother's voice.

CHORUS

Thou art calling on the dead with voice of lamentation.

HECUBA

Yea, as I stretch my aged limbs upon the ground, and beat upon the earth with both my hands.

CHORUS

I follow thee and kneel, invoking from the nether world my hapless husband.

HECUBA

I am being dragged and hurried away.

CHORUS

O the sorrow of that cry!

HECUBA

From my own dear country, to dwell beneath a master's roof. Woe is me! O Priam, Priam, unburied, left without a friend, naught dost thou know of my cruel fate.

CHORUS

No, for o'er his eyes black death hath drawn his pall-a holy man by sinners slain!

HECUBA

Woe for the temples of the gods! Woe for our dear city!

CHORUS

Woe!

HECUBA

Murderous flame and foeman's spear are now your lot.

CHORUS

Soon will ye tumble to your own loved soil, and be forgotten.

HECUBA

And the dust, mounting to heaven on wings like smoke, will rob me of the sight of my home.

CHORUS

The name of my country will pass into obscurity; all is scattered far and wide, and hapless Troy has ceased to be.

HECUBA

Did ye hear that and know its purport?

CHORUS

Aye, 'twas the crash of the citadel.

HECUBA

The shock will whelm our city utterly. O woe is me! trembling, quaking limbs, support my footsteps! away! to face the day that begins thy slavery.

CHORUS

Woe for our unhappy town! And yet to the Achaean fleet advance.

HECUBA

Woe for thee, O land that nursed my little babes!

CHORUS

Ah! woe!

Exeunt OMNES.

THE END