

AI-Generated Graded Readers

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About This Edition

This book is a simplified English adaptation created for extensive reading practice.

The text was generated using ChatGPT and prepared for intermediate English learners as part of an educational project.

Target reading level: CEFR A2-B1

This edition aims to support fluency development through accessible vocabulary, expanded narration, and improved readability while preserving the original story structure.

Content Note

This adaptation is based on a historical literary work. It may contain expressions, attitudes, or depictions that some readers may consider inappropriate or offensive by today's standards. Such elements have been retained or reflected where necessary in order to preserve the historical and literary character of the original work.

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Euripides, *The Trojan Women* (Simplified Edition, Adapted and Simplified by ChatGPT)

Part 1 — Dramatis Personae and the Gods Before Troy

Dramatis Personae

POSEIDON, god of the sea.

PALLAS ATHENA, goddess of wisdom and war.

HECUBA, Queen of Troy, wife of Priam, mother of Hector, Paris, Cassandra, and many others.

CASSANDRA, daughter of Hecuba, a prophetess.

ANDROMACHE, wife of Hector, prince of Troy.

HELEN, wife of Menelaus, King of Sparta. Paris brought her to Troy.

TALTHYBIUS, a Greek herald.

MENELAUS, King of Sparta, husband of Helen.

GREEK SOLDIERS.

CHORUS OF TROJAN WOMEN, now prisoners of the Greeks.

The Trojan Women

[The scene is outside the ruined walls of Troy. It is very early morning, before sunrise. The city has been taken by the Greeks. Some parts of the walls are broken. Near the walls are small huts. In these huts are Trojan women, now prisoners. They have been set aside for the Greek leaders. Some dead soldiers lie near the walls. In front of the huts, HECUBA, the old Queen of Troy, lies asleep on the ground. She has white hair. She looks weak and full of sorrow.]

[POSEIDON appears before the walls. He is seen dimly in the half-dark.]

POSEIDON.

I have come up from the deep sea. I am Poseidon, lord of the sea. Long ago, I helped build these walls of Troy. Apollo helped me too. These walls were strong, and I cared for this city. But now Troy is gone. Smoke rises where proud houses once stood. Greek spears have broken the city that I loved.

The Greeks won by a trick. A man named Epeius made a great wooden horse. Athena gave him the plan. The horse looked like a gift, but it was full of armed men. The Trojans brought it through the gates. Then death came into the city. The streets, the houses, and the temples were filled with blood.

Old King Priam lies dead near the holy fire of his own house. Gold and rich clothes from Troy are being carried to the Greek ships. The Greek soldiers wait by the shore. They are tired after many years of war. They want the wind to rise, so they can sail home to their wives and children.

I must leave Troy now. Hera hated this city, and Athena helped her. They have won. A god cannot stay gladly in a city that is dead. When a city is empty and ruined, the gods turn away from its altars. There is no joy here now, only the sound of women crying.

Listen. The Trojan women are waiting. The Greeks have chosen them by lot. Some will go to Thessaly, some to Argos, some to Athens, and some to other far places. Noble women, once wives and daughters of kings, now wait behind these doors like slaves. Helen too is here. She, the woman from Sparta, is now a prisoner like the rest.

And there lies Hecuba. Who could look at her now and believe she was once Queen of Troy? She lies at the gates, full of tears. Her daughter Polyxena has been killed in secret beside the grave of Achilles. Priam and his sons are dead. Cassandra, the holy daughter who served Apollo, must now go to Agamemnon's bed. She will be called his bride, but there is no joy in that word.

[POSEIDON turns to go. Another divine figure appears in the dim light. It is PALLAS ATHENA.]

POSEIDON.

Farewell, you towers of Troy. Once you were bright and strong. If Athena had not broken you, your deep stones might still stand.

PALLAS ATHENA.

Great god, brother of Zeus, may I speak with you? I was your enemy before, but that hatred is finished for today.

POSEIDON.

You may speak. We are of one family among the gods, and we have known each other for a long time. That old bond has power.

PALLAS ATHENA.

I am glad to hear gentle words from you. I think there may be a way for both of us to act together.

POSEIDON.

Have you brought some message from Zeus? Or have you heard news from another god?

PALLAS ATHENA.

I have come because of this city. I stand on the ground of Troy, and I want my hand to work with yours.

POSEIDON.

Has your old hatred ended? Do you pity Troy now, as it lies in ashes?

PALLAS ATHENA.

First answer me. Will you stand with me until the work is done?

POSEIDON.

Yes. But tell me your true thought. Have you come for Troy, not for Greece?

PALLAS ATHENA.

I have come to give joy to my old enemies, the Trojans. I have come to bring a bitter journey home to the Greeks.

POSEIDON.

Your love and hate move quickly, Athena. When you turn, you turn with fire. Tell me why you hate the Greeks now.

PALLAS ATHENA.

They did a terrible wrong to me. They did it inside my own holy place. You know this.

POSEIDON.

I know. Ajax dragged Cassandra away from your temple.

PALLAS ATHENA.

Yes. And no Greek punished him. No man struck him. No man even spoke against him.

POSEIDON.

And yet it was your hand that helped them take Troy.

PALLAS ATHENA.

That is why I now stand with you. I helped them, but now I will strike them.

POSEIDON.

What do you want from me? Say it, and if I can do it, it is already in my heart.

PALLAS ATHENA.

I want their return home to become long, hard, and full of pain. I want them to seek home and not find it.

POSEIDON.

Do you want me to hold them here on the shore? Or do you want me to attack them on the sea?

PALLAS ATHENA.

Wait until the last ship has opened its sail for home. Then Zeus will send rain and hail. Darkness will fall from the sky. He has promised me his lightning. I will strike the ships and the men. You must make the sea wild. Raise the waves. Open deep water under them. Let many dead men fill the bays near Euboea. Then Greece will remember my anger. They will learn not to dishonor the gods in a strange land.

POSEIDON.

I grant what you ask. My hands will trouble the Aegean Sea. The rocks, the islands, and the hard shores will be waiting for them. Mykonos, Delos, Scyros, Lemnos, and the dangerous shore of Caphereus will see drowned men. Go now. Ask Zeus for the fire of his lightning. Then wait for the hour when the last Greek ship pulls away from Troy.

[PALLAS ATHENA exits.]

POSEIDON.

How blind men are when they destroy cities. They burn temples. They break holy places. They leave the graves of the dead without honor. Yet they do not understand that they too will die soon.

[POSEIDON exits.]

[The stage remains dark for a moment. The ruined walls of Troy stand silent. HECUBA still lies on the ground. The day has not yet fully begun.]

Part 2 — Hecuba Wakes and Calls the Women

[The day begins slowly. HECUBA wakes on the ground. She is old, tired, and full of pain. For a moment she does not rise. She looks around and sees the ruined walls, the huts, and the empty city.]

HECUBA.

Rise, poor head. Rise from the earth. This is not the Troy I knew. This is not the city where we were kings and queens. My neck is weak, but it must bear this pain. My body is broken, but I must still live.

The wind blows, and we are like a ship on a dark sea. We cannot choose our road.

We must float where the wind drives us. We must not fight the wave, because the wave is stronger than we are.

Ah, sorrow. What sorrow is not here? My children are lost. My husband is dead. My city is gone. Troy once held great glory, year after year. We watched it shine. Was it all nothing? I ask, but no answer comes.

What can I do? What help is left? My body aches from lying here in the dust. My side hurts. My head hurts. Pain moves through me like a song of tears. Yes, tears have their own music. A heart that weeps hears that music, even when no one else can hear it.

[She rises slowly and looks toward the Greek ships far away on the shore.]

HECUBA.

O ships. O many ships. I see your faces by the sea. Your oars moved like many feet over the water. You came through the narrow way from Greece. You came with hate in your hearts and music in your mouths.

Why did you come? You came for one woman. You came for Helen, the wife of a king. Her husband hates her now. Her name brought shame and fire. Because of her, my old king was killed. Because of her, I am thrown away like a person after a ship has broken on rocks.

Who am I now? I sit in the dust near a Greek king's door. I am a slave. Men will drive me where they wish. I have no home. I am an old woman, crying alone for my dead. The glory has been beaten from my head.

[She turns toward the huts and calls to the Trojan women inside.]

HECUBA.

Women of Troy, mothers, girls, young wives, come out. Troy is smoke now. Troy is a dying fire. Come and weep with me. I call you as a bird calls her young.

But this is not the old cry of Troy. This is not the music we once heard in the halls of Priam. Once I stood in the palace, and music answered my hand. Once the gods of Troy seemed to listen. Now we have only tears.

[The door of one hut opens. A woman comes out slowly. Then another comes out. They are frightened and weak.]

FIRST WOMAN.

Queen, why do you call us? Where does your bitter cry lead us? We heard you from behind the door. We heard your heart pouring out sorrow. Fear shook us there. We are prisoners, and we shall never be free again.

HECUBA.

Child, the ships are moving on the shore.

SECOND WOMAN.

The ships? Are the ships waking?

THIRD WOMAN.

Dear gods, what will they do? Will they carry me over the sea to a strange city?

HECUBA.

I do not know, child. These are fears, not knowledge. They are the dreams of people who have no hope.

FIRST WOMAN.

Wake, daughters of sorrow. Wake and learn your fate. Even now the Greeks are breaking their camp. Soon they will sail away, and we will be taken with them.

HECUBA.

Ah, not Cassandra. Do not wake Cassandra. Apollo has made her mind wild. If the Greeks see her dreams, they will laugh at her. Leave me free from that one new pain.

O Troy, my Troy, you die here alone. And we, the living, must leave you alone. The dead remain with you, but they cannot speak. We go away, and you stay behind in silence.

[Another hut opens. More Trojan women come out. Some are old. Some are young. Some have been wives. Some are still girls. They gather near HECUBA.]

FOURTH WOMAN.

I come out from the tent of a Greek king. I am shaking, my Queen. Why did you call us? Is it death? No, not death. They would not kill such low things as we are.

FIFTH WOMAN.

No, it is the sailors. They are calling to make the ships ready. We must part. We must all part from one another.

HECUBA.

No, daughter. Take the morning into your heart. We do not yet know everything.

FIFTH WOMAN.

My heart is dying with fear.

SIXTH WOMAN.

A Greek herald has come.

FIFTH WOMAN.

Then he will tell us. To whom have they given me? Whose slave am I now?

HECUBA.

Be quiet, child. Wait for your fate. The lots are near. Soon we will know.

FOURTH WOMAN.

Will it be Argos? Will it be Phthia? Will it be some lonely island in the tossing sea, far from Troy?

HECUBA.

And where shall I go? I am old. I am like a bee frozen by winter. I am like a stone on a dead man's grave. Shall I nurse the children of my enemies? Shall I stand at a master's door and open it for others? I, who was Queen in Troy?

A WOMAN.

Sister, what tears can tell your fate?

ANOTHER WOMAN.

Perhaps I shall work at a loom. My hands will still move the thread, but the house will be strange. The cloth will not be for my own people.

ANOTHER WOMAN.

My dead child. O my child, my love. I saw you for the last time.

ANOTHER WOMAN.

There may be worse than work. A Greek man's bed in the dark. May the gods curse that night.

ANOTHER WOMAN.

Or I shall carry water again and again. I shall carry jars up a hill to some proud fountain. The water will keep asking for another slave with a broken heart.

ANOTHER WOMAN.

May the gods send me to the land of Theseus. They say Athens is gentle and famous.

ANOTHER WOMAN.

But not Sparta. Never Sparta. Never the river of Helen and Menelaus. I do not want to bow under the hand of the man whose war destroyed Troy.

A WOMAN.

I have heard of a rich land near Olympus, with a great river and fields full of grain and fruit.

ANOTHER WOMAN.

That would be my wish, next after Athens, where good spirits may live.

ANOTHER WOMAN.

Or perhaps Sicily, with its mountain of fire, and strong cities by the sea.

ANOTHER WOMAN.

Or the lands beyond the narrow sea, where bright mountains rise over the waves, and rivers make the valleys rich. They say brave and true men live there.

LEADER.

But look. Someone is coming. His mouth is heavy with news we do not know. A herald comes from the Greek ships. He walks quickly, as if he wants his work finished. What does he bring? News? Judgment? We are slaves now, prizes won by the Greeks.

[TALTHYBIUS enters from the left, followed by some GREEK SOLDIERS.]

TALTHYBIUS.

Hecuba, you know me. Many times I crossed your plain during the war. I brought messages from the Greek army. I am Talthybius. You have known me for a long time. Now I come with news for you.

HECUBA.

Ah, women of Troy, it has come. The fear we carried in our hearts has come at last.

TALTHYBIUS.

The lots have been thrown, if that is what you feared.

HECUBA.

What lord? What land? Tell us. Will it be Phthia? Thebes? Thessaly by the sea?

TALTHYBIUS.

Each woman has her own master. You will not all go together.

HECUBA.

Then tell us one by one. What good can fall to any child of Troy now? Still, tell us.

TALTHYBIUS.

I know the answers. Ask me about each woman in turn.

HECUBA.

My broken child must be first. Tell me about Cassandra.

TALTHYBIUS.

Cassandra has been chosen for Agamemnon, the great king.

HECUBA.

Chosen as a servant for his Spartan wife? As a woman to wait on Clytemnestra, Helen's sister?

TALTHYBIUS.

No. Not as a servant. She will go to the king's bed. He has chosen her as his bride.

HECUBA.

Cassandra? The holy girl of Apollo? She kept herself untouched for the god. Apollo promised her that life. And now this?

TALTHYBIUS.

The king desired her because of that strange holiness.

HECUBA.

Daughter, throw away the sacred things. Throw away the keys and the holy clothes. They kept your body like a temple. But now the Greeks have broken even that.

TALTHYBIUS.

Is it not a rare fortune that the king himself has chosen her?

HECUBA.

What of my other child? The one taken from me just now?

TALTHYBIUS.

Do you mean Polyxena?

HECUBA.

Yes. What man has her now? What fate has taken her?

TALTHYBIUS.

She rests apart. She has been set to watch the grave of Achilles.

HECUBA.

To watch a grave? My daughter? What kind of Greek law is this? Speak plainly, friend.

TALTHYBIUS.

Count her happy. She has no more evil to fear.

HECUBA.

What do you mean? Is she still alive?

TALTHYBIUS.

I mean that one task has freed her from all other tasks.

HECUBA.

And what of Andromache, wife of my strong-hearted Hector? Where must she go?

TALTHYBIUS.

Pyrrhus, the son of Achilles, has taken her.

HECUBA.

And I? Whose slave am I? I am old. My head shakes. My arm needs a staff. I am ready to fall.

TALTHYBIUS.

Odysseus, king of Ithaca, has received you as his slave.

HECUBA.

Beat this head, this head without a crown. Tear my face until tears run like blood.

A lying man, a cruel man, will be my lord. He has no straight heart. He changes right into wrong when it helps him. Even his hate is false, as false as his love.

O women of Troy, weep for me. I am lost. I go to the worst fate of all. This is the bitterest day of our bitter days.

LEADER.

Queen, you know your fate now. But I do not know mine. I do not know what lord, from north or south, has won me.

TALTHYBIUS.

Men, go and find Cassandra. Be quick. I must take her to the king. Then I must lead the others to their new masters. Wait. What is that light? Is it fire?

[Light shines through the cracks of one hut.]

TALTHYBIUS.

Are they burning their prison room? Do these women mean to set fire to the hut and die rather than sail with us? A free neck does not bear slavery easily. Open the door. Open quickly. Such a death might be joy to them, but it would bring anger on me. The king would blame me.

HECUBA.

There is no fire and no danger. It is my child Cassandra. The breath of the god is on her, and it has made her wild.

[The door opens from inside. CASSANDRA appears, dressed in white and crowned like a priestess. She holds a great torch in her hand. She sings softly to herself. She does not seem to see TALTHYBIUS, the SOLDIERS, or the women.]

Part 3 — Cassandra's Torch

[CASSANDRA stands in the doorway with the torch in her hand. She wears white clothes and a holy crown. The light of the torch moves over her face. She looks like a bride, but also like a priestess. She sings as if she is at a wedding, though the city around her is dead.]

CASSANDRA.

Lift the fire high. Give it to my hand. I carry this flame for the god. I praise his name. I light this place for a wedding. Blessed is the man who will take me. Blessed am I, for I go to Argos. I go as a bride to the bed of a king.

Hail, wedding fire. Hail, bright torch. Mother, why do you weep? Your face is pale with tears. You weep for our land and for our dead father. But I go with flowers on my head. I am a bride, so my torch must shine.

Look, morning is coming. Look, the fire leaps up. Dance, my feet, dance. Our father's hope is won. The dead are happy under the sun. I make a circle with my torch. Apollo, are you near me? I still carry your holy fire. Be near me now.

[She moves in a circle with the torch. Her eyes look far away, as if she sees something that others cannot see.]

CASSANDRA.

Hail, wedding god. Hail, quick torch that joins two people. But why am I alone? Laugh with me, Mother. Dance with me. Let your feet come near my feet. Women of Troy, sing. Sing loud for the bride. Cry out for joy, even when the song breaks.

LEADER.

Queen, hold the girl. Her feet are in a dream. She may run toward the Greek ships.

HECUBA.

O fire, fire. At a true wedding, you have your place. But what is this? These are not the torches I dreamed of for my child. These are wild lights, not holy lights. When I was happy, I never dreamed that Greek spears would make your wedding day.

Give me the torch, child. It has no holy flame when you throw it about in madness. Your pain has not taught you calm. Women, take this half-burned wood back inside. And answer her wedding songs with tears.

[HECUBA takes the torch from CASSANDRA and gives it to one of the women.]

CASSANDRA.

Mother, put flowers in my hair. Send me out quickly. If my spirit grows weak, drive me forward with anger. Apollo lives, and by his power I tell you this: I go to Agamemnon, but I shall be a more deadly bride than Helen ever was.

I shall destroy him, Mother. I shall destroy him and bring fire into his house, as he brought fire into ours. My brothers and my father shall be paid back. But some things I must not say. I will not speak of the axe waiting for me. I will not speak of the terrible road of blood that comes after my marriage. I will not speak of that whole house falling down into darkness.

No, listen to me. I will show you something. Even now, Troy is happier than the Greeks. I know the god is upon me, but for this short time I will hold him back and speak clearly. One woman's beauty brought the Greeks here. For Helen, thousands of men died. Their great king gave up love and fed hate. He gave his own child to death so that his brother's wife might be brought home again.

For many years they stood by our river and fought. Why? No Trojan had taken their land. No Trojan had broken their walls. But Greek men died here far from

home. Their wives could not touch their dead bodies. Their fathers could not pour wine on their graves. Old men waited in Greece for sons who would never return. This is what the Greeks have won.

But we died for our own people. Our men fell while defending their homes. Their friends carried them back. Their wives wrapped their bodies. They sleep in their own earth. Those who lived through the long years of war lived near their wives and children. They were not alone, like the Greeks on this shore.

And what of Hector? He is dead, but all men know his name. They know his courage. They know his true heart. The Greeks gave him that gift. Before the war, not all men knew him. Now his glory will not die. And Paris, too, loved a child of heaven. Without that, his love would have been like any other man's love.

Cities, if you are wise, run from war. But if war comes, there is honor in dying well for your own land. There is shame only in dying for an evil thing. So, Mother, do not pity Troy too much. Do not pity our dead too much. Do not pity me, the bride. Through this marriage, our worst enemy will fall.

TALTHYBIUS.

If Apollo had not made you mad, you would not speak so freely against my lord. I would not let such dark words be thrown at Agamemnon before he sails. Yet perhaps all the great things of men are empty. The son of Atreus is the mightiest king in Greece, and still he has chosen this mad girl above all women.

By the gods, I am only a rough man, but I would not touch her hand. Her mouth speaks blindly. She praises Troy and shames the Greeks, but I throw her words to the wind. Come quietly with me. May heaven be satisfied with the king's bride.

[He turns to HECUBA and speaks more gently.]

TALTHYBIUS.

And you, Hecuba, must follow to the camp of Odysseus when the order comes. They say his wife is wise and gentle. You will serve her.

CASSANDRA.

What a fierce slave you are. Heralds, yes, heralds are servants of death. They carry the pain of dead men around them like a dark crown. They serve the hate of kings and armies.

You say my mother will go to the house of Odysseus? Does the god's word mean nothing? I know what has been spoken to me in silence. She will die here. But no more. I will not tell all their shame before it comes.

Poor Odysseus. He does not know what deep trouble waits for him. All our tears, all the wounds of Troy, will seem small beside his own road. Ten years of war are behind him, and ten more years of wandering wait before him. His home will be far away, lost and full of pain. But why should I waste breath on him?

Go on. Lead me quickly to the house of death. I go to lie beside my bridegroom. Greek king, you think your fortune is high now. But I see a low bed waiting for you. I see darkness, not light. I see you dead, cast out, and dishonored. And I shall be near you. Wild animals shall come near the body of Apollo's chosen one.

[She touches the holy flowers on her head.]

CASSANDRA.

O wreaths. O flowers of my god. His love still breathes around me. Go away now. I have forgotten the wedding. I have forgotten the joy. I tear you from my head.

[She tears off the wreaths and throws them away.]

CASSANDRA.

Go on the quick wind. I give you back to the god while my body is still clean. O light, lead me. Where is the ship? Which way must I walk? Set your watchmen. Spread your sail. The wind is coming quickly.

Remember this, herald. Three powers are in the world below, and one walks with you now. Mother, farewell. Do not weep. My sweet city, farewell. My brothers under the earth, farewell. Father, who gave me life, wait only a little. Soon I shall come to you. I shall come crowned, shining with the fire that will fall on those who kill us and on their children after them.

[CASSANDRA goes out, followed by TALTHYBIUS and the GREEK SOLDIERS. HECUBA stands still for a moment. Then she falls to the ground.]

LEADER.

Look, women. The Queen has fallen. She falls without a word. Poor slaves, help her. Do not leave her lying there. She is a woman and very old. Lift her up again.

[Some women go to HECUBA. They try to raise her, but she refuses their help. She stays on the ground.]

Part 4 — Hecuba's Lament and the Wooden Horse

[HECUBA lies on the ground. The women stand around her. Some reach out their hands to help her, but she does not take them.]

HECUBA.

Let me lie here. Love that is not wanted is not love. Do not try to lift this ruined body. Is this fall so deep, after all that has already fallen on me? I have suffered so much. I have suffered in the past, I suffer now, and more suffering still waits

for me.

Gods, gods. Why do I call on the gods? They are weak helpers when a human heart is broken. And yet, when we are in pain, something inside us still cries out to heaven. I will think of long ago. I will weave those memories into a song, like one more tear in my misery.

Once we were kings. I married a king. I gave him many sons. But that is not enough to say. They were not only many; they were the best of Troy. No Greek woman, no Trojan woman, no woman in the rich East had such sons as mine. But I saw them fall under Greek spears.

I cut my hair for the dead. I saw the man who planted my great garden of children. I do not weep because someone told me of Priam's death. I saw him with my own eyes. I saw him killed at the altar, inside his own city, while Troy was being torn apart around him.

And my daughters, raised to marry great kings, were raised only for the Greeks. They are gone from me. I have no hope that I shall see their faces again. They will not see mine. We are cut apart like branches from a tree.

Now I stand at the lowest edge of life. I am old, and I am a slave. I must go through the gates of my enemies. What work will they give me? I shall open and shut a stranger's door. I, who gave birth to Hector, must perhaps grind meal like a servant. I must bend this broken head over stones, after sleeping once in a royal bed.

Rags will cover me. Under the rags, my old body will feel shame. O, how far one woman can fall. How many seas of sorrow have rolled over me, and still they roll. Cassandra, my child, your bright spirit once laughed in the light of Apollo. What strange hands have taken you now?

And you, Polyxena, where are you? And my sons, where are they? No child of mine, no man or woman born from me, can help me now. Why should you raise me? What hope can hold me up? Take this slave who once walked proudly in Troy. Lay her on the earth. Let her sleep on stone and pass away with tears.

Do not call any person happy while that person still lives. Wait until the last day. Only then can you know.

[The women stand in silence for a moment. Then the CHORUS begins to sing. Their song remembers the night when the wooden horse entered Troy.]

CHORUS.

Muse, come near us now. Help us make a strange song for Troy. Let tears become music in our mouths. Let our song tell how the end came. We remember the wheels of the Greeks pressing on us. We remember the great wooden horse standing before our gates. Around it, all seemed quiet. The Greek spears were gone from the plain.

The horse was tall and shining. It looked beautiful outside, but dark iron waited inside. The plain was empty, and we thought the Greeks had sailed away. Then a cry rose from the people on the high walls of Troy. "Fear is over," they cried. "Carry this gift to Athena. She has saved us."

Old men came out of their houses. Young women left their looms. Everyone hurried to the gates. They sang songs of thanks. They did not know they were bringing death into the city. They did not know that joy itself was leading them to the grave.

With ropes and strong hands they pulled the horse up through the gates. It was like a great ship dragged from the sea onto the land. It came higher and higher, until it stood near the holy place of Athena. We thought it was an offering. We

thought the goddess would protect us. But the goddess desired our blood.

That evening, joy made the city tired. Music filled the streets. Songs from far lands mixed with songs of Troy. Young women danced in the dim light. Fires shone in many houses. Faces laughed. Eyes grew heavy with sleep. No one knew what the night carried.

A TROJAN GIRL.

I was one of the dancers. I sang for Artemis, the pure goddess of the hills. I was proud and happy. Then, from the darkness, a cry rang out. It fell through the streets like death. Silence came over the city.

A child cried and hid in his mother's clothes. Then the killers came out from their wooden hiding place. They walked through Troy with swords. Blood filled the streets and the altars. In the rooms where married people slept, darkness was left alone. Men stumbled on dead bodies, and many bodies had no heads.

CHORUS.

Then the women were driven out. We became the prize of war. We became the crown of sorrow. We must bear children for the enemy. We must weep for Troy, Troy that is gone.

[The song ends. The women look toward the ruined city. Then, from the direction of Troy, a chariot slowly approaches. It is loaded with spoils taken from the dead. On the chariot sits ANDROMACHE, Hector's wife. She holds her young son ASTYANAX in her arms.]

LEADER.

Look there. On that Greek wagon, high among the spoils, comes Andromache. She is like a woman tossed on a strange sea. On her breast clings Hector's child, Astyanax. O most unhappy woman, where are they taking you?

You sit among Hector's bronze arms and the goods taken from the dead. These things will be gifts for your new lord. The Greeks who destroyed Troy will carry them to their own shrines. But you, poor wife of Hector, are carried away with them.

ANDROMACHE.

I go out to the Greeks. I am driven like an animal.

HECUBA.

Sorrow, sorrow.

ANDROMACHE.

No, mine is sorrow. No other woman has sorrow like mine. Let the song and the crown of sorrow be mine.

HECUBA.

O Zeus.

ANDROMACHE.

Zeus hates you deeply.

HECUBA.

My children.

ANDROMACHE.

No more, no more. They cannot help you. Their struggle is finished.

HECUBA.

Troy, Troy is gone.

ANDROMACHE.

Yes, and all her treasure has been divided.

HECUBA.

Gone, gone are my own children, the noble-hearted ones.

ANDROMACHE.

Sing sorrow.

HECUBA.

For me, for me.

ANDROMACHE.

Sing for the great city. It falls and becomes a shadow. It becomes a fire that has gone out.

ANDROMACHE.

Come to me, my husband.

HECUBA.

Darkness covers him. Woman, he was my flesh too, not only yours.

ANDROMACHE.

Make your arms a cover for me.

HECUBA.

Priam, old king, you who keep my children now, gather me where you sleep.

Part 5 — Andromache and the Last Hope of Troy

ANDROMACHE.

Here is the deepest pain in my heart.

HECUBA.

Is this not pain enough already?

ANDROMACHE.

I grieve for the city burned by fire.

HECUBA.

Pain strikes again and again.

ANDROMACHE.

This came because Paris did not die long ago. His love sold Troy and all her towers. Now dead men lie without clothes under the open sky. Birds come over them and cry for joy. So love has put its heavy yoke on the neck of Troy.

HECUBA.

O my own land, my home.

ANDROMACHE.

I weep for you, left alone.

HECUBA.

Do you see what end has come?

ANDROMACHE.

I see the house where my child was born.

HECUBA.

We leave our mother city behind us. She is empty and dishonored. She is like a

song left by the road. People may remember it, but no one hears it now. Rain falls in the old house, and all that was loved is gone. But the dead have lost their pain. The dead weep no more.

LEADER.

Tears are sweet to people in deep sorrow. Songs of pain can bring a little rest to a broken heart.

ANDROMACHE.

Mother of Hector, the man whose strong spear struck Greeks down like dry grass, do you see what has happened to us?

HECUBA.

I see the hand of the gods. They lift small things high, and they throw down the great.

ANDROMACHE.

My child and I are driven away with the stolen goods. We are like cattle taken after war. When fortune changes so fast, even a proud heart beats low like the heart of a slave.

HECUBA.

It is terrible to be without power. A little while ago they took Cassandra from me, and I fought against it in vain.

ANDROMACHE.

Ah, has Ajax come again? Has another wrong like that been done? But there is another evil waiting for you.

HECUBA.

Daughter, my evils are too many to count. One doom runs after another.

ANDROMACHE.

Polyxena lies dead beside the grave of Achilles. They killed her there as a gift to the dead.

HECUBA.

My sorrow. That was what Talthybius meant. He spoke in a riddle, and I did not understand it.

ANDROMACHE.

I saw her body. This chariot stopped near her. I wrapped clothes around her dead limbs. I struck my breast for her.

HECUBA.

O the foul sin. O the wickedness. My child, my child. Again I cry for you. How cruelly they killed you.

ANDROMACHE.

She has died her death. Dark as it was, death is sweeter than my life.

HECUBA.

Death cannot be the same as life, child. Death is empty. Life always has some hope.

ANDROMACHE.

Mother, listen to me. Let this word enter your heart and drive away fear. To die is to feel nothing. Better to be dead than to live in terrible pain. The dead do not suffer. They do not think about the wrong done to them.

But the living person who has fallen from joy into misery is different. Her soul wanders as if it has lost its home. Your daughter lies now like someone never born.

She knows nothing of the shame and violence that killed her.

And I, long ago, tried to win a good name. I did everything that people praised in a wife. I did it for Hector. I stayed in my own house. I did not walk through the streets for pleasure. I did not listen to foolish talk from other women. I kept silence and peace in my heart.

When Hector came home, I met him with a calm face. I knew when to guide and when to obey. I was happy because my own thoughts were enough for me. But that good name has become my curse. The Greeks heard of me. When Achilles' son took me prisoner, he chose me for himself.

Now I must serve in the house of the man whose father killed my husband. What shall I do? Shall I push Hector's beloved face out of my heart? Shall I open my heart to a new lord? If I do that, I betray the dead. But if I hate this new master, anger will fall on me in his house. I am a slave. I have no defense.

Men say that one night in a man's arms can make a woman forget. Shame on such words. What woman can forget her dead husband so easily? What woman can give strange kisses in another man's bed? Even an animal is troubled when its mate is taken away. And I am not an animal. I am a woman with a heart and a mind.

O Hector, my beloved. You were everything to me. You were my prince, my wise one, my brave one. No other man had touched me when you led me from my father's house and made me your wife. Now you are dead, and I am thrown by war into slavery. I must cross the bitter sea to Greece.

What does Polyxena know of such evils? You weep for her, but she is free from them. In my life, no hope remains. I will not lie to my own heart and say that anything is well, or that anything will be well. Still, to dream of hope would be

sweet.

LEADER.

Your feet have walked the same road as mine. Your clear sorrow teaches me my own.

HECUBA.

Look at the ships. I have never set foot on one, but I have heard stories. I have seen pictures of ships in storms. When a storm is not too strong, every man works hard. One holds the steering wood. Another works at the mast. Another throws water out of the ship. They all fight to live.

But when the sea grows too strong, they stop. They give themselves to fate and to the wild water. I am like that now. My sorrows are too many. I do not curse. I do not fight to change what cannot be changed. A great wave from the gods has rolled over me and conquered me.

Yet listen, daughter. Let Hector sleep. Let the fate of Hector sleep too. No tears, however deep, can wake him. Honor the new lord set over you now. Use your gentle heart to win him if you can. Then you may help those who still love Troy.

Perhaps, if the gods allow it, you may raise this child among our enemies. Hector's son may grow to be a man. Perhaps he may become a help to Troy. Perhaps our stones may one day be set one on another again. Perhaps a city may rise where this fire has fallen.

[HECUBA stops. She looks toward the side of the stage.]

HECUBA.

But thought calls to thought too quickly. Who is this servant of the Greeks coming toward us now? He brings new words, and I fear them.

[ANDROMACHE holds ASTYANAX closer. The child does not understand. He hides his face against his mother. From the side, TALTHYBIUS enters slowly with GREEK SOLDIERS. He looks troubled and does not come forward proudly.]

Part 6 — The Child Must Die

TALTHYBIUS.

Wife of the bravest heart in Troy, Andromache, do not hate me. I do not come with joy. I must tell you what the Greek kings and the army have decided.

ANDROMACHE.

What is it? Evil is on your lips. I can hear it before you speak.

TALTHYBIUS.

It concerns this child. O, how can I tell you?

ANDROMACHE.

Will he not go with me? Will he not have the same master?

TALTHYBIUS.

No man in Greece will ever be master of your son.

ANDROMACHE.

What do you mean? Will they leave him here? Will they let him grow among the ruins and build Troy again?

TALTHYBIUS.

I do not know how to say it plainly.

ANDROMACHE.

You have a kind heart. If the news were good, you would speak quickly. You hide it because it is terrible.

TALTHYBIUS.

They have ordered that your son must die. Now the whole cruel truth is spoken.

ANDROMACHE.

O, I could have borne my enemy's bed more easily than this.

TALTHYBIUS.

Odysseus spoke in the council. He said the son of such a dangerous father must not grow to manhood.

ANDROMACHE.

Lost, lost, lost. Forgive me. It is not easy to hear this and still stand.

TALTHYBIUS.

They say he must be thrown from the high wall of Troy. He must die there. Do not fight this order. Be wise in your pain. Do not hold him too fiercely. You have no strength against the whole Greek army.

Look around you. Is there help anywhere? Your city has fallen. Your husband is dead. You are a prisoner, one woman alone. How can you fight us? For your own good, do not struggle. Do not make the soldiers angry.

And do not curse the ships aloud. If you speak evil against the army, they may refuse the child a burial. They may throw him away without honor. Be silent. Bear war's fortune as well as you can. Then the Greeks may let him be buried, and they may not be crueller than they already are.

ANDROMACHE.

Go, then, my best-loved child. Go to death in the hands of fierce men, and leave me alone. Your father was too brave. That is why they kill you. Another child might have lived because his father was weak. But your father's glory has become death for you.

O my marriage bed. O day when Hector took my hand. I came to his house not to bear a child for Greek swords, but to bear a prince for wide Asia. I thought you would rule over many people. I thought Troy would be yours. But now you are only a small child in my arms, and they are afraid of you.

Are you crying? No, you cannot understand. You do not know what waits for you. Your father will not come. He will not break open the tomb. He will not stand with his great spear and save you. No brother of his will come. No wall of Troy can protect you now.

How will it happen? One terrible fall. Down, down from the high wall. Your little neck. O gods, is that how sleep will come to you? And no one will pity you there.

You little body, warm in my arms. Your neck still smells sweet. Was all my care for nothing? I held you at my breast. I watched through long nights when you were sick. I grew weak with watching, but I was glad because you lived.

Kiss me now. This one time. Never again. Put your arms around my neck. Come close. Kiss me, lips to lips. Let me feel your face before they take you.

O Greeks, you have found a pain greater than all the tortures of the East. Why will you kill this innocent child? He has done no wrong. He has not lifted a sword. He has not spoken one word against you.

Helen, Helen, evil tree. Who can call you the child of Zeus? You have many

fathers: madness, hate, death, and every poison in the sky. Zeus does not know you. You drank the life from Greece and Troy. May the gods hate you and destroy you. With your beautiful eyes you burned this land.

Quick, then. Take him. Drag him away. Throw him from the wall, if that is your will. Tear him, wild beasts, be swift. The gods have undone me. I cannot lift even one hand to save my child.

Hide my head for shame. Throw me under the benches of your ships. I must go to my new marriage. I must go, though I have lost my child, my own child.

[ANDROMACHE faints. The SOLDIERS move closer. After a moment she half rises, but she is weak and confused.]

LEADER.

O unlucky Troy. For one hated woman, for one kiss, all your armies have been destroyed.

[TALTHYBIUS bends over ANDROMACHE. Slowly and gently, he takes ASTYANAX from her arms. The child reaches back toward his mother.]

TALTHYBIUS.

Come, child. Let go of this tired hold of love. Walk your path with me. We must go up to the high tower, above your father's wall. There they have ordered your life to end.

Hold him. Hold him carefully. O gods, I wish another man had this duty. I wish some harder man, with less pity in his heart, had been sent instead of me.

HECUBA.

O child, they steal you from us. Child of my great son, you are ours, ours. Is there

any deed I can do to help you? Is there any pain I can bear for you? Look, I give you this beaten head. I give you this wounded breast. These are the only gifts left to me.

Woe for Troy, and woe for you. What fall is still missing? What deeper place of misery remains before we touch the bottom? We have lost city, husband, children, and hope. Now they take even this child.

[ASTYANAX pulls back from TALTHYBIUS and reaches toward HECUBA and ANDROMACHE. One of the SOLDIERS lifts him. The child is carried toward the city and the high wall. TALTHYBIUS goes with him.]

[ANDROMACHE is placed again on the chariot. She is weak and half silent. Her arms are empty now. The chariot turns toward the Greek ships.]

ANDROMACHE.

My child. My child.

[The chariot moves away. The women watch it go. For a while no one speaks.]

HECUBA.

There goes Hector's wife. There goes the mother without her son. Her arms are empty, and mine are empty too. The Greeks have taken everything that could still breathe for Troy.

LEADER.

The child is gone to death. The mother is gone to slavery. The city stands behind us, but it is already a grave.

[The stage is quiet. Far away, the sound of the Greek camp can be heard. The Trojan women remain near HECUBA, looking toward the city where the child

has been taken.]

Part 7 — The Song of Troy's Old Glory and Ruin

[The women remain near HECUBA. ANDROMACHE has been taken away toward the Greek ships. ASTYANAX has been carried toward the high wall of Troy. The stage is still. Then the CHORUS begins to sing.]

CHORUS.

Far away, there is an island called Salamis. The sea beats around it, and bees move among its flowers. Long ago, Telamon, a great Greek hero, lived there. He looked out from that island over hills with olive trees. Athena's tree grew there, grey and bright, and the city was loved by the goddess.

But Telamon did not stay at peace. He went out with Heracles, the lonely hero with the bow. Together they came against Troy in an older war. Their hands helped bring ruin to this land. So Troy has known Greek anger before. This is not the first time that a great hand has struck our walls.

Those men came over the wide water. Their ships moved into our river. Their ropes held them near the shore. Then the old king of Troy died. The towers that Apollo had helped to build fell before fire and iron. The fields and woods were laid waste. Long ago, Troy was broken once.

Now it is broken again. Twice the hand of destruction has been lifted over the city of Dardanus. Twice fire has come against our walls. Twice our homes have heard the cry of war. How can any city stand forever, if even Troy can fall?

Ganymede, child of Troy, you are far away now. You stand in the house of Zeus and pour wine for the highest god. Your face is still beautiful there. You live in

calm places among the gods. But the land that gave birth to you is burning.

Your mother city is torn by fire. The shores cry out like a wild bird. Mothers cry for their children. Wives cry for their husbands. The pools where you once bathed are lost. The paths where your feet once moved are empty. Zeus still loves your beauty, but he has not saved your land.

O old love of the gods, what did it give us? The gods once came near Troy. The lords of the sky once seemed to favor us. We thought our city stood high above other cities. We thought heaven had joined itself to us. But now that old love is gone, or it cannot help us.

We remember another child of Troy, Tithonus. Dawn loved him and carried him away. She lifted him above us in her golden light. Once we blessed the gods because they loved our people. We believed that such love made Troy great.

But what is left now? Dawn still rises, but she shines on broken walls. The horses of morning still run across the sky, but they look down on a dead city. The things that made the gods love Troy have perished. Our beauty, our houses, our songs, our kings, our children—all have been taken.

Do not trust too much in old glory. Do not say, “The gods have loved us, so we cannot fall.” A city may be high one day and ashes the next. A house may be full of music at night and silent in the morning. A child may sleep in his mother’s arms and be carried away before the next sun is high.

Troy was famous among cities. Her towers could be seen from far away. Her princes were brave, and her women walked in bright rooms. Strangers spoke her name with wonder. Yet now we stand outside her broken gates as slaves.

The gods knew our city. Heroes came from us. Songs were sung about us. But

songs do not hold back spears. Old honor does not stop fire. A beautiful name does not save a child from the wall.

O Troy, once loved, now lost. O city of bright houses, now dark. O mother of many children, now childless. We have no strength to help you. We can only remember. We can only sing.

[The CHORUS grows softer.]

CHORUS.

The sea waits for us. The Greek ships wait for us. Our new masters wait for us. But behind us Troy waits too, not as a home, but as a grave. Every stone speaks of someone dead. Every broken door speaks of a family gone.

We shall be carried to far lands. Some of us will serve in houses that hate us. Some will carry water. Some will work at the loom. Some will sleep beside men who killed our people. But wherever we go, Troy will go with us as pain in the heart.

No one can take that memory from us. No master can command us to forget. No sea can wash it away. No new house can make it small. We were women of Troy. We are still women of Troy, even as slaves.

[The song ends. The women stand together. Their faces are turned toward the city, but their bodies are turned toward the shore. They are pulled between the dead home behind them and the ships before them.]

LEADER.

The song is finished, but sorrow is not finished. One grief goes, and another comes. The child has gone to death. Andromache has gone to slavery. Cassandra has gone to the bed of a king. Hecuba waits for Odysseus.

What remains? Helen remains. The woman for whom so many men died still breathes. The woman whose beauty burned Troy is still inside these huts. And now another Greek comes. His steps are proud, but his heart is not at peace.

[The women look toward the side of the stage. From that direction comes the sound of armed men approaching. The CHORUS draws back around HECUBA. The next part will begin with the entrance of MENELAUS.]

Part 8 — Helen Before Menelaus

[The song has ended. MENELAUS enters with armed GREEK SOLDIERS. He is richly dressed for war. His face is full of anger, but also full of trouble. He looks toward the hut where HELEN is kept.]

MENELAUS.

How bright the sky is today. How sweet the air is. This is the day that puts before me the woman I—No. I did not come for her. I came for the man who deceived me. Paris ate at my table and stole my wife.

But Paris is dead now. The Greek horses have crushed him, and his land has fallen around him. Now I seek—curse her, I can hardly speak her name. Helen, who was once my wife, is kept here among the prisoners. The Greek army has given her to me. I may kill her, or I may take her home.

I think I shall not kill her here in Troy. I shall carry her back across the sea. There, in Greece, those who lost their dearest men for her can decide her death. Soldiers, go into that hut. Bring her out. Drag her by the hair if you must.

[The SOLDIERS go to the hut. MENELAUS controls himself with difficulty.]

MENELAUS.

When the wind is good, my ships shall carry her home.

HECUBA.

O deep power under the world, O high power over the world, whoever you are, I praise you. You may be hard for us to know, but I see one thing. Justice walks silently. It comes slowly, but it comes to all who live and die.

MENELAUS.

Who is speaking there? What strange prayer is this?

HECUBA.

I bless you, Menelaus, if you will kill her. But fear one thing. Do not look too long at her face. She catches strong men with her eyes. She catches whole cities. Fire comes from her and eats houses. She is like a cup of death. I know her. You know her too. The dead around us know her.

[The SOLDIERS return from the hut. HELEN comes between them. She is calm and gentle. Her clothes are not torn. She does not look like the other prisoners.]

HELEN.

King Menelaus, your first act could make a woman afraid. Your armed men broke into my room and led me out in anger. I almost think you hate me. Tell me, what has been decided? Must I live, or must I die?

MENELAUS.

No one in the army defended you. All gave you to me with one voice. You wronged me. They gave you to me to kill.

HELEN.

May I speak before I die? May I answer the charge? I want to show that I am

wronged and innocent.

MENELAUS.

I came to kill you, woman, not to hear you speak.

HECUBA.

Hear her, Menelaus. She must not die unheard. And let me answer her after she speaks. You do not know all the wrong she did here in Troy. When the whole story is told, it will be death enough for her. She will not escape.

MENELAUS.

It is only a little time and breath. For your sake, Hecuba, I will allow it. Let her speak if she must. But she should know this: I have no pity for her.

HELEN.

Perhaps you will not answer me, whether I speak truth or not. You hold me as your enemy. Still, I will speak to the anger that I believe is in your heart. I will set my case against yours, and show how these things began.

[HELEN points to HECUBA.]

HELEN.

First, she gave birth to Paris, the beginning of sorrow. And old King Priam did not kill the child when there was a dream of fire before his birth. Later, Paris judged three goddesses. Athena offered him war and victory. Hera offered him a great kingdom. Aphrodite offered him me.

Paris chose Aphrodite. She promised him my beauty. So I was taken by the power of a goddess. Because of this, Greece was helped. No eastern king rules over Greece now. No spear from Asia has conquered your homes. That was good for Greece, but terrible for me. My beauty, which could have been my honor, became

my slavery.

You may ask why I left your house in secret. But Paris came with Aphrodite beside him. You were not at home. You had sailed away to Crete and left me. I ask my own heart what made me forget my home, my land, and all I loved. Surely it was not truly I. It was Aphrodite.

If you want to punish someone, punish her. But then you must be stronger than Zeus, because even Zeus is bound by her power. My wrong has its own excuse. It came from a goddess.

Perhaps you ask another thing. After Paris died, why did I not run to the Greek ships? I did try. The old guards at the gate could have told you. The watchmen on the wall knew it. More than once they caught me trying to escape. I was pulled back by force.

So, husband, if justice has come at last, what should you bring me? Not death, but safety after pain. I am a woman carried away by violent men. My beauty was my birthright, but the gods burned it into a mark of slavery. Do not try to stand higher than the gods. That wish is empty.

LEADER.

Queen, remember your children and your land. Break her spell. Her words are soft and sweet, but her heart is dangerous. I am afraid of her.

HECUBA.

I think the goddesses themselves call me to answer these lying lips. I do not believe that Hera or virgin Athena would sell their own people for a shepherd's prize on Mount Ida. Why would Hera need to win a beauty contest? She is wife of Zeus. Why would Athena desire beauty? She chose a virgin life and turned away from love.

Do not cover the evil in your own heart by making the gods low and cruel. Wise people can hear you and understand. And your story about Aphrodite sailing with Paris is foolish. If she wanted you in Troy, she did not need a ship. She could have moved you and all your city by divine power.

My son was very beautiful. You saw him in gold and eastern clothes, and desire woke in your heart. In Sparta you had little wealth beside the great beauty of Troy. When you saw Troy's gold and power, Menelaus' house seemed small and cold to you.

You say Paris took you by force. But in Sparta, who heard you cry out? Castor and his brother were there then. They were brave men. They would have helped you. Yet no cry came from your rooms that night.

And after you came here, war followed you. When the Greeks won a battle, you praised Menelaus, so Paris would feel pain. When Troy won, Menelaus meant nothing to you. You always watched Fortune. Wherever Fortune went first, you followed. You did not follow honesty.

You speak of secret ropes and attempts to escape from the wall. Who found you? When were you caught? If you truly loved your old husband, there were other ways. An honest woman, trapped in shame, might have chosen death long ago.

Often I told you, "Go, daughter. Leave us. My sons will find other wives. I will help you pass the Greek guard. Give peace to us and to our enemies." But you hated those words. You liked the house of Paris. You liked proud eastern people bowing before you.

And now you come out dressed so carefully. You stand in the same air as your husband with your hair and clothes in order. If you had shame, you would come

with torn clothes and a lowered head. You would show sorrow, not beauty. I have finished. Be true, King. Give Greece the crown of justice. Kill this woman, and make the law clear for all time: a woman who betrays her husband must be judged.

LEADER.

Be strong, King. Give a judgment worthy of yourself and your house. Shake off your old shame. Be iron against this wrong.

MENELAUS.

Your thought and mine walk together. It is clear that her heart went willingly to a stranger's bed. Her story about divine magic is empty air.

[He turns angrily to HELEN.]

MENELAUS.

Go, woman. There are people who still want to stone you. Meet them. Your long debt will be paid. Before this night ends, your dead face will dishonor me no more.

[HELEN kneels before him and holds his knees.]

HELEN.

See, my arms are around your knees. Do not place the fault of heaven on my head. Remember everything, and do not kill me.

HECUBA.

Remember those she killed. Remember the men who fought beside you, and remember their children. Listen to their prayer, not hers.

MENELAUS.

Peace, old woman. Peace. It is not for her. She is nothing to me.

[He speaks to the SOLDIERS.]

MENELAUS.

Go before us. Take her to the shore. Prepare a ship with a closed room for her, so she may sail across the sea.

HECUBA.

If you are on that ship, do not let her step into it.

MENELAUS.

Why? Will the ship be heavier because of her sin?

HECUBA.

A man who once loved will always love again.

MENELAUS.

If what he loved is evil, he will learn to hate it. Still, I will do as you say. Another ship shall carry her, not mine. You speak wisely. When we come to Argos, then she shall meet a hard judgment. It will be a judgment as black as her heart. It will teach all women faithfulness. It will not be easy, but the thought of it will make even wild women afraid.

[MENELAUS exits, following HELEN. HELEN is escorted away by the SOLDIERS. HECUBA and the Trojan women remain before the ruined city.]

Part 9 — Astyanax Returns

[HELEN and MENELAUS have gone. The GREEK SOLDIERS have led HELEN toward the shore. HECUBA and the Trojan women remain before the broken city. For a moment the stage is quiet. Then the CHORUS begins to sing.]

CHORUS.

Has Zeus turned away from the altar of Troy? Has he given his temple and his city to the Greeks? The sweet smoke of sacrifice is gone. The smell of holy cakes and flowers is gone. The towers that once wore garlands are gone.

Dark Ida stands far away, with its wild green plants and its valleys of snow-water. There was a holy rock where the first light of morning touched the earth. We thought the god lived there. We thought he saw us from that high place. But now his city burns in the wind.

The sound of joy is gone. The dances under the stars are gone. The long prayers of the night are gone. The golden images and the holy feasts of Troy are gone. My heart cries out, "Lord Zeus, were all these things nothing to you?"

You sit high in the sky. You sit in the fire-cloud. Below you, a city dies. Its smoke rises like an offering. But what kind of offering is this? It is not the smoke of prayer. It is the smoke of houses, temples, and bodies.

A WOMAN.

My dear husband, you are in the dark world below. Your lips are dry, and no one has buried you. I must go over the bitter sea in a Greek ship. I shall be carried like a storm-bird, far from your body and from our home.

OTHERS.

Children still cry at the gates. Many small voices call to their mothers. "Mother, they drive me away alone. I stand on the shore, far from you. The oar dips into the water. The black ship waits for me."

"Will I go to Salamis, the island in the sea? Will I go to Corinth, where the rock stands over the water? Will I go to some old land of kings? Mother, where are

they taking me?" So the children cry, and the tears run dry.

A WOMAN.

Out on the sea, where dark Menelaus sails, come to us, thunder of God. Come with white lightning and broken waves. Strike the ships. Kill us there while our tears are still wet for home. Kill us before we must live as slaves of our enemies.

OTHERS.

And may Helen be there. May she be there with her golden mirror, making her face beautiful like a young girl. Let her hear the storm. Let her stare and turn cold with fear. Let her never again see the fire of her own home.

Let her never see the sand of Sparta again. Let her never see the graves of her fathers. Let her never stand in Athena's bronze house. Let her never see the towers of her old city. Her face was a dark desire upon Greece. Her shame was like fire. Because of her, the dead fill the land from red Simois to the sea.

[The song ends. From the direction of the ruined city, TALTHYBIUS approaches. One or two SOLDIERS follow him. They carry the body of ASTYANAX. The child is dead.]

LEADER.

Ah, change after change. Each new change tears this land with another evil. Women of Troy, look. They are bringing the dead Astyanax. He was our prince, but the bitter Greeks have thrown him from the tower of Troy.

TALTHYBIUS.

Hecuba, one ship still waits by the shore. It is the ship that will carry the last goods of Pyrrhus to Thessaly. Pyrrhus himself has already gone. He left in haste because he heard of trouble in his own house. He has taken Andromache with him.

She made tears come into my eyes. She stood by the sea and looked back at her fatherland. She wept for Troy. She spoke to the grave of Hector, though Hector could not hear her from this world.

But before she went, she asked one thing. She asked that proper burial be given to this child, the son of Hector. He has fallen from the tower of Troy and is dead. She also asked that this great bronze shield, which Hector carried in battle, should not be taken away to the house of Pyrrhus.

She could not bear the thought of seeing Hector's shield in the hall of her new master. She could not bear to see it in the room where she must live as a slave wife. So she asked that the shield stay here in ruined Troy. It will be the child's last bed.

She asked me to place the child in your hands. You must wrap him for death with whatever clothes are still left to you. She cannot do it herself. Her master was in haste, and she has already gone. She cannot hold her child and lay him to rest.

When he has been dressed and crowned for burial, we will cover him with earth. Then we will raise our sails. Do this quickly, as you are told. I have saved you one task. When I passed the river Scamander, I washed the blood from his body and cleaned his wounds.

Now I will go and break the hard earth for his grave. Then you and I must finish this work quickly. The Greek oars are waiting for the homeward sea.

[TALTHYBIUS goes out with some of the SOLDIERS. The body of ASTYANAX is left in HECUBA's arms. HECUBA looks down at the child. The great shield of Hector is set on the ground beside her.]

HECUBA.

Lay Hector's great round shield here on the ground. It is bitter for my eyes to see it. O Greeks, your spears were sharp, but your hearts were low and cold. Were you afraid of this child? Brave men have done a strange murder.

You feared that one day this baby might raise his fallen land. Had you so little pride? When Hector fought, and thousands fought beside him, you struck us down. We died. Now all are dead, and Troy lies low. Yet still you fear an innocent child.

This is not wisdom. It is fear without thought. What kind of death has found you, little one? If you had fallen in battle after growing strong, if you had known youth, love, and royal honor, then perhaps people could have called you blessed. But in these days, who can be blessed?

Your eyes saw life. Your lips tasted life. But your soul never understood the rich world around you. Poor child. Was it our old wall, built by loving gods, that tore your soft hair? Here is the place where your mother kissed you. Here, where the broken bone shows white, I cannot look.

Your arms are like your father's arms in shape, but now they hang loose and weak. Your dear lips were full of hope, and now they are closed forever. What false words you spoke this morning, when you crept into my bed and called me kind names.

You promised, "Grandmother, when you die, I will cut my hair for you. I will lead the captains past your grave." Why did you cheat me so? Now I, old, homeless, and childless, must weep cold tears for you. You were so young. You are so cruelly dead.

Dear gods, I remember the sound of your little feet. I remember holding you in my lap. I remember sleeping beside you when you were small. All that is gone. What should a poet write on your grave? "Here lies a baby whom the Greeks

feared. Because they feared him, they killed him.” Greece will be proud of that story, perhaps.

Child, they have left you poor in all things from Hector’s house. But you shall keep one thing. You shall sleep in this bronze shield, the shield your father carried. O faithful shield, you guarded Hector’s strong left arm. Now you have no master.

I see the mark of his hand on your handle. I see the deep stains made by his sweat in battle. Drop by drop, it fell from his brow and beard onto you. You still remember him, though men have killed him.

Bring what we have. Bring the poor clothes that these terrible days have left us. The gods have not allowed us to honor him richly. But all I can give, I will give to you, child of Troy. Human pride is empty. A person rejoices and thinks there is no danger. Then fortune dances like a fool in the wind, and no one can command it.

[Several Trojan women come forward with small pieces of clothing, flowers, and funeral things in their hands.]

LEADER.

Look, these women heard you. They have gathered clothes from the dead of Troy. They bring them now to fold around the child.

Part 10 — The Burning of Troy

[The Trojan women come forward with poor pieces of clothing and a few small funeral gifts. HECUBA kneels beside ASTYANAX. Slowly, with shaking hands, she begins to wrap the dead child. The great shield of Hector lies beneath him.]

HECUBA.

These gifts are not for a victory in a race. They are not for a young man who has thrown a spear farther than all others. They are not prizes for joy, or signs of honor before the eyes of men. I, your father's mother, place these things around you because there is nothing else left.

Once all these bright things belonged to you. They were kept for your future. But now that future is gone. One woman, hated by the gods, opened the door to all this pain. She robbed your house of its treasures. She made your warm breath cold. She brought your people down to death.

SOME WOMEN.

Deep in our hearts, we feel your small hand, child. Is this truly he? Is this our prince? Is this the one who should have ruled the land?

HECUBA.

Beautiful clothes of Troy, I saved you in my thoughts for another day. I thought you might be used when this child married some great queen from a far eastern land. Now you cover him forever. And you, grey mother-shield, you carried a thousand days of Hector's glory. This is your last crown.

Dear shield of Hector, you shall lie down with the dead. You shall have more honor there than all the gold Odysseus can wear on his cruel body. You were true to Hector. You shall be true to his child.

SOME WOMEN.

Child of the shield-bearer, child of Hector, alas. Great Earth, mother of all, takes you into herself. She receives you with wild crying.

OTHER WOMEN.

Mother of misery, give death its song. We weep for you. We weep for the child.

We weep for the wrong that has no end.

[HECUBA bends over the child. She touches the wounds as if she could heal them. She takes clean cloth and places it gently on the broken body.]

HECUBA.

I make you whole. I bind your wounds, little soul that has gone away. This wound and this one I cover with white cloth. O empty help. O useless care. Still, the rite must be spoken. This wound I heal, and this one too.

No, not I. I cannot truly heal you. Your father, far away among the dead, must comfort you now. Go to him, child. Tell him what the Greeks have done. Tell him that Troy still loved his son.

[HECUBA bows her head to the ground. She stays still, as if she sees nothing around her.]

CHORUS.

Beat your head. Beat it with the rhythm of mourning hands. Bleed for the dead. Cry for the dead. Woe for us. Woe for the dead.

HECUBA.

O women, my own women.

[She rises suddenly, confused, as if she has seen something.]

LEADER.

Hecuba, speak. We are all yours. Speak before your heart breaks.

HECUBA.

I have seen the open hand of God. There was nothing in it for us except the rod of

suffering. Troy was chosen and lifted high, but only to be hated beyond all lands. Our prayers were empty. The sweet smoke at the altars was empty. The blood of bulls was empty.

Yet perhaps all is well in one strange way. If the gods had not turned us in their hand, if they had not thrown down our high places and shaken our hills into dust, our wrong would not shine before the world. Our sorrow will become a song that earth and heaven cannot forget.

Go now, women. Lay our dead child in his low grave. He has his clothes. And I think the dead care little whether rich cloth covers them. We living people care. We dream. We want honor. We are full of empty pride.

[The women lift ASTYANAX on Hector's shield. They carry him slowly away for burial, singing as they go. Soon, flames begin to appear among the ruins of the city. Dark shapes move near the broken walls. Greek soldiers are setting fire to Troy.]

SOME WOMEN.

Woe for the mother who bore you, child. You were a thin thread of hope, and time has broken it. Men smiled around your cradle. They saw your father's greatness in you. Now you lie low, low in death.

OTHER WOMEN.

Who are those men on the high rocks? I see fiery hands in the dark. I see torches thrown. What new evil is left for you, wounded city, before you die?

[TALTHYBIUS comes out through the ruined wall. Behind him are GREEK SOLDIERS with torches.]

TALTHYBIUS.

Captains, you who have been ordered to destroy Priam's city, do not let your torches sleep. Throw fire into the heart of Troy. Then our work here is finished. Then we may leave this evil land and go home to Greece.

And you, daughters of Troy, listen. One word can have two faces. Wait here until the trumpet of my masters sounds from the ruined wall. When you hear it, go forward to the sea. The long ships are waiting there.

And you, old woman, most unhappy of all, you must follow too. The men of Odysseus are here. They wait to guide you. You go to him as his slave.

HECUBA.

Ah, it has come. This is the end of all. This is the highest point of my suffering. I go out from my land, and every road of it is filled with fire. Old feet, carry me a little nearer. I must look at my poor city and say farewell before she falls.

Farewell, farewell, my Troy. Once your name was strong on the winds from the east. Soon even your name will be taken from you. Fire holds you now. We, your children, go away into slavery.

God, O God of mercy. No, why do I call on the gods? They know my prayers. They heard them long ago and did not answer. Quick, let me go to the flames. Troy, in your last pain, take me with you. Let me die with you.

[HECUBA runs toward the fire, but SOLDIERS seize her and hold her back.]

TALTHYBIUS.

Back. Your misery has made you mad, poor woman. Hold her fast, men, until Odysseus is ready for her. She was chosen as his prize. Do not lose her.

[TALTHYBIUS goes back to watch the burning city. The light grows darker

around the stage, but the fire grows brighter.]

SOME WOMEN.

Woe, woe, woe. Father of the Trojans, why do you leave us? We are your children. Will no one help us? Do you see us? Do you see us?

OTHER WOMEN.

He sees, but his heart has no pity. The land dies. The great city dies without a city. Troy shall be no more.

OTHER WOMEN.

Woe, woe, woe. Ilion shines far away with fire. Fire is deep in her houses. Fire is high on her walls. The towers of war burn in the night.

OTHER WOMEN.

Smoke climbs into the sky and is torn apart by the wind. The land cries for death. The red fire breaks the walls. The sword and the flame have finished their work.

[HECUBA suddenly kneels and beats the earth with her hands.]

HECUBA.

O Earth, earth of my children, listen. And you, my dead, you have hearts. You do not forget us in the dark.

LEADER.

Now you have found your prayer. You cry to those who are gone.

HECUBA.

My knees are tired, but I kneel above your heads. Listen, silent dead. My hands beat on your bed.

LEADER.

I am near you. I kneel beside your dead. I kneel beside my own dead too. Husband, hear my crying in the darkness.

HECUBA.

Like animals that men drive, like heavy loads that men carry, we go to the house of slavery.

LEADER.

Pain. O pain.

HECUBA.

We go to bondage. Hear us, dead ones. Hear us.

LEADER.

Go, and do not come back again.

HECUBA.

Priam, my own Priam, lying so low, you are without shelter and comfort now. Do you see what I am? Do you know my bitter pain?

LEADER.

No. You are nothing to him now. Out of struggle, out of noise, out of shame, death came to him. Death closed his eyes. Death is holy, because it ends pain.

[The fire and smoke rise higher.]

HECUBA.

O high houses of the gods. O streets of my birth, loved so long. You have found the road of the sword. You have found the red river of fire and blood.

LEADER.

Fall now, and men will forget you. You will lie in the gentle earth.

HECUBA.

Dust rises like smoke. It spreads a wide wing. It makes me a shadow. It makes my city a thing that has vanished.

LEADER.

She goes out on the smoke. No man will know her name. The cloud goes north and south. Troy is gone forever.

[A great crash is heard. Part of the wall falls. Smoke and darkness cover the place where it stood.]

HECUBA.

Did you see it? Did you hear it? The towers have fallen.

LEADER.

All is gone.

HECUBA.

The earth shakes with anger. A flood sweeps everything away.

LEADER.

And it passes on.

[The Greek trumpet sounds.]

HECUBA.

Farewell. Grey spirit inside me, do not fail now. Weak legs, why do you shake? Go forward. A new long day begins, and it begins in slavery.

CHORUS.

Farewell from our parting mouths. Farewell. Come, you and I. Whatever waits for us now, we must go forward to the long Greek ships and the foaming sea.

[The trumpet sounds again. The Trojan women go out into the darkness.]

[The End]