

HECUBA AT THE FALL OF TROY – PARTIAL TEXT

(A Greek soldier enters alone carrying a lighted torch.)

GREEK SOLDIER.

How often have I glared in spite,
With teeth clenched tight in futile rage,
And stomach aching for the fight,
To see the walls and towers, yet,
Within knew there were palaces,
And silks, and fires, and music e'en
Soft flowers on a summer's night;
While I lay upon the broken ground;
Or, tossed, awake, as star paths wound...
Breathless... through an endless, sultry,
And oppressive night. In pain,
The fires of hatred kept me warm
On winter days; and blew a chilling
Breeze when it was stifling out.
How often held I the self-same
Ground at the weary day's dark close
That was mine at the start; though all my strength
Was spent! And times there were, when I,
And strong-willed comrades, fought with courage;
Yet we were pushed back, a fire meant
For the ships came near, and panic
Grew among the guard who thought
That all was lost, that none
Could hinder our destruction here!
But in the course of time all things
May change, and come about. The walls,
No longer serve their protecting purpose.
Watchtowers, unmanned, stand blind on
Vast foundations. Gates that barred us once
Lie smote asunder, and their planks,
Feed hungry fires that light the torches
To burn this despised' city down.
We will collect what's due us at last,
For all the blood, and pain, and vile scorn.
This place, like some strange, evil beast,
Or serpent with a black heart, took
Its fill of Greeks. And of the rest,
Who saw no cuts upon their flesh,
Knew that it had yet taken, still,
A large bite from their span of years,
That, too well, nourished it. Now, when
We have vanquished this enemy,
None wish life to return once more,
In time, when wounds may heal. So we

Shall put all to the torch, that winds
Might *scatter* the remains, and dark
Oblivion take hold of it.
From the communal ring of fire

(Lights a torch from a bonfire)

Steal I a solitary ember,
A rebellious, live member,
A bright *incendiary* spark;
I free it from its human
Chains, its well domesticated
Range, where long it served the matriarch,
And the artisan, too, at his work;
Take it from the mortared stone;
Release it from its pris'ning throne;
And free it from its narrow fate,
Return it to its God-like state!
Excited, let the smold'ring
Rage, break forth in incandescent
Blaze, and wildly, geyser-like,
Throw up to heaven its showery
Glow. Then let it touch the firmament,
And leave its ashes here below.
Let all the constellations there,
Know what's been done down here; and where!
Let it bellow and let it roar!
And let it leap from porch to door!
Let it sing, let it crackle
Let it throw off *every* shackle!
Let it singe and let it sunder
Let it howl and let it thunder!
Let a spreading conflagration,
Bring down palace, bring down nation,
Bring down hope of all salvation!
Joined, let city and let Fire,
Together form a fun'ral pyre!
Then let us dance in exaltation,
Let us sing in jubilation!
End we now our deprivation,
In a whirling intoxication,
In tumbling obliteration!

CHORUS OF TROJAN WOMEN.

Where are the bells that call for help?
Where the worried dogs that bark and yelp?
Where is the watchman? Cutting kelp?
Where are the men gathered in the square?
What brave brother is now aware?
No Father shows himself full of care
No man shows himself...anywhere.
Woe to us who once did thrive!

Woe to us who did survive!
Woe to us who are still alive!
What helper sees our desperation!
What protector sees our devastation!

HECUBA.

Know you not our men are dead? And
That Troy has fallen? There is none
Left who can still take up our cause!
Yet I do fear there may be worse
To come. Their War Council meets,
In the shadows of the fires,
Set here to herald to the world
Our sudden, most appalling, ruin.
We have paid a price, too costly even
For grim victory, but bought
Instead only rending defeat.
We must hold on to what
Is left, to build again, not for
Our time, perhaps, but for our children's,
If great God permits. Where life is,
There does faith remain!

TROJAN CHORUS.

Hope is bestowed
By God to man, for good or ill.
But comes to us Talthybius
To tell us of the Greek Council's
Desires ,and its will, if we shall
Live or die; and how.

TALTHYBIUS.

Good women, I
Am sent as messenger to you
To tell you of what has been said,
Decided on behalf of you.
Hecuba, by name, the Trojan Queen,
Your life is spared! The lord and king
Of Ithaca, Odysseus
Has claimed you for his prize, to be by
Him brought to his island home,
To help his old nurse take care
Of his son.

HECUBA.

I have no longer
Hands for that. But tell me, I hope
It is what I want to hear, will any of
My daughters be allowed to
Accompany me?

TALTHYBIUS.

No!

HECUBA.

Oh, what will be their fate?
I hesitate to ask about it.

TALTHYBIUS

I will respond exactly.
Your older daughter, Cassandra,
Caught she the eye of a most
Important man, the leader of the
Greeks, great Agamemnon, himself.
He has chosen her, and I am
Charged to bring her to his tent, for
She is now his prize.

HECUBA.

Knows he not that she
Ails, and is afflicted? Better
It would be, to give her to me,
Not even a divine gift could
Unlock her maiden's chastity.

TALTHYBIUS.

You are no longer free to respond
Yea, or nay, to the demands
We make. It's been decided!
You must yield to our much greater
Strength.

HECUBA.

And Polyxena, what is
To become of her? Whose eye did
She catch?

TALTHYBIUS.

The mightiest of Lords,
He, whose dominions include
Ilium and the wide Hellas
And all the nations of the earth.

HECUBA.

Who is that? He is certainly
A most powerful monarch.

TALTHYBIUS.

Men
Call him Death.

HECUBA.

What do you mean that
She has caught the eye of Death? What
Are you telling me?

TALTHYBIUS.

That she must
Die, that is decided!

HECUBA.

But why?

TALTHYBIUS.

Neoptolemos, the son of
Achilles and the leader of the
Myrmidons, spoke at the Council.
His Father appeared to him in a dream
Seated alone, face turned away, as
In reproach. He asked if Greeks had now
Forgotten him, and all he'd
Done for Argives before Troy.
If not, he said, why had they failed
To allot him a prize, as had
Been given to all those still living.
To that Achilles son had no
Answer, and asked his Father what
He wished. Great Achilles said only
Polyxena granted him, would
Satisfy. Hearing this story and
Remembering him, the Council
Shouted that it must be done! Yet
Some did argue that it was not
Right to take the life of a young
Girl to please a pallid ghost.
Odysseus rose to say: 'Shall
We forget those who have fought with us?
Then who will take up arms with us
Next time a need may come.' This seemed
To sway the Council, since
All knew him to be a wise man.
So now prepare yourself for your
Daughter, to meet her death.

HECUBA.

I'm
Numb, and cannot quite take in
What you have said.

TALTHYBIUS.

Polyxena
Must be no more! That is it! She will

Be sacrificed before the Greek
Army assembled and her ghost
Shall leave to join Achilles
Underground. The body will be
Given back to you for burial
Afterward.

HECUBA.

Can there be no appeal?

TALTHYBIUS.

Not even Agamemnon can
Revoke what's been decided
In the Council. There is nothing
You can do.

POLYXENA.

Oh Mother, Mother
Must I be one whose life is over
Before it is begun? Exists there
A thing I have sown to bring on
Me this bitter fruit, this dreaded fate?
Have I done something I should not,
Or, careless, neglected some mandate?
If so, I beg you, forgive me...please!
Let me correct it...all appease.
But do not let me go, these
Gentle hands, and heart that loves you!

HECUBA.

Sir, please, take me rather than my
Child, or take us both!

TALTHYBIUS.

No, that is not
What's ratified, nor sanctioned!

CASSANDRA.

You have no choice! Not mother nor child!
And all resistance must renounce.
Best here to say good bye, Mother,
To she *and* me. Messenger, you
Have told me nothing I did not know.
There comes a time, when after all
One's strength is spent, one must march
Dumbly to one's doom. My sister come,
Now, take my hand.

(Exit Talthybius, Polyxena, Cassandra)

HECUBA.

My husband gone, and,
Now, my children too, one marked
For death, the other for a bed
Unwanted. I am helpless
To prevent it. What more grief can
Find me. that has never found me yet!

TROJAN CHORUS.

She must go forth into the world,
Without children, those props of age,
To keep her up. Battered is she,
Weakened in more than physical
Flesh, and bone. All who stood with her,
Now, are dead. While they did live,
Rode high her country, and her power.
Silk robed, garlanded, sweet scented;
By cold frowns, or warm affirmations,
Could she change the fate of nations.
Now all that is lost... all here is past...
Must she now find her way, as best
She can. No more in any question.
Need her wishes be considered.
Weak and helpless is she, as one
Who's been from the light, sepulchered.
But, a hope for her remains
From all her many labor pains,
A son in Thrace, her youngest child,
Sent off when Heaven still smiled
On her city and her cause. She
Sent him away, to live with a friend,
Whom she'd often entertained.
And warmly was that guest received.
But, lest her trust be ill conceived,
She sent him girdled by a treasure;
With wealth, equal to her power,
Thought she to buy a life, if all
Else failed. Smiling, Polymestor
Assured her no harm would come, for
This he owed to her both as friend,
And benefactor. The Thracian
King did watch her son grow, then
Become a teacher to his own two
Younger ones. So, now, in hope-fled
Sorrows, has she, yet a windward
Anchor, 'gainst bleak hopeless 'morrrows
And storms that may buffet her.
Today arrives Polymestor
In the Greek camp. She has no doubt
He will keep his solemn word.
She knows he will call, and pay
His respects, and keep a trust.

She had asked him to visit her,
The vanquished, as well as the victors,
So she may glean about her son,
All that she most, discretely, can;
And on that build, and try to mend,
A self that's shattered.