



WOMEN OF TROY

BY ELISABETH HARVEY

AN ORIGINAL ADAPTATION OF TROJAN WOMEN & HECUBA BY EURIPIDES

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An Original Adaptation
of Hecuba and Trojan Women

by Elisabeth Harvey

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WOMEN of TROY

NOTES

Act One begins with morning and ends at midday. Act Two begins at noon and ends in the evening.

The Trojan War took place between 1194 to 1184 BC. The invading army consisted of Greek men (called Argives throughout this text) from surrounding countries. The Trojans themselves were not Greeks, but a separate people in Northwestern Asia Minor.

The text is an adaptation of *Hecuba* and *Trojan Women* by Euripides. Additional sources include *The Greek Myths: 1* and *2* by Robert Graves as well as *Dictionary of Classical Mythology* by J. E. Zimmerman. Our interpretation of historical and mythological Sparta is indebted to *A History of Western Philosophy* by Bertrand Russell, from Chapter XII, "The Influence of Sparta," through Chapter XIV, "Plato's Utopia."

DRAMATIS PERSONAE

CASSANDRA. Virgin priestess of Apollo. Though she is lucid, due to a curse from Apollo everyone believes she is mad.

HECUBA. Former queen of Troy and wife to the late king Priam. Known as the most unfortunate woman in all of Greek mythology.

WOMEN. The remaining captive Trojans, including women of all ages, girls and small boys.

TALTHYBIUS. Argive messenger to Troy these ten years, now a most reluctant bringer of bad news.

MEN. Armed guards accompanying all male Argives.

POLYXENA. Hecuba's youngest daughter.

ODYSSEUS. Hero among Argives, instrumental in staging Troy's defeat.

AGAMEMNON. Brother to Menelaus and general of the Argive forces. Compelled against his will to help his brother besiege Troy.

POLYMESTOR. King of Thrace and longtime friend to Troy.

ANDROMACHE. Daughter-in-law to Hecuba, mother to Astyanax and wife of the late Hector, who was captain of the Trojan forces and Troy's chief hero. Renowned in the mythology for her faithfulness.

MENELAUS. Invading king of Sparta and husband to Helen.

HELEN. Fugitive queen of Sparta, wife of Menelaus and lover to the late Paris, who was Hecuba's son.

ACT ONE

Scene 1, Foreshadow

Predawn. The figure of Cassandra is barely visible.

CASSANDRA.

Early this morning, while dawn was dark, I dreamed I stood in the court of the gods. Poseidon was there, watching Troy burn. "Stripped, gutted, sacked," he said. "My niece's work."

So Athena came to him – she the goddess of wisdom and of war, as if the two had anything in common. "Come," she told her uncle, "let us put aside our quarrel."

"For whose sake?" said he. "For Troy? Or is this some new ploy to make yourself great in the eyes of the greater gods?"

She said, "No, for Troy's sake I come." Ha! Athena, who broke Troy with her own hands.

Poseidon laughed too.

She said, "Did you know these Argives shamed my temple when I helped them take your city?"

"What, did that displease you?" he said. "Did you think your house would hold while Troy burned?"

"Help me make them suffer," said she. "When the Argives take ship from Troy, Zeus will blacken the air with hail, rain, roaring winds. He will put the lightning in my hand, and with it I will burst to flame the Argive ships. You know your part: the Aegean. Let the waves burst up like walls to churn the dead, to glut the surf with floating bodies, so after this these Argives will know to treat the gods with respect."

Beat.

And do you know what Poseidon said, in the court of the gods, while the city smoldered and dawn was dark? "I will do it, and gladly."

Scene 2, Story

Dawn. A field of rubble outside the walls of Troy, encircled by tents in which the captive Trojan Women are living with their daughters and youngest sons. Hecuba wakes.

HECUBA.

Rise, ruined head. Up from the dust. Open the throat. Limbs stiff from such a night. Rocks for the queen.

Behold Troy! The toppled walls. Oh, my lovely strong city. O Troy's kings. We, the perished ones, are they. Two days ago, we held eternity in our hands. One short night crumbled all. Two days ago, we laughed. That grim image: Argive tents crowding the foot of our gates, they were gone. The war, done. Dust, dry brush only, and the print of their feet brushed off in the wind. Only the wooden horse remained – a sign that they had put to sea. What laughter while we wheeled it through our gates. They waited till night to spring. They gutted us.

Oh, we Trojans, we are wives no more. Should I bear it meekly or lash my tears across the ground? Two days ago, I was queen. Now our men lie low, cast no more shadow. We stand under a different shadow now.

Ah, such a dream I had. What, am I now too old to stand? O dreams, dim-winged: take it back. Vision of my youngest, my dappled doe Polyxena. Does she not sleep in these tents? No further cause do I need for tears. Ha. Massive pride, heaped to the sky's ceiling, you meant nothing. Well, Troy's warriors' widows? Come out, you brides of disaster, and sing the smoke of this city. I am a bird spreading wings to welcome my scattered young. I will begin the song of defeat. Who will end it?

Enter some of the Women.

WOMEN.

What are these cries, queen? I heard your voice before I woke, and fear splintered my heart.

HECUBA.

Women, smeared in my city's ash, herded here like cattle: all day they tore you from the altars, routed us from the closets where we hid.

WOMEN.

What news?

HECUBA.

Ill-fated Troy.

Enter the rest of the Women.

WOMEN.

Ah, shivering, I heard your voice, and crept from the tents to listen.

HECUBA.

One night we have spent here. I fear we will not spend another.

WOMEN.

Will the Argives serve us death?

HECUBA.

The ships will surely move today.

WOMEN.

Must I be torn from my land so soon?

HECUBA.

They wait only for wind. After ten years' fighting, they are eager to leave this place. On the other side of the Aegean they have homes. If there be no wind, when their patience breaks they will row.

WOMEN.

Will they take us aboard?

HECUBA.

I do not know.

WOMEN.

O coldest morning of my captivity. What has befallen me? Am I never again to weave my cloth, to sway my feet at the looms of Troy? No more may I tend the fires beside you, cook our food and bake our bread. My home, my life, O Troy, no more! Am I never to see you again?

HECUBA.

This misfortune has a capstone. Every man of them is bound for a different country.

WOMEN.

We are scattered?

HECUBA.

Maybe. But calm this shivering. We must prepare ourselves for pain.

WOMEN.

Whose slave must I be?

HECUBA.

And whose slave must I? Where shall this old drone live: weak-shining shadow of a woman who had authority?

WOMEN.

O let not me land in Sparta, detested: not serve Menelaus, the wrecker of Troy.

HECUBA.

Some common woman will humble this grey head with mundane tasks.

WOMEN.

Shall I work the bolts that bar their door? Nurse their children?

HECUBA.

Lay these bones to sleep on the ground, whose bed was luxury? I was the bride of a king, mother by him of sons as no other might boast. Fifty boys I nursed, each a ruler whose words were heeded, that with many defenders we would have peace. Twelve girls I bore, choice flowers set apart for worthy men, that in many allies we would rest safe. I was Priam's queen, the woman whose son was Hector.

WOMEN.

Midnight was my doom, the night before the last. The grateful feast was done, and softly, sleep was settling sweetly on our eyes. My husband lay asleep in bed, his spear upon the wall. My husband lay in

peace, in bed, while I stood plaiting up my hair, gazing at the golden glimmer deep within the mirror.

Then, uproar broke the air apart. Cold shouts shot the streets. "Now, Argives! Ruin Troy, and we can go home!"

I left the warmth of my husband's skin. Dressed in a gown like a girl I ran, swift-foot, to the shrine of Athena. Morning came. Noon glare followed. Then the Argives found me. The soldiers dragged me here to camp. I saw my husband's body, naked, lying in the road. Athena did not answer.

HECUBA.

Safety imperishable, you have perished.

WOMEN.

Voice of singing, do not leave me. Soon they will take me over the sea. I will look back from the hurrying ship, as these hills of mine all slip behind. So, gain the strength to bear these tears. Tell this tale together while we can.

Two days ago I looked across our walls and saw the horse. What did it look like? Tall and plain, its belly packed with silent thunder. Oh how we thronged the gates, remember. "The war is over! All is done!" Who stayed inside? Not one.

Old men, laughing, left their chairs, while girls' bare feet flung forth to beat a path outside. Singing, children led our death within by hand. We hauled the horse like the hull of a ship through the streets of our city as far as the altar: Athena's altar, where later the slaughter began.

Black night fell. I danced, I with all of Troy, we pounded our feet to the lute with torches bright to beat back sleep. Then came the shout that snapped my blood like a frost. It stunned the song from our throats. Children clutched the mother's dress, as war lurched from the beast.

Athena. She did this. Athena betrayed us. She it was who told Odysseus how to build the wooden horse. By her altar, Trojans died in blood because of her, and lonely beds give up their brides to breed sons now for Argive men.

Scene 3, Allotment

Enter Talthybius and Men.

TALTHYBIUS.

Women, where is your queen?

WOMEN.

At your feet, herald.

TALTHYBIUS.

O Zeus. What can I say? Is this she with whom I used to speak? O proud head, fouled in dust. Rise, lady.

HECUBA.

Who is it?

TALTHYBIUS.

For ten years I have come to Troy on behalf of the Argive council, and now you know me not? Hecuba, it is Talthybius. I have new messages for you to hear.

HECUBA.

O daughters.

TALTHYBIUS.

You have been assigned masters. Was this your dread?

HECUBA.

To which country must we go?

TALTHYBIUS.

You are all allotted separately, each to a different man.

WOMEN.

No hope left for my people?

HECUBA.

Who is given to whom?

TALTHYBIUS.

Please, I can answer, but not for all at once. Ask by name.

HECUBA.

My daughters. My witless Cassandra.

TALTHYBIUS.

She goes to Agamemnon.

HECUBA.

The brother of Menelaus.

TALTHYBIUS.

General of the forces that assembled for his brother's cause.

HECUBA.

Unhappy child, to serve the wife of such a man!

TALTHYBIUS.

No. Rather to warm his bed in the dark.

HECUBA.

She is Apollo's virgin.

TALTHYBIUS.

I know.

HECUBA.

She is Apollo's priestess. She has made vows to the god. Cassandra is set aside.

TALTHYBIUS.

Love struck him hard. He wanted the girl with a god inside her.

HECUBA.

Well. Fling down, my daughter, the keys to your temple. Break the holy branches that kept you safe.

TALTHYBIUS.

Is a king's bed so hateful as that? Agamemnon is lord of Argos. He holds more sway by far than his brother, and he is not unkind.

HECUBA.

The others. Andromache, wife to my son Hector, widow now.

TALTHYBIUS.

The son of Achilles wanted her.

HECUBA.

Ah, it will be hard for her. Bride to Troy's best hero, married to our enemies' champion's son. It will be hard for her.

TALTHYBIUS.

My order is to call out your daughter Cassandra.

HECUBA.

And I, these old limbs, to whom do I go?

TALTHYBIUS.

To Odysseus, lord of Ithaca.

HECUBA.

Odysseus. Oh no, no.

TALTHYBIUS.

Where is Cassandra?

HECUBA.

That slippery man, mouth of crooked words. His the scheming that hatched the wooden horse and made worthless our walls. Oh grieve, daughters. I am undone. I am gone.

WOMEN.

What of me?

HECUBA.

(To Talthymbius.) Wait. The other queen in these tents. Helen: what of her?

TALTHYBIUS.

No decision has been reached regarding Menelaus's wife.

WOMEN.

Queen, what of me? Ask for me.

HECUBA.

Had she never come.

TALTHYBIUS.

(To Men.) Bring Cassandra out. I must give her to the general.

HECUBA.

Menelaus would not have given chase.

TALTHYBIUS.

Afterward, we may move more slowly in distributing the rest.

HECUBA.

Would not have called the kings of Argos to our door.

TALTHYBIUS.

Search the tents if they will not bring her out.

HECUBA.

Had Helen not been, Troy would be yet.

CASSANDRA.

(Offstage.) Brandish the torch! Thrust the hot light up! Set fire to the gods, to the city, to my robes!

TALTHYBIUS.

What, are they setting themselves aflame? Open, there, open, lest the commanders hurl the blame on me.

Scene 4, Sacrilege

Enter Cassandra brandishing an unlit torch.

CASSANDRA.

Raise the torch, heave up, fling the flame. Flood the temple in holy light. Blessed the bridegroom. Blessed the bride. Blessed am I to

descend to bed with a king. O Agamemnon, take all, and the blessing which falls on me shall fall no less on you.

HECUBA.

Daughter, inflict no song of joy on these ears.

CASSANDRA.

Yours the tears, mother. But this marriage is mine, and I myself shall shake the torch for me. Dazzle, flare for you, Apollo. For custom makes this my wedding night.

WOMEN.

There is no flame.

CASSANDRA.

A torch without flame, a wedding without joy, a priestess without god.

WOMEN.

Madness.

CASSANDRA.

Think not of madness, think not, no thought is needed now. Loose your feet, rippling forth, let free your laughter. Holy! Dance! Hear, Apollo, the one who tends your temple: be struck by the voice that breaks on heaven's door. Laugh, whirl your daughter round. Cry my name in wedding song, while all you daughters across the sea, dance for the fate I appoint to your unlucky lord.

WOMEN.

Hecuba, wrap her in your arms before she whirls herself into the

soldiers' camp.

HECUBA.

Child. Child. Child. Child. I never dreamed you were meant for this, married at spear's edge amid the men of Argos. Let me take that. There, you cannot carry it straight enough. Women, take this inside. Your faces are the only answer for songs such as hers.

CASSANDRA.

No, crown my hair with flowers. I marry a king; then be glad. Escort the bride. Thrust her strongly on, for wise Agamemnon brings home a wife more deadly than Helen ever was. I shall kill him, and avenge my brothers' broken bodies, and my father's.

TALTHYBIUS.

Were it not that Apollo had unhinged your wits, you would be made to regret a speech so foul as this.

CASSANDRA.

No, I have wits. I can think. Let me think now. Think with me, herald.

TALTHYBIUS.

(To Men.) Hold still till her fire burns out. There is no substance in it.

CASSANDRA.

No, there is no substance. There is no bite in these events. For Troy's fate is fortune compared to yours. For Helen, you Argives died in the thousands. The gracious lord Agamemnon, on an errand he hated, gave up what he cherished: his home, his children. For ten years you died, and for what? To defend your own? No, to chase down some woman because her cuckold husband begged you. For that, your

soldiers never saw their sons again, and when they died, they were not laid in the ground decently, wrapped in good sheets by their wives. They lie in a foreign land, while across the sea, their widows die alone. Fathers grow old without sons to comfort them or sing the burial songs.

WOMEN.

She laughs at them.

CASSANDRA.

I laugh. This expedition has won the Argives much. Congratulate them! No, but softly; the truth is difficult. We Trojans, we have better. They who took the spear these ten years were carried home, buried in the bosom of our own earth by those who loved them. And they that escaped a hero's death, they came home each night to joy that the Argives could not know: their wives, their children. My brother Hector is dead, but he earned a hero's name, and think too of my brother Paris, coupling in the sheets with the daughter of a god.

WOMEN.

Does it comfort you to be so crass?

CASSANDRA.

Our fame will live. Death has sealed us into memory. Living things fade, but we are cast in bronze now.

TALTHYBIUS.

Agamemnon makes a clown of himself, picking this crazed girl to love.

CASSANDRA.

They are the mad ones, who could not live quietly at home.

TALTHYBIUS.

Apparently great men are fools too.

CASSANDRA.

They are the ones plunging headlong after their own fist.

TALTHYBIUS.

I am a plain man, but I would not take this woman if either of us were free.

CASSANDRA.

Pity them, and have vengeance.

TALTHYBIUS.

Enough. Your insults for Argos and your Trojans glorified, I fling to the wind. If there were any wind. Well, stately bride, will you follow me to the ships, or shall we drag you?

CASSANDRA.

I follow. A slave is a slave.

TALTHYBIUS.

Hecuba. When Odysseus calls you, do not hang back. If all is true that I have heard, his wife is a good woman.

CASSANDRA.

And a slave is a slave.

TALTHYBIUS.

I advise your mother for her sake, not mine.

CASSANDRA.

Apollo promised me that Hecuba should die before falling so low.

WOMEN.

Who can fathom the whisperings of a god?

TALTHYBIUS.

Bid the queen farewell.

CASSANDRA.

Odysseus, poor soul. I will throw no insults at him, who little dreams what his future holds. But a day will come when the man looks back on Troy's pain as bliss beside his own. Ten years he wasted here, but he will waste ten more. The rocky gorge, the sea monster, oxen's dead bodies groaning out human speech. Oh yes, Odysseus will go down to hell alive, and he who left home to conquer Troy will be forced to conquer home before he sleeps. His fate is bad, and I am satisfied.

HECUBA.

Then Apollo's promise may be true. I would not survive such a journey.

CASSANDRA.

As for Agamemnon: in the darkness of night your life shall leave you, while I, naked, am cast to the gorge where the winter waters roar. And the beasts shall pick our bones.

TALTHYBIUS.

These their words of parting.

CASSANDRA.

Lord Apollo, how I loved you. Take back the garlands that I wore. Tear them from my undefiled skin, and be dishonored, since you would give me up. Where then is this general's ship?

HECUBA.

Oh daughter.

CASSANDRA.

Do not doubt it, herald,; the wind will come. But watch. When we leave this shore, a Fury goes in my stead.

HECUBA.

Daughter, do not make them make you suffer. Cassandra. We will never speak again.

CASSANDRA.

No more tears, mother. Goodbye brothers buried. Priam, father, you will not be waiting long. I come triumphant, and behind me I will leave in rubble the house that wrecked our house.

Men escort Cassandra offstage. Talthybius moves to follow.

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