

AGAMEMNON

No. Stop acting like a barbarian: use words, not force!  
Both of you make your case so that  
I can make a just decision about what has happened.

1130

POLYMESTOR

Let me tell you what happened.  
Polydorus was the youngest son of Priam and Hecuba.  
When Priam feared that Troy might fall,  
he gave him to me to raise in my house.  
I killed him. Yes! Listen to my reasons and you will see  
it was a wise thing to do and showed forethought.  
The boy was your enemy, but here I was sheltering him.  
I was afraid that he might gather allies and rebuild Troy.  
Another fear I had was that if the Greeks  
heard that a son of Priam was alive,  
they might set out again against Phrygia  
and sack the land of Thrace,  
stealing everything in sight,  
and then we, Troy's neighbor, would suffer  
the same catastrophe that Troy did.

1140

Hecuba, after she found out I killed her child,  
lured me here on the pretext  
that she would tell me about the treasure  
that Priam left buried in Troy.  
She took me and my sons into the tent,  
so that no one else could hear.  
I sat relaxed in the middle of a couch,  
and the women sat to the right and left of me,  
speaking to me as a friend.  
They praised my clothes of fine Edonian weave,  
holding the fabric up to the light.  
Others admired my Thracian weapons,  
and suddenly I was without spears and shield.  
Mothers said sweet things about my children,  
and bounced them on their laps.  
passing them from one to another.  
They made sure that they were far from me.  
Then, after all this pleasant talk, out of the blue  
they drew daggers they had hidden their clothing,

1150

1160

and killed my children.  
Others held my arms and legs down  
as if I were an enemy and their prisoner.  
I wanted to help my children, but when I lifted my head,  
they pulled me back by my hair.  
I couldn't even move my hands.  
There were too many of them. I was at their mercy.  
Then they did the unspeakable, horror of horrors:  
they took out the long pins that fastened their clothes  
and stabbed my eyes until they spurted blood. 1170  
Then they scattered about the tent because I leapt up  
like a wounded beast, and chased those bitches.  
I tried to hunt them down,  
flailing and hitting wildly, as I groped the sides of the tent:  
I was out to kill them.  
I suffered all this for your sake, Agamemnon:  
for helping you by eliminating your enemy.  
To make a long story short, 1180  
I shall sum up what the ancients said about  
that curse that is called woman:  
on earth or in the sea there is nothing  
that matches them for the evil they do.  
Anyone who knows them will agree:  
this always was and always will be.

#### CHORUS

You've said quite enough: you can't blame all women  
on the basis of your experience alone.  
Women are different:  
Some are envied; others are evil.

#### HECUBA

Agamemnon,  
one should not believe words more than actions.  
if a man does good, his words should shine with goodness, but  
If he commits crimes, his words should stink with rotteness.  
No one should be able to gloss over crime with clever words.  
There are men who have mastered this art,  
but their success never lasts. They trip up in the end.  
No one can get away with deception forever.

Agamemnon, I wanted you to hear that first.  
Now I'll answer this man's charges directly.

*Speaking to Polymestor.*

You claim you killed my son to help both  
the Greeks and Agamemnon, and save them from another war.  
First of all,  
what civilized Greek ever wanted a barbarian as his friend? 1200  
So what did you want to gain from this?  
Possibly some connection by marriage? You're related to them?  
Some other reason? Would the Greeks waste your land  
if they sailed here again? That was hardly your motive.  
The truth is that you wanted my son's gold;  
your greed was the reason you killed my son.

Tell me this. When Troy's towers still stood, and we thrived,  
when Priam was alive, and Hector's spear was strong, 1210  
if you wanted to win favor with Agamemnon,  
instead of keeping my son safe, why didn't you kill him then  
or hand him over alive to the Greeks?  
It was only when you saw that we had lost  
and smoke was rising from fires the enemy set in our city;  
it was only then that you killed this guest  
who had come to you for sanctuary.

There's more:  
If you were a friend of the Greeks,  
then why didn't you hand over this gold —  
which you admit wasn't yours, but his — 1220  
to these "friends" who needed it since  
they had been gone so long from home  
and had many losses? Oh no, you still shamelessly  
keep it safe and sound at home.

If you had raised my son as you should  
and kept *him* safe, you would have won praise.  
Adversity shows who's a true friend;  
fair-weather "friends" are easily found.  
If my son had been lucky and his kingdom still stood,  
he would have been a great treasure for you,  
in case you ever needed anything.  
Look at what you have now:  
my son is dead, so no friend there; 1230  
you won't enjoy your gold any more;  
and your children are dead.

Agamemnon, if you help this man,  
people will criticize you:

they will say that is not right to help someone  
who had no respect for the laws of god or men,  
and who betrayed those whom he should have saved.  
If you help him they will say it shows  
you're the same as he is.  
But that's all I have to say:  
I don't want to criticize my master.

CHORUS

*Pheu, Pheu!* This shows if you have a good cause  
you will find the words!

AGAMEMNON

I don't like passing judgment on other people's crimes. 1240  
It's a burden for me, but it must be done. I agreed to do it,  
so it would be bad of me if I were to say I won't do it now.  
Here's what I think:

*(to Polymestor)*

You didn't kill your guest  
for the sake of the Greeks, but so that you could get Polydorus' gold.  
Since you've been caught, you now make any excuse.  
Perhaps among barbarians it's the custom to kill guests.  
but we Greeks call it murder. If I said you weren't guilty,  
I'd be sorely blamed. No. I can't let you off.  
If you dared to do these crimes, you must pay for them 1250  
and suffer the consequences.

POLYMESTOR

What a disgrace. Beaten by a woman, a slave,  
bested by my inferior!

HECUBA

Didn't you get what you deserved for your crimes?

POLYMESTOR

The pain of it: to lose both my children and my eyes.

HECUBA

What a pity: you're in pain. What do you think I feel for my child?

POLYMESTOR

You are really gloating now, you bitch from hell!

HECUBA

Vengeance is sweet; do you begrudge me that?

POLYMESTOR, *becoming prophetic*

Soon you won't be so happy...when you set sail...

HECUBA

When I sail to Greece?

1260

POLYMESTOR

When you fall from the mast into the sea.

HECUBA

Who's going to push me?

POLYMESTOR

You yourself will climb up the mast.

HECUBA

Will I grow wings? Some other way?

POLYMESTOR

You will turn into a dog with flaming eyes.

HECUBA

How do you know that I'm going to change shape?

POLYMESTOR

Dionysus, the Thracian prophet, told me.

HECUBA

He left a few things out, didn't he? Not a word about what just happened to you!

POLYMESTOR

No. Or you wouldn't have been able to carry out your plot to destroy me.

HECUBA

Will I be dead or alive when all this happens to me? 1070

POLYMESTOR

Dead. Your grave will be called...

HECUBA

Something to do with my shape?

POLYMESTOR

..."The bitch's grave." *Cynossema*. A landmark for sailors.

HECUBA

I don't care what happens, as long as I am avenged.

POLYMESTOR

Yes. And your daughter Cassandra must also die.

HECUBA

I spit your words out! They are for you, not me!

POLYMESTOR

At the hands of the wife of this man here, Clytemnestra, bitter guardian of his house...

HECUBA

I pray the daughter of Tyndareus will never be so mad!

POLYMESTOR

She will kill Agamemnon. Lifting the ax high above her head.

AGAMEMNON

Are you insane? You're asking for trouble.

1280

POLYMESTOR

Kill me! A bloody bath is waiting for you in Argos!

AGAMEMNON

Servants. Drag him away, out of my sight!

POLYMESTOR

Don't tell me, are my words causing you pain?

AGAMEMNON

Shut him up!

POLYMESTOR

Please. Shut me up. I've had my say.

AGAMEMNON

As quickly as possible!

Throw him on some deserted island  
because he doesn't know when to keep his mouth shut.

*Polymestor is taken away by servants.*

Hecuba, you poor woman, go and bury your two children.

You women, go to the tents of your masters.

I see we now have favorable winds for sailing home.

May the gods grant a pleasant voyage back to Greece,  
an end to our troubles, and peace at home.

1290

*Exit Agamemnon and Hecuba.*

## CHORUS

Go friends, go to the harbor and the tents  
To learn what it is to be a slave.  
Necessity now calls the tune, and the song is a bitter one.