

## Hecuba

SCENE: *In the Greek army's camp on the Thracian Chersonese, the peninsula across the Hellespont from Troy.<sup>1</sup> One side entrance leads to the main part of the Greek camp; the other leads to the seashore. The stage building represents Agamemnon's tent, inside which Hecuba is sleeping; Polydorus' ghost stands in front of the tent.<sup>1</sup>*

GHOST OF POLYDORUS:

I've left the dark recesses of the dead—  
where Hades dwells apart from other gods—  
and crossed the gate of shadows, to come here.  
I'm Polydorus, son of Cisseus' daughter  
Hecuba. My father Priam sent me 5  
out of danger when our city, held  
at spearpoint by the Greeks, came close to falling.  
Priam feared for me, and so I left  
the land of Troy to live with Polymestor,  
my Thracian host, whose spear protects the fruitful 10  
plain of the Chersonese and all its people,  
lovers of horses. My father sent, in secret,  
a large amount of gold with me: he hoped  
that if the walls of Troy should fall, his children,  
if they survived, would be provided for. 15  
I was Priam's youngest, and that's why  
he sent me out of danger. My frame was too slight  
for defensive gear, my arm too young for a sword.

As long as Troy stayed safe, her towers standing,  
as long as my brother Hector's spear held sway, 20  
my Thracian host—my father's friend—took care  
to raise me well; I flourished like a sapling,  
for nothing.

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1. The play never explains why the Greek army has sailed across the Hellespont.

25                   Then, when Hector was destroyed  
 along with Troy—my father’s hearth demolished,  
 my father fallen at the god-built altar,  
 slaughtered by Achilles’ murderous child—<sup>2</sup>  
 he killed me for the sake of gold—my host,  
 my father’s friend!—unhappy me. He threw  
 my corpse into the salt waves of the sea  
 30                   so he could keep the gold in his own house.

One moment I am lying on the shore;  
 the next, the surf has rolled me out of reach:  
 out and back, like a sprinter running a course  
 over and over, unburied and unwept.

35                   But now I’ve deserted my body; I dart above  
 the head of my mother Hecuba, suspended  
 in space for three days, ever since she left  
 her home in Troy, poor thing, and came to this land,  
 the Chersonese. The Greeks all sit at rest  
 40                   beside their ships along the Thracian shore,  
 heeding an apparition: Peleus’ son  
 Achilles rose up from his tomb and stopped  
 the whole Greek army as they put to sea.  
 He demands a blood-offering for his tomb,  
 45                   my sister as his special prize of honor:  
 Polyxena.<sup>3</sup> He’ll get her. Achilles’ friends  
 won’t let him go without his gift. And fate  
 will lead my sister to her death before  
 this day is done. My mother’s eyes will see  
 50                   two dead bodies, her two children: me  
 and that poor girl. I will appear! I want  
 a burial, after all that I’ve been through.  
 I’ll wash up in the waves between the feet  
 of a servant woman. I begged the gods below  
 55                   to let me have a tomb, to let me fall

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2. The killing of the old king Priam at the household altar by Neoptolemus (also called Pyrrhus), the son of Achilles, was a well-known atrocity.

3. Achilles had seen Polyxena when he ambushed her and her brother Troilus; he pursued Troilus and killed him. The story of her sacrifice was told in the (now lost) epic *Sack of Troy*.