into my mother's arms, and I will have my wish. But now, I'll get out of the way: my agèd mother Hecuba emerges from Agamemnon's tent. My ghost has spooked her. Ah.

O Mother, from a royal household—you who look upon your day of slavery— some god has counterpoised your former joy with all the weight of what you suffer now.

(Enter Hecuba from the tent, supported by her Servant and an attendant. Exit Ghost of Polydorus.)

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HECUBA:

Hold me steady there, children, and help me go out. Keep me straight! That's the way. I'm not young anymore, dear daughters of Troy; I'm a servant like you, though I once was your mistress.ⁱⁱ

Take ahold of this old lady's arm, and I'll hurry just as much as I can, in my slow-footed way, with the crook of your arm as my crutch.

(Hecuba sings.)iii

Blazing sunlight of Zeus, and obsidian Night, when will phantoms and night terrors leave me alone? O Holy One, Earth below, mother of black-wingèd dreams, may the vision I saw in the night stay away, leave me be!⁴

There, in my dream, was my child, whom I sent off to Thrace for safekeeping; there was Polyxena, too—my dear daughter appeared in this vision—

and it shook me with panic.iv

Gods of earth down below, keep my child safe from harm! He alone is my anchor. A friend of his father watches over him now, here in Thrace, land of snow.

^{4.} It was a Greek popular belief that the best way to dispel evil omens from bad dreams was to tell them to the sun and the gods.

How I fear what comes next.

Our refrain will be wailing. We're wailing already. I'm quailing and trembling like never before. The gods granted Helenus insight—where is he?⁵ Where's my Cassandra?⁶ O daughters of Troy, where's the judge who can help me decipher these dreams?

Here's what I saw in my vision: a dappled deer being slaughtered, slain by a wolf's bloody claw, and then torn from my knees without pity.

90 This is what I am dreading:

from the height of his tomb came the ghost of Achilles demanding a prize in his honor: a daughter of Troy, one of those who has known so much heartache. I beg you, O gods, keep this threat far away from my child.

(Enter the Chorus from the direction of the camp, chanting in anapests.)

CHORUS:

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I have come in a hurry to meet you here, Hecuba, slipping away from the tent of my master where I've been allotted, assigned as a slave driven here by the Greeks from the city of Ilion—a war captive, hunted and taken at spearpoint. The message I bring will not lighten your suffering; no, I am bearing a weight of great sorrow.

In the Greeks' full assembly, it was resolved (we have heard) that your daughter be given in sacrifice,

^{5.} Helenus was a son of Priam and Hecuba who had prophetic abilities. He was captured by the Greeks and told them what they must do to take Troy. In *Andromache* (1294), Thetis predicts that he will marry Andromache.

^{6.} Cassandra, a daughter of Hecuba and Priam, had prophetic abilities but was cursed not to be believed, since she refused sexual favors to the god Apollo. During the capture of Troy she was sexually assaulted by Ajax son of Oïleus, but then taken as a concubine by the leader of the Greeks, King Agamemnon of Mycenae.