

**Tiger at the Gates, by Jean Giraudoux
(adapted by Ray Kostulias)**

ACT I

Andromache. There's not going to be a Trojan war, Cassandra!

Cassandra. I shall take that bet, Andromache.

Andromache. The Greeks are quite right to protest. We are going to receive their ambassador very civilly. We shall wrap up his little Helen and give her back to him.

Cassandra. We shall receive him atrociously. We shall refuse to give Helen back. And there *will* be a Trojan war.

Andromache. Yes, if Hector were not here. But he is here, Cassandra, he is home again. You can hear the trumpets. At this moment he is marching into the city, victorious. And Hector is certainly going to have something to say. When he left, three months ago, he promised me this war would be the last.

Cassandra. It is the last. The next is still ahead of him.

Andromache. Doesn't it ever tire you to prophesy only disasters?

Cassandra. I prophesy nothing. All I ever do is take account of two great stupidities: the stupidity of men and the wild stupidity of the elements.

Andromache. Why *should* there be a war? Paris and Helen don't care for each other any longer.

Cassandra. Do you think it will matter if Paris and Helen don't care for each other any longer? Has destiny ever been interested in whether things were still true or not?

Andromache. I don't know what destiny is.

Cassandra. I'll tell you. It is simply the relentless logic of each day we live.

Andromache. I don't understand abstractions.

Cassandra. No matter, we can try metaphor. Imagine a tiger, a sleeping tiger.

Andromache. Let it sleep.

Cassandra. There's nothing I should like better. But certain cocksure statements have been prodding him out of his slumber. For some considerable time Troy has been full of them.

Andromache. Full of what?

Cassandra. Of cocksure statements. A confident belief that the world, and the supervision of the world, is the province of humankind in general and Trojan men and women in particular. Is Hector at this very moment marching into Troy?

Andromache. Yes, Hector at this very moment has come home to his wife.

Cassandra. And Hector's wife is going to have a child?

Andromache. Yes, I am going to have a child.

Cassandra. Don't you call that a little overconfident? Hector has come home in triumph to the wife he adores. The tiger begins to rouse... opens one eye... licks his lips... stretches his limbs... starts to prowl...

Andromache. Stop!

Cassandra. climbs noiselessly up the palace steps... pushes the doors open with his snout... and...

(Hector's voice: Andromache!)

here he is!

Andromache. Hector!

Hector. Andromache!

(They embrace)

Oh Cassandra, good morning to you too.

(Pause)

Cassandra. Your wife is going to have a child.

(She exits)

Hector. The gods be praised! Will it be a son or daughter?

Andromache. Which do you want?

Hector. A thousand of each!

Andromache. Sorry to disappoint you. It will be a son, one single son.

Hector. That makes sense. More boys than girls are born at the end of a war.

Andromache. And before a war?

Hector. Forget wars, Andromache. As soon as I leave you, I will go into the square and formally close the Gates of War, once and for all.

Andromache. Close them, then. But they will open again.

Hector. You can even tell me the very day, perhaps?

Andromache. Yes. When all is well. When every house is sheltering a contented couple.

Hector. And peace is at its very height?

Andromache. And our son is glowing with life.

Hector. Perhaps our son will be a coward. That's one possible safeguard.

Andromache. He won't be a coward. But perhaps I shall cut off the index finger of his right hand.

Hector. If every mother cut off the index finger of her son's right hand, the armies of the world would fight without index fingers. And if they cut off their sons' right legs, the armies would be one-legged. And if they put out their eyes, the armies would be blind, but there would still be armies. Blind armies groping to find the fatal place in the enemy's groin.

Andromache. I would rather kill him.

Hector. There's a truly maternal solution to war!

Andromache. It's because he is your son, Hector, because he is you, that I'm so afraid. You don't know how like you he is. Even in this limbo where he waits, he has your tenderness, your silences. If you love war, he will love it. Do you love war?

Hector. If a man can love what takes away hope, and happiness, and all those nearest to his heart.

Andromache. You know it can be so. Men do love it.

Hector. If they let themselves be fooled by that little burst of divinity the gods give them at the moment of attack.

Andromache. Ah, there, you see! At the moment of attack you feel like a god.

Hector. More often, not as much as a man. But sometimes, on certain mornings, you get up from the ground feeling lighter, astonished, altered. You are invulnerable. A tenderness comes over you, a kind of tenderness of battle: you are tender because you are pitiless; what the tenderness of the gods must be.

Andromache. And then the enemy comes.

Hector. And then the enemy comes, frothing at the mouth. You pity him. You can see him there, behind the swollen veins and the whites of his eyes, the helpless, willing little man of business, the well-meaning husband and son-in-law who like to grow his own vegetables. You feel a sort of love for him. You love the wart on his cheek, and the cast in his eye. You love him. But he comes on, he is insistent. Then you kill him.

Andromache. And you bend over the wretched corpse as though you were a god. But you're not a god. You can't give back his life again.

Hector. It's hard to explain how all the sounds of war combined to make me think it was something noble. The galloping of horse in the night, the clatter of bowls and dishes where the cooks were moving in and out of the firelight, the brush of silk and metal against your tent as the night patrol went past. It all seemed so right, so marvelously right.

Andromache. But not this time. This time war had no music for you.

Hector. Why was that? Because I'm older? Or was it just the kind of weariness with your job which, for instance, a carpenter will be suddenly seized by, with a table half-finished, as I was seized one morning, standing over an adversary of my own age, about to put an end to him? Up to that time, a man I was going to kill had always seemed my direct opposite. This time, I was kneeling on a mirror. This death would be a kind of suicide. I don't know what a carpenter does at such a time, whether he throws away his hammer and plane or goes on with it. I went on with it.

Hector. But after that, nothing remained of the perfect trumpet note of war.

Andromache. War is here, in Troy, Hector.

Hector. What do you mean?

Andromache. You haven't heard that Paris has carried off Helen?

Hector. They told me so. What else?

Andromache. Did you know the Greeks are demanding her back? And their ambassador arrives today? And if we don't give her up, it means war.

Hector. Why shouldn't we give her up? I'll give her back to them myself.

Andromache. Paris will never agree to it.

Hector. We'll see about that. Go ask Priam if he will let me speak to him at once. And set your heart at rest.

(Andromache exits. Paris and Cassandra enter.)

Hector. Congratulations, Paris! I hear you've been well occupied while we were away.

Paris. Not badly, thank you.

Hector. What is this story they tell me about Helen?

Paris. Helen is a very charming person. Isn't she, Cassandra?

Cassandra. Fairly charming.

Paris. Why these reservations? Only yesterday you said you thought she was extremely pretty.

Cassandra. She is extremely pretty and fairly charming.

Paris. Hasn't she the ways of a young gazelle?

Cassandra. No.

Paris. But you were the one who said she looked like a gazelle.

Cassandra. I made a mistake – since then I have seen a gazelle again.

Paris. She isn't the type of woman we know here, obviously.

Cassandra. What type is that?

Paris. Your type, my dear. The fearfully unremote sort of woman.

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Cassandra. When your Greek makes love she is a long way off, I suppose?

Paris. You know perfectly well what I'm saying. I've had enough of Asiatic women. They hold you in their arms as though they were glued there. Their kisses are like battering rams. The more they undress the more elaborate they seem. And they paint their faces to look as though they mean to imprint themselves on you. And they do! In short, you are definitely *with* them. But Helen is far away from me, even held in my arms.

Hector. Very interesting. But one wonders, is it really worth a war to allow Paris to make love at a distance?

Cassandra. *With* distance. He loves women to be distant but right under his nose.

Hector. How did you fetch her away? Willingly, or did you compel her?

Paris. You know women as well as I do, Hector. They're only willing when you compel them.

Hector. Have you insulted her husband's house, or the Greek earth?

Paris. The Greek water, a little. She was bathing. Menelaus was naked on the river bank, busy removing a crab from his big toe.

Hector. No onlookers?

Paris. My crew.

Hector. Perfect! You've done nothing irrevocable. She was undressed so neither her clothes or her belongings were insulted. Nothing except her body which is negligible. The Greeks will concoct a divine adventure out of it, to their own glory – the little Greek queen who goes down into the sea and comes up again a few months later with a look of perfect innocence on her face.

Paris. You think I'm going to take Helen back to Menelaus?

Hector. We don't ask so much of you, Paris. The Greek ambassador will take care of it. He will put her back in the sea himself, like a gardener planting water lilies. You will give her into his hands this evening.

Paris. You are not master here.

Hector. I'm your elder brother, and the future master.

Paris. Then order me about in the future. For the present, I obey my father.

Hector. You're willing that we should put this to Priam and accept his judgment?

Paris. Perfectly willing.

Cassandra. Mind what you're doing, Hector. Priam is also mad for Helen. He would rather give up his daughters.

Hector. What nonsense is this?

Cassandra. And all our brothers, and all our uncles, and all our great-great uncles! Helen has an honor guard which includes every old man in the city.

Hector. But our father can't be like that.

Paris. Hector, before we have this out in front of father, I don't suppose you like to take just one look at Helen.

Hector. I don't care a fig about Helen! Ah, greetings, father, Hecuba...

(Priam enters with Hecuba, Andromache, Demekos, and the Mathematician).

Priam. What was that you said, Hector?

Hector. I said we should make haste to shut the Gates of War, father. See them bolted and padlocked so not even a gnat can get between them.

Priam. I thought what you said was somewhat shorter.

Demekos. He said he didn't care a fig about Helen.

Priam. I had no idea the young men of Troy had come to this.

Hector. What have they come to?

Priam. Being impervious to beauty.

Demekos. And consequently, ignorant of love. And consequently, unrealistic. To us who are poets, reality is love or nothing.

Priam. Surely Hector, there have been occasions in your life when a

woman has seemed to be more than merely herself, as if a radiance of thoughts and feelings glowed from her flesh, taking a special brilliance from it.

Demekos. As a ruby represents blood.

Hector. Not to those who have seen blood. I've just come back from a close acquaintance with it.

Demekos. A symbol, you understand. Soldier though you are, you've surely heard of symbolism.

Hector. And what does Helen symbolize?

Demekos. We've told you. Beauty.

Hecuba. Then you 'd better send her quickly back to the Greeks. Blonde beauty doesn't usually last for long.

Demekos. It's impossible to talk to women!

Hecuba. Then don't talk *about* women!

Hector. Father, explain to me what Helen has given us that's worth a quarrel with the Greeks.

Mathematician. Anybody can tell you. I can tell you myself.

Hecuba. Listen to the mathematician!

Math. Don't think mathematicians have no concern with women. We're the land-surveyors of your personal landscape. I can't tell you how we mathematicians suffer to see any slight disproportion of the flesh, on the chin or the thigh, any infringement of your geometrical desirability. Well now, until this day mathematicians have never been satisfied with the countryside surrounding Troy. The line linking the plain with the hills seemed to us too slack; the line from the hills to the mountains too taut. Now, since Helen came, the country has taken on meaning and vigour. And, what is particularly evident to true mathematicians, space and volume have now found in Helen a common denominator. We can abolish all the instruments we have invented to reduce the universe to a manageable equation. There are no more feet and inches, ounces, pounds, milligrams, or leagues. There is only the weight of Helen's footfall, the length of Helen's arm, the range of

Helen's look or voice; and the movement of the air as she goes past is the measure of the winds. That is what the mathematician will tell you.

Hecuba. The old fool is crying.

Priam. My dear son, you have only to look at this crowd and you will understand what Helen is. She is a kind of absolution. To the old men, the swindler, the thief, the pander, all the old failures, she has shown they always had a secret longing to rediscover the beauty they had lost. If throughout their lives beauty had always been as close at hand as Helen is today, they would never have tricked their friends, or sold their daughters, or drunk away their inheritance. Helen is like a pardon to them, a new beginning for them, their whole future.

Hecuba. The older we women grow, the more clearly we see what men really are: hypocrites, boasters, and he-goats! The older men grow, the more they doll us up with every perfection. There isn't a slut they've hugged behind a wall who isn't transformed in their memories into a loved and lovely creature.

Priam. Have you ever deceived me, Hecuba?

Hecuba. Only with yourself, dear. Scores of times with yourself.

Andromache. Father, I must beg you to listen, for I speak for all women. Let us keep our husbands as they are. The gods took care to see they were surrounded with enough obstacles and dangers to keep them brave. Quite enough if they had nothing to cope with except floods and storms! Or only wild animals! Why should you want me to owe Hector to the deaths of other men?

Priam. I don't want it, my child. But why do you think you are all here now, looking so beautiful and valiantly demanding peace? Why? Because your husbands and fathers and their fathers and theirs were fighting men. If they had been too lazy and self-indulgent to spring to arms, if they hadn't known how this dull and stupid business we call life suddenly leaps into flame and justifies itself through the scorn men have for it, you would find you were the cowards now, and you would be clamoring for war. A man has only one way of being immortal on this earth. He has to forget he is mortal. Daughter, the first sign of

cowardice in a people is their first moment of decay.

Andromache. But which is the worse cowardice, father? To appear cowardly to others and make sure of peace? Or to be cowards in your own eyes and let loose a war?

Hector. And you can listen to all this without saying a word, Paris? Can you still not decide to give up an adventure to save us from years of unhappiness and slaughter?

Paris. What can I say? My case is an international incident.

Hector. Are you really in love with Helen?

Cassandra. They've become a symbol of love's devotion. They don't have to be in love.

Paris. I worship Helen.

Hector. If I persuade her to set sail, will you agree?

Paris. Yes, I'll agree.

Hector. Father, if Helen is willing to go back to Greece, will you hold her here by force?

Priam. Why discuss the impossible?

Paris. Father, let him do what he wants. I accept Hector's challenge.

Demekos. Helen's not only yours, Paris. She belongs to the city. She belongs to our country.

Math. She belongs to the landscape.

Cassandra. Here's Helen now.

Hector. Father, leave this to me.

Priam. Very well. Come along the rest of you. We will see that the Gates of War are made ready.

(Exit all but Hector and Paris)

Cassandra(as she enters) Those poor gates. They need more oil to shut them than to open them.

(Helen enters)

Paris. Helen, darling, this is Hector. He has a proposition to make to you. He wants to hand you over to the Greeks and prove to you that you don't love me. Tell me you do love me, before I leave you with him.

Helen. I adore you, my sweet.

Paris. Tell me you hate Menelaus.

Helen. Menelaus? I hate him.

Paris. And say, I shall never return to Greece. Say that.

Helen. You shall never return to Greece.

Paris. No, no, *you*, darling.

Helen. Oh, yes, of course. I shall never return to Greece.

Paris. Good luck, Hector.

(Paris exits)

Hector. Is Greece a beautiful country?

Helen. Paris found it ravishing.

Hector. I meant is Greece itself beautiful, apart from Helen.

Helen. How very charming of you.

Hector. I was simply wondering what it's really like.

Helen. Well, there are a great many kings, and a great many goats, dotted about on marble.

Hector. And a great many gods, I hear. Paris tells me the sky is crawling with them. He says you can see the legs of the goddesses hanging down from the heavens.

Helen. Paris always has his head in the clouds. Perhaps he's seen them.

Hector. But you haven't seen them.

Helen. I'm not gifted that way. I will look out for them when I go back there again.

Hector. You told Paris you'd never go back there.

Helen. He asked me to tell him so. I adore doing what Paris wants me to do.

Hector. Is that also true of what you said about Menelaus? Do you not, after all, hate him?

Helen. Why should I hate him?

Hector. Maybe you've seen too much of him.

Helen. On the contrary, I have never seen Menelaus.

Hector. You've never seen your husband?

Helen. There are some things, and certain people, that stand out in bright colors for me. They are the ones I can see. I believe in them. I have never been able to see Menelaus.

Hector. Whereas you have seen Paris.

Helen. Vividly. In the clearest outline against the sky and sun.

Hector. Are you sure Paris loves you?

Helen. I don't like knowing about other people's feelings. There's nothing more embarrassing.

Hector. What about yourself? Do you love him?

Helen. I don't much like knowing my own feelings either.

Hector. But when you make love with Paris, when he sleeps in your arms, when you're circled round with Paris, overwhelmed with Paris, haven't you any thoughts about it?

Helen. My part is over. I leave any thinking to the universe. It does it much better than I do.

Hector. Have there been many others before Paris?

Helen. Some.

Hector. And there will be others after him, wouldn't you say? As long as they stand out in clear relief against the sky or the white sheets on the bed. You don't love Paris particularly, Helen. You love men.

Helen. I don't dislike them. They're as pleasant as soap and a sponge and warm water.

Hector. So you will go back this evening with the Greek ambassador.

Helen. What makes you think so?

Hector. You don't love Paris.

Helen. You don't understand me, Hector. It would be very easy for me to say, 'I will do this or that, so that this can happen or that can happen.' You've discovered my weakness and you are overjoyed. But you musn't think because you've convinced me, you've convinced the future too.

Hector. Do you choose to leave here, yes or no?

Helen. Don't bully me. I choose what happens in the way I see men, or

anything else. I choose whatever is not indefinite and vague. I choose what I see.

Hector. What you see in the brightest colors. Well, we are going to give you back to the Greeks at high noon, on the blinding sand, between the violet sea and the ochre-colored wall. We shall all be in golden armor with red skirts, and my sisters dressed in green standing between my white stallion and Priam's black mare. We will give you back to the Greek ambassador with his silver helmet and purple plumes. Can you see *that*?

Helen. No, none of it. It's all quite somber.

Hector. You will leave for Greece this evening, Helen, otherwise I shall kill you. We must have peace.

Helen. I don't see peace.

Hector. Will you do what I tell you to do?

Helen. Yes.

Hector. When we come in front of Ulysses, you won't contradict me? You will bear out everything I say?

Helen. Yes.

Hector. You say yes beautifully, Helen. And yet, I believe you're determined to defy me.

Helen. That's possible. But how can I help it? It isn't my own determination.

Hector. By what peculiar mischief did the world choose to place its mirror in this obtuse head?

Helen. It's most regrettable, obviously. But can you see any way of defeating the obstinacy of a mirror? If you break the mirror, will what is reflected in it cease to exist?

Hector. That is the whole question.

ACT II

(At the Gates of War)

Priam. My son, you must deliver the Oration for the Dead.

Hector. There's not going to be any Oration for the Dead.

Priam. But it's part of the ceremony. The victorious general must always speak in honor of the dead when the Gates are closed.

Hector. I have given my oration for the dead already. I gave it to them in their last minute of life, when they were lying on the battlefield, on a little slope of olive trees, while they could still hear me. There was one with his skull split in two, and I said to him, "You look pretty comical with that broken nose." And another with his left arm hanging useless and his last blood flowing out of him, and I said, "Lucky for you it's the left arm you've splintered." I'm happy I gave them one final swig of life. It was all they asked for. They died drinking it. There's nothing else to be said. Shut the Gates!

Priam. Why must you be so stubborn, Hector?

Hector. Very well. You shall have the oration... (Pause). You who cannot hear us, who cannot see us, listen to these words, look at those who come to honor you. We have won the war. I know that's of no moment to you. You are the victors too. But we are victorious, and still live. That's where the difference is between us and why I'm ashamed. I don't know whether, among the crowd of the dead, any privilege is given to men who died victorious. But the living, whether victorious or not, have privilege enough. We have our eyes. We see the sun. We do what all men do under the sun. We eat. We drink. By the moon we sleep with our wives. And with yours, now you have gone. What I have to say to you today is that war seems to me the most sordid, hypocritical way of making all men equal. I accept death

neither as a punishment or expiation for the coward, nor as a reward to the living. So whatever you may be – absent, forgotten, purposeless, unresting, without existence – one thing is certain when we close these Gates. We, the deserters who survive you, must ask you to forgive us. Close the Gates!

(The Gates are closed)

We are at peace.

Hecuba. Peace.

(Exit all. Enter Helen, then Andromache)

Andromache. Helen, I must speak with you.

Helen. Why? It's been decided. I'm leaving.

Andromache. Whether you go or stay isn't the problem any longer.

Helen. Tell Hector that. You'll make his day easier.

Andromache. Helen, you know what this struggle is going to be. Fate would never take so many precautions for an ordinary quarrel. It means to build the future on this war, the future of our countries and our peoples. It won't be so bad if it's built on the story of a man and a woman who truly love each other. But to think we're going to suffer and die, and the splendor and calamity of the age to come will be founded on a trivial adventure between two people who don't really care for each other – that's what's so horrible. I beg of you, Helen, love Paris, or tell me I'm mistaken. Tell me you would kill yourself if Paris were to die. Tell me you would let yourself be disfigured if it would keep him alive. Then the war will only be a scourge and not an injustice.

Helen. You are being very difficult. I don't think my way of loving is as bad as all that. The world is nervous enough already. Look at yourself. What will it become if I fill it with jealousy, emotion, and anxiety?
Andromache. Fill it with pity, Helen.

Helen. There we are. I knew it would come. The word has been said.

Andromache. What word?

Helen. Pity. You must talk to someone else. I'm afraid I'm not very good at pity.

Andromache. Because you don't know unhappiness.

Helen. Possibly. It could also be that I think of unhappy people as my equals. I accept them and I don't think of my health and my position and beauty as any better than their misery. I'm sure people pity others to the same extent they would pity themselves. Unhappiness and ugliness are mirrors they can't bear to look into. I haven't any pity for myself. You'll see, if war breaks out, I'll put up with hunger and pain better than you will. And insults too. Do you think I don't hear what the Trojan women say when I'm going past them? They treat me like a slut. They say the morning light shows me up for what they think me. It may be true, or it may not be. It doesn't matter to me one way or the other.

(Enter Ajax, then Hector)

Ajax. Where is he? Where's he hiding? The coward. Typical Trojan.

Hector. Who are you looking for?

Ajax. I'm looking for Paris.

Hector. I am his brother.

Ajax. Beautiful family! I am Ajax. What's your name?

Hector. Hector.

Ajax. It ought to be pimp!

Hector. I see that Greece has sent over her diplomats. What do you want?

Ajax. War.

Hector. Not a chance. Why do you want it?

Ajax. Your brother carried off Helen.

Hector. I'm told she was willing.

Ajax. A Greek woman can do what she likes. She doesn't have to ask permission from you. He carried her off. It's a reason for war.

Hector. We can offer our apologies.

Ajax. What's a Trojan apology? We're not leaving here without your declaration of war.

Hector. Declare it yourselves.

Ajax. Will you declare it if I call you a coward?

Hector. That is a name I accept.

Ajax. I've never known such an unmilitary reaction. Suppose I strike you?

Hector. Try it.

Ajax. Suppose I slap your face, you disgusting example of Troy's conceit and spurious honor?

Hector. Go ahead.

Ajax (striking him) There. If this lady's your wife she must be proud of you.

Hector. I know her. She is proud.

(Enter Demekos)

Demekos. What's going on, Hector?

Hector. Nothing, Demekos.

Ajax. Ha! A Greek hits Hector and Hector does nothing.

Hector. Completely false, isn't it, Helen?

Helen. The Greeks are great liars. Greek men, I mean.

Ajax. Is it natural for him to have one cheek redder than the other?

Hector. Yes, I'm healthier on that side.

Demekos. Hector, has this drunkard raised his hand against you?

Hector. That is my concern.

Demekos. It is the concern of war! You are the figurehead of Troy!

Hector. Exactly. No one is going to slap a figurehead.

Demekos (racing off) Trojans! Soldiers! To the rescue!

Ajax. Here is Ulysses.

(Enter Ulysses)

Hector. Ulysses, I am Hector.

Ulysses. Greece and Menelaus cry out for vengeance. Deliver Helen within the hour or it means war.

Hector. We will give Helen back to you. Will you give us your assurance that when we do there will be peace?

Ulysses. You don't mean to say that you're giving Helen back to us?

Hector. Bag and baggage. And you guarantee peace. No reprisals. No vengeance.

Ulysses. I guarantee nothing until we have determined there is no cause for vengeance. There are too many people here for a diplomatic conversation.

Hector. Leave us, everyone.

(Exit all, except Hector and Ulysses)

Ulysses. Now we come to the real tussle, eh Hector? Out of which either war or peace will come.

Hector. Will war come of it?

Ulysses. We shall know in about five minutes.

Hector. If it's to be a battle of words, my chances are small.

Ulysses. I believe it will be more a battle of weight, as though we were one on each side of a pair of scales. How we weigh in the balance will be what counts in the end.

Hector. How we weigh in the balance? And what is my weight, Ulysses? My weight is a young man, a young woman, an unborn child. Joy of life. Belief in life. A response to whatever's natural and good.

Ulysses. And my weight is the mature man, the wife thirty-five years old, the son whose height I measure each month with notches against the doorpost of the palace. My weight is the pleasures of living, and a mistrust of life.

Hector. Do you want war?

Ulysses. I don't want it. But I'm less sure whether war may not want us.

Hector. Our people have put us together to prevent it. Our meeting itself shows that there's still some hope.

Ulysses. It's usual on the eve of every war for the two leaders of the peoples concerned to meet privately at some innocent village, on a terrace in a garden overlooking a lake. And they decide together that war is the world's worst scourge, and as they watch the rippling reflections in the water, with magnolia petals dropping onto their shoulders, they are both of them peace-loving, modest, and friendly. They study one another. They look into each other's eyes. And warmed by the sun and mellowed by the claret, they can't find anything in the other man's face to justify hatred, nothing, indeed, which doesn't inspire human affection, nothing incompatible in their languages anymore, or in their particular way of scratching the nose or drinking wine. They really are exuding peace, and the world's desire for peace. And when their meeting is over, they shake hands in a most sincere brotherly fashion, and turn to smile and wave as they drive away. And the next day war breaks out. And so it is with us at this moment. Our peoples have given us full powers to stand above the catastrophe and taste the essential brotherhood of enemies. It's a rare dish. Savor it. But that is all. One of the privileges of the great is to witness catastrophe from a terrace.

Hector. Do you think this is a conversation between enemies we are having?

Ulysses. Because we have been created sensible and courteous, we can talk to each other, an hour or so before the war, in the way we shall talk to each other long after it's over. We are merely having our reconciliation before the struggle instead of after it. That may be unwise. If one day one of us should have to kill the other, it might be as well if it wasn't a friend's face we recognized as the body dropped to the ground. But, as the universe well knows, we are going to fight each other.

Hector. What fairness of proportion can you see between the rape of one woman and the destruction of a whole people, yours or mine, in war?

Ulysses. We are speaking of Helen. She is one of those rare creatures destiny puts on this earth for its own use. You could have laid hands with impunity on one of our great admirals or kings. Paris could have let himself go with perfect safety in a Spartan or Theban bed, but he chose the shallowest brain, the hardest heart, the narrowest understanding of sex. And so you are lost.

Hector. We are giving Helen back to you.

Ulysses. The insult to destiny can't be taken back.

Hector. Then the die is cast. On with the war! If you won't help me, it were better you should leave.

Ulysses. Don't misunderstand me, Hector. You have my help, but don't ask me to interpret destiny. I am inquisitive by nature and not easily frightened. I'm quite willing to join issue with fate. I accept your offer of Helen. I will take her back to Menelaus. I've more than enough eloquence to convince a husband of his wife's virtue. I'll leave at once, to avoid any chance of disturbance. Once back on my ship, perhaps we can take the risk of running war onto the rocks.

Hector. Is this part of Ulysses cunning, or his greatness?

Ulysses. In this particular instance I'm using my cunning against destiny, not against you. It's my first attempt, so I deserve some credit for it. I am sincere, Hector. If I wanted war, I should have asked for a ransom more precious to you than Helen. I'm going now. But I can't shake off the feeling that the road from here to my ship is a long way. As long as the road of a visiting king when he knows there has been a threat against his life. Where will the road carry me? Will I slip and kill myself? Will part of the cornice fall down on me? It's all new stonework here. At any moment a stone may be dislodged. But courage. There, the first step is over. How many more?

Hector. Four hundred and sixty.

Ulysses. You know what made me decide to go, Hector?

Hector. Your noble nature?

Ulysses. Not exactly. Andromache's eyelashes dance as my wife Penelope's do.

(Exit Ulysses. Enter Andromache)

Hector. Did you hear what we said?

Andromache. Yes. I am broken.

Hector. You see, we need not despair.

Andromache. We need not despair for ourselves, perhaps. But for the world, yes. All the unhappiness of the world is in me.

(Enter Cassandra, then Ajax)

Cassandra. Ulysses will be waiting for you, Ajax, down by the harbor. Helen will be brought to you there. (Pushes him toward the door).

Ajax. All right... I'm going. Don't push! I'm going.

(Enter Demekos)

Demekos. What's this cowardice? You're giving Helen back? Trojans, to arms! They've betrayed us! To arms! (He exits)

Hector. There will be no war, Andromache! (They look out, toward the harbor). A moment or two more and Ulysses will be on board. Look, see how fast he is moving. There he is, on a level with the fountains.

Cassandra (joining them, looking out) There's Ajax, running toward Ulysses... running from our soldiers. They're on him. They have him. They've killed Ajax. Ulysses has reached the ship. Where is Helen?

(Helen is heard laughing softly in the background)

Andromache. The Gates of War are opening.

(The sound of the opening Gates is heard, in the BLACKOUT)

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