ACT 1

*Troy, circa 1200 BC.*

*A room in King Priam’s palace. Raised*

*above the floor is Cassandra’s bower, a*

*high bed in a small upper room with*

*steps leading to the main floor below.*

*Cassandra lies asleep on the raised bed. Seated to one side below are an actor and an actress in black, focused inward, not paying attention to the dialogue or action before them. Later, they will perform all of Cassandra’s visions and memories. On the other side and farther downstage, her nurse, Amaltheia, sits on a stool, watching and knitting. After a few moments, a gruff Guard enters. He pauses and looks up at Cassandra’s bower for a moment. Amaltheia ignores him at first.*

GUARD

Is she still sleeping? ... She’s been asleep for hours ... a lot of hours ... more than her usual eight or nine, isn’t it?

(no response - he sits)

Doesn’t seem right to me ... not natural ... all that sleep ... not natural in the least. Not in the midst of all this commotion... and she’s missing out on the celebration.

(Pause. He begins to be annoyed at the lack of response from Amaltheia)

Maybe she’s dead.

(Pause)

Did you check to see if she’s breathing lately?

AMALTHEIA

(not looking up)

Be quiet. Let her be.

(Pause)

GUARD

Well, have you checked?

AMALTHEIA

Yes.

GUARD

And ... ?

AMALTHEIA

She’s fine. She’s alive. She’s breathing.

(Pause)

GUARD

(sarcastic)

Oh.... I suppose she was just tired, then.

AMALTHEIA

You’d be tired, too, if you were in her place.

GUARD

Would I be?

AMALTHEIA

Yes, you would. I would.

GUARD

I suppose.

(pause)

It must be enough to exhaust anyone. All that ranting and raving and running around all the time, all that screaming nonsense.

AMALTHEIA

It isn’t nonsense.

GUARD

Yeah, right! What did she say last night? After the Greeks are gone, a really big horse will enter the gate of the city ... a horse made of wood, no less... empty its bowels in the center of town, and then all the walls of the city will burn and come crashing down. Tell me that isn’t nonsense. A giant horse!

AMALTHEIA

And *is* there a horse?

GUARD

Well, yeah, but the enemy’s gone; not a Greek in sight... and the walls are still standing. Nothing’s burning.

AMALTHEIA

But she was right about the horse. She’s been right before. Fortunately, we are all still alive and safe.

GUARD

Right! But she still shouted that the city would burn down -- and tonight, no less. And everybody will be killed or taken prisoner or made slaves.

AMALTHEIA

Not everybody.

GUARD

What? ... Oh, right. Everybody but what’s-his-name, her lazy lout of a brother-in-law.

AMALTHEIA

Aeneas.

GUARD

Yeah, him, that lousy traitor Aeneas. The rat.

AMALTHEIA

That’s no way to talk about a prince ...

GUARD

Perhaps not, but it’s true for all that, and who’s here to stop me saying so if I want to, anyway? He always was a good-for-nothing; you know it as well as I do. And she says that he’s supposed to be the sole survivor -- and then sail off to the west -- past the Greeks, no less -- and start a whole new Troy, even bigger and greater than this one, somewhere in Italy! *If* you can believe that one!

AMALTHEIA

Not the sole survivor, no.

GUARD

Right, right, right -- his little boy’ll make it, too, won’t he, to carry on the line? A little brat just like his father Oh, yeah, his old man, what’s-his-name, Anchises, that senile old nut job, is going with him -- on Aeneas’s back, no less. But Aeneas’s wife, Princess Creusa, she won’t make it, will she? Oh, no, she’s gonna die here, like the rest of us. Well, that’s no surprise, considering how he’s cheated on her every chance he could get! So ... Is that what’s going to happen, then?

AMALTHEIA

I don’t know what’s going to happen, but that’s what my lady Cassandra said, yes.

GUARD

Right! Tell me another one.

AMALTHEIA

(putting down her knitting)

Only not all of us will die here.

GUARD

Oh, really?

AMALTHEIA

(amused)

Really. You will. I won’t.

GUARD

(his disbelief confirmed)

Well, that’s a comforting thought! She should have just gotten married off, like her sister Creusa -- only to someone better than Aeneas.

AMALTHEIA

She was engaged before -- twice. But both of them were killed in battle before the wedding days could even be announced.

GUARD

And she really wanted to marry one of them, that Othy-whathis-name. She could have been happily married to him.

AMALTHEIA

Othryoneus.

GUARD

Right. She really liked him.

AMALTHEIA

Yes, she did. She still loves him, but he’s dead, just like the other one. She could have been married twice over.

GUARD

Could’ve been three times if the King agreed to that last proposal.

AMALTHEIA

What last proposal?

GUARD

The one from the Greeks.

AMALTHEIA

Agamemnon!? I don’t think so.

GUARD

Could’ve ended the whole damn war.

AMALTHEIA

Not very likely.

GUARD

Anyway, it don’t matter. Even if King Priam would’ve accepted the offer, she’d never go through with it, would she?

AMALTHEIA

Not at all likely. She hates Agamemnon.

*Cassandra begins stir.*

GUARD

Too bad. Best thing for the city if she did marry Agamemnon -- best thing for her, too.

(looking up)

What’s that?

*Cassandra looks up, slowly, as if in a trance. As she speaks, she slowly crawls down the steps to the floor in front of her bier. The two actors in black turn and watch her.*

CASSANDRA

(Slow; trance-like; from deep within her soul)

Doom. Darkness. Fire. Blood. Destruction. Death.

GUARD

Oh, no. She’s at it again. I wish she would just stay asleep.

AMALTHEIA

She’s not awake.

GUARD

But ...

AMALTHEIA

Shhh!

CASSANDRA

(still in a trance)

The gods are cruel.

Men are wicked.

The future -- bleak.

Bleak for Troy; bleaker for the enemy.

The illusion of power traps everyone.

GUARD

She’s nuts.

AMALTHEIA

Hush.

CASSANDRA

(still in a trance – slowly coming down from her bower)

See the enemy’s ships sailing west,

Sailing out of sight from our shores,

Leaving behind the great wooden horse --

Hollow and hellish; overflowing with death.

*As Cassandra speaks, the actor and actress in black step out of the*

*darkness and act out a dumb show of her vision. When she mentions Agamemnon, the actor who plays him enters and mimes his part. The actress in black enters with him, portraying the figure*

*of death, while the actor in black represents his army.*

CASSANDRA (cont’d)

We take the horse inside;

We celebrate, prematurely;

We carouse and drink deeply,

We fall dumb with sleep,

And, from the bowels of the horse,

Out creeps the enemy,

Fire and Sword in hand,

Slaughter at heart.

And with them, their leader, Agamemnon,

Death debauching at his side.

As he strides through Ilium,

Slashing and killing the sleeping revelers,

Sending his men with their torches

To destroy our beautiful city,

To kill my country and family.

*As the vision subsides, Agamemnon and the others disappear into the darkness again.*

CASSANDRA (cont’d)

But all is not as it seems:

The burning towers of Ilium fall,

Greeks gather us up in chains,

But it is they who are enslaved,

Though they cannot feel it.

I, as Agamemnon’s captive bride,

Live to witness it,

His ultimate destruction.

Survival is death.

Victory is defeat.

The end is only the beginning:

Retribution at last!

*Cassandra laughs, moans, and slowly sinks back into sleep on the floor.*

GUARD

(looking in disbelief at the sleeping Cassandra)

Utterly unhinged!

AMALTHEIA

Oh, be quiet!

GUARD

You can shush me all you want, nurse, but that girl is far gone! She’s too crazy to be seen in public. King Priam was right to keep her under lock and key.

AMALTHEIA

He did set her free.

GUARD

Yeah, but she never leaves her room anyway. And well she shouldn’t! What was it she said? “Agamemnon’s captive bride!?” He wouldn’t have her now, after his proposal was refused -- certainly not if he could see her now. And what does that “survival is death” or that “victory is defeat” comment supposed to mean? She’s completely deranged, unbalanced! She should be kept locked up in here.

AMALTHEIA

A prisoner in her own room! Don’t be ridiculous. What do you know about anything?

GUARD

I may not know much, but I know that she’s looney!

AMALTHEIA

You’re the crazy one. She’s as harmless as a puppy. Look at her, how she suffers. She’s right -- the gods are cruel. And her father, king or no king, is a fool.

GUARD

Are you mad, woman; you can’t talk that way about the king!

AMALTHEIA

Go report me to him; I don’t care! I’ll tell him to his face. He should have listened to her when he had the chance and sent Helen back to the Greeks years ago! She was right, and he was wrong. That’s a simple fact.

GUARD

We’d still be at war with the Greeks, even if he had sent her back. You think Menelaus would have taken her back without getting his revenge on Paris?

AMALTHEIA

One look at Helen would have melted the heart of that simpering idiot.

GUARD

Ridiculous!

*Cassandra starts to stir.*

AMALTHEIA

Quiet. She’s waking up, now.

GUARD

Good grief. I don’t want to listen to her talk anymore.

AMALTHEIA

(returning to her knitting)

The trance is over. She’ll be quite herself, now. Wait ... No ... She’s asleep again.

GUARD

So what?! I don’t trust her awake or asleep; she might start all over again -- and my head will start pounding. I’m going back on duty... outside the door.

AMALTHEIA

Go ahead. I didn’t ask to talk to you, anyway.

GUARD

Good. I’m going.

AMALTHEIA

Excellent.

*As he starts to leave, Hecuba enters. The Guard sees her and bows.*

GUARD

Your majesty.

HECUBA

Is she awake?

GUARD

(indicating Cassandra asleep on the floor)

Majesty -- no. She sleeps.

HECUBA

(seeing Cassandra)

On the floor?!

GUARD

(without his previous attitude)

She was up in her bed when I looked in a minute ago, but she started having one of her “visions,” and now she’s down there.

HECUBA

All right -- good. Let her rest. I will wait here.

*The Guard bows and exits. Hecuba, her eyes remaining on Cassandra, comes closer to Amaltheia, who sees her and rises.*

AMALTHEIA

Your majesty.

HECUBA

Sit, please.

*Amaltheia sits.*

HECUBA (cont’d)

How is she today?

AMALTHEIA

The same.

HECUBA

Has she slept long?

AMALTHEIA

On and off. Her usual fits. No change.

HECUBA

What has she been saying today?

AMALTHEIA

I don’t really understand what she says. The usual doom and gloom. She speaks in riddles.

HECUBA

But her voice -- is it clear? Or is it plagued by her usual anxiety?

AMALTHEIA

As always, there seems to be a panic in her voice.

HECUBA

My poor, poor girl.

(pause)

What has she “seen” today?

AMALTHEIA

A horse, I think -- yes, a *kind* of horse. It wasn’t very clear to me.

HECUBA

A horse!

AMALTHEIA

Quite a large one, apparently. She raved on about it this morning.

HECUBA

How large?

AMALTHEIA

As large as a palace, I believe.

HECUBA

How strange ... .

AMALTHEIA

Yes, I suppose, but all her visions are strange -- and so very intense.

HECUBA

But a horse -- a large horse?

AMALTHEIA

And how did she put it? ... I remember:

“And out of its womb

An army black as night

Like turtle’s eggs

Pouring out and engulfing all Ilium”

Then she woke up, covered in sweat; shivering, she wept and then fell asleep again.

HECUBA

A horse, large enough to hold an army?

AMALTHEIA

Yes, that’s what she seems to have imagined.

HECUBA

A vivid imagination -- and too absurd to be believed. Of course, she may have seen from her window.

AMALTHEIA

Seen from her window?

HECUBA

Yes.

AMALTHEIA

That small slit opposite her bed?

HECUBA

She *could* have looked through her small window, seen it over the walls in the distance?

AMALTHEIA

Seen what?

HECUBA

Why -- the horse.

AMALTHEIA

Oh, the horse.

HECUBA

Like the one she has imagined.

AMALTHEIA

As big as... ?

HECUBA

As big as a palace; made of wood.

AMALTHEIA

The horse the Greeks left behind.

HECUBA

Yes -- a tribute from the defeated enemy as they departed. It was so big that we had to remove the main gate and open part of the city walls to get it inside.

AMALTHEIA

Pardon my asking, majesty, but aren’t you afraid that the enemy will use such an opening in the wall to penetrate the city?

HECUBA

No, I told you. They have sailed away and left the horse as a tribute to the gods who have given us victory -- at long last.

AMALTHEIA

Yes, Majesty, I know; the Greeks are gone.

HECUBA

Yes, sailed beyond the horizon -- since yesterday.

*Cassandra starts to rise. The actors in black look up, but do not observe the scene. Cassandra, trancelike, has another vision, which the actors participate in but Hecuba and Amaltheia cannot see or hear.*

CASSANDRA

They drop from the heart of the horse.

Odysseus, with his sword in hand;

Menelaus, dull revenge in his heart;

Agamemnon, forcefully leading his men,

All of them with death in their midst.

Troy will be destroyed.

And see, here comes Helen,

Unpunished by the weak-willed Menelaus.

See it, mother, follow me,

Enter into my vision with me.

*Cassandra touches Hecuba, bringing her into the vision.*

CASSANDRA (cont'd)

You will see and feel it,

Although you will not remember

-- Or believe.

*The actor and actress in black move center and ‘become’ Menelaus and Helen.*

HECUBA

(having been brought into the

vision, trancelike, but alive)

What am I seeing? Menelaus -- Helen. Where is this?

CASSANDRA

Not where, but when. Soon -- very soon -- this is what will happen. Watch and listen and then -- forget.

*Menelaus has his sword drawn, threatening Helen.*

MENELAUS

(played by the actor in black)

Helen, at last my vengeance will be satisfied.