

Now, now, no more delay. I'll follow you.
420 Where you conduct me, there I'll be.

Gods of my fathers,
Preserve this house, preserve my grandson. Yours
This portent was. Troy's life is in your power.
I yield. I go as your companion, son.'
Then he was still. We heard the blazing town
425 Crackle more loudly, felt the scorching heat.

422 **portent**: a sign of events; omen.

Then come, dear father. Arms around my neck:
I'll take you on my shoulders, no great weight.
Whatever happens, both will face one danger,
Find one safety. Iulus will come with me,
430 My wife at a good interval behind.
Servants, give your attention to what I say.
At the gate inland there's a funeral mound
And an old shrine of Ceres the Bereft;
Near it an ancient cypress, kept alive
435 For many years by our fathers' piety.
By various routes we'll come to that one place.
Father, carry our hearthgods, our Penatēs.
It would be wrong for me to handle them—
Just come from such hard fighting, bloody work—
440 Until I wash myself in running water.'

433 **Ceres the Bereft**: goddess of grain, whose daughter Proserpina was stolen by Pluto, god of the underworld.

When I had said this, over my breadth of shoulder
And bent neck, I spread out a lion skin
For tawny cloak and stooped to take his weight.
Then little Iulus put his hand in mine
445 And came with shorter steps beside his father.
My wife fell in behind. Through shadowed places
On we went, and I, lately unmoved
By any spears thrown, any squads of Greeks,
Felt terror now at every eddy of wind,
450 Alarm at every sound, alert and worried
Alike for my companion and my burden.
I had got near the gate, and now I thought
We had made it all the way, when suddenly
A noise of running feet came near at hand,
455 And peering through the gloom ahead, my father

Cried out:

'Run, boy; here they come; I see
Flame light on shields, bronze shining.'

I took fright,

And some unfriendly power, I know not what,
Stole all my addled wits—for as I turned

460 Aside from the known way, entering a maze
Of pathless places on the run—

Alas,

Creusa, taken from us by grim fate, did she
Linger, or stray, or sink in weariness?

There is no telling. Never would she be

465 Restored to us. Never did I look back

Or think to look for her, lost as she was,

Until we reached the funeral mound and shrine

Of venerable Ceres. Here at last

All came together, but she was not there;

470 She alone failed her friends, her child, her husband.

Out of my mind, whom did I not accuse,

What man or god? What crueler loss had I

Beheld, that night the city fell? Ascanius,

My father, and the Teucric Penatès,

475 I left in my friends' charge, and hid them well

In a hollow valley.

I turned back alone

Into the city, cinching my bright harness.

Nothing for it but to run the risks

Again, go back again, comb all of Troy,

480 And put my life in danger as before:

First by the town wall, then the gate, all gloom,

Through which I had come out—and so on backward,

Tracing my own footsteps through the night;

And everywhere my heart misgave me: even

485 Stillness had its terror. Then to our house,
Thinking she might, just might, have wandered there.

Danaans had got in and filled the place,

And at that instant fire they had set,

Consuming it, went roofward in a blast;

490 Flames leaped and seethed in heat to the night sky.

I pressed on, to see Priam's hall and tower.

In the bare colonnades of Juno's shrine

Two chosen guards, Phoenix and hard Ulysses,

Kept watch over the plunder. Piled up here

459 addled wits: confused powers
of mind.

477 cinching: fastening tightly.

484 my heart misgave me: I had
feelings of dread.

495 Were treasures of old Troy from every quarter,
Torn out of burning temples: altar tables,
Robes, and golden bowls. Drawn up around them,
Boys and frightened mothers stood in line:
I even dared to call out in the night;
500 I filled the streets with calling; in my grief
Time after time I groaned and called Creusa,
Frantic, in endless quest from door to door.
Then to my vision her sad wraith appeared—
Creusa's ghost, larger than life, before me.
505 Chilled to the marrow, I could feel the hair
On my head rise, the voice clot in my throat;
But she spoke out to ease me of my fear:

'What's to be gained by giving way to grief
So madly, my sweet husband? Nothing here
510 Has come to pass except as heaven willed.
You may not take Creusa with you now;
It was not so ordained, nor does the lord
Of high Olympus give you leave. For you
Long exile waits, and long sea miles to plow.
515 You shall make landfall on Hesperia
Where Lydian Tiber flows, with gentle pace,
Between rich farmlands, and the years will bear
Glad peace, a kingdom, and a queen for you.
Dismiss these tears for your beloved Creusa.
520 I shall not see the proud homelands of Myrmidons
Or of Dolopians, or go to serve
Greek ladies, Dardan lady that I am
And daughter-in-law of Venus the divine.
No: the great mother of the gods detains me
525 Here on these shores. Farewell now; cherish still
Your son and mine.'

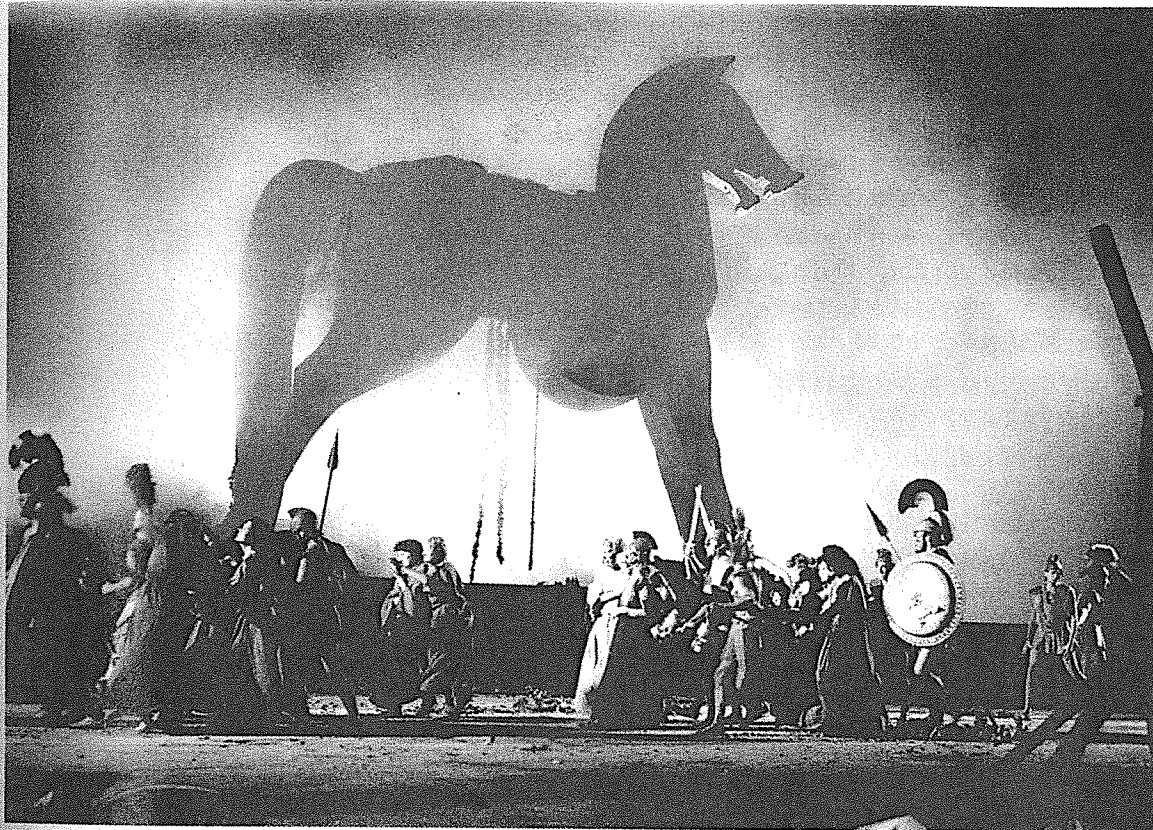
With this she left me weeping,
Wishing that I could say so many things,
And faded on the tenuous air. Three times
I tried to put my arms around her neck,
530 Three times enfolded nothing, as the wraith
Slipped through my fingers, bodiless as wind,
Or like a flitting dream.

So in the end
As night waned I rejoined my company.
And there to my astonishment I found

503 wraith: ghost.

515 Hesperia (hě-spĭr'ē-ə): "western land"—that is, Italy.

516 Lydian Tiber (lĭd'ē-en tĭ'bĕr) the river beside which Rome was built—called Lydian here because it flowed through the lands of the Etruscans, who originally came from Lydia in Asia Minor.



Scene from *Helen of Troy* (1955).

535 New refugees in a great crowd: men and women
Gathered for exile, young—pitiful people
Coming from every quarter, minds made up,
With their belongings, for whatever lands
I'd lead them to by sea.

The morning star

540 Now rose on Ida's ridges, bringing day.
Greeks had secured the city gates. No help
Or hope of help existed.
So I resigned myself, picked up my father,
And turned my face toward the mountain range."

540 *Ida's ridges*: the crests of a
mountain range near Troy.