

Untitled

By Hannah Crnkovich

A spinoff of Hector's Farewell Myth told from Andromache's point of view

“Hold my baby,” I said, tossing my child into the arms of the handmaiden at my side. The woman grabbed him, holding him tight. The woman’s voice was a whisper on mice feet as she asked,

“What are you doing, my lady?”

“I’m going to cause a scene,” I said, waving my servants away with a gentle hand.

Their footsteps scurried away, their presence lurking a few feet away, still in sight but out of trouble’s eye. They never left my side, the busy-bodied women. And though their persistent presence in my life became a hassle more often than not, I couldn’t help but be thankful for them. I couldn’t help but find comfort in the way they watched me make my way across the castle’s throne room, silks brushing against the ground with each practiced step.

Tipping my chin up, I bawled my fists and marched towards the men gathered at the base of the throne, their gilded armor pristine in the noon light. They had not yet been rusted over by the tides of war. If I had anything to say about it, their gold would never be touched by the red waves scattering the ground just beyond our walls.

I played the role. I held the arrogance of any royal up as a shield, holding back the swords of doubt that had begun to splinter so much of Troy during the ten-year war.

Though not nearly as much as Helen, I was necessary, and the world would know it from only the commanding look I held. But despite all my surety, all my swagger, I could not convince my husband of my value. I could not persuade him that my life meant more than the war he was desperate to die in.

No matter how I pleaded or cried, my beloved Hector only hardened in his resolve. With each of my pleas, the malice in him seemed to darken until a vicious lust for blood was all he knew.

When Agamemnon's armies fell upon the rocky shores of Troy, Hector had vowed to be there waiting, spear drawn to plant a victorious blow. And if he wasn't along the beaches with his foot soldiers, he would take up arms across the mighty city walls that crowned the outskirts of Troy. No matter how I fought with him, he refused to falter.

"What of our son?" I would ask. My questions were reserved for the old nights when sleep evaded us. I had grown used to holding my tongue until only the stars remained to listen. "Should he grow without a father?"

The bastard's reply was always the same; "Should he grow with a father disgraced by his cowardice?"

"What if Troy falls?" I would ask, pinning him down with my elbows. "Who will protect us then? Who will protect us while you lie a cold corpse from a war that was your brother's to fight?"

He would reach up from his place below me, stroking my cheek with a gentle hand. The soft smile that played itself across his face was nothing short of cruel. He would speak to me, voice soft like he was consoling a child, "I would rather lie dead than watch you be taken as a

slave. I'd rather lie dead than watch my son be butchered in the name of our conquerors. Tell me, Andromache, what would I do to protect you from here? How would I stand against the armies should they break through our walls? I am only one man, one man with a duty to his—”

“You have a duty to me,” I would practically scream the words through our chambers. “You have a duty to your family.”

There was no kindness in his words, aggravation curling around them like a ghost. “I must put the good of my city before the good of one woman. This is my decision, as it has been since Paris took Helen as his wife. It will be my decision until the Trojan flag reigns victorious over the bodies of the Grecian kings.”

I could scream and yell, but my voice would never bellow through the palace like his. My voice could never command a thousand souls as he did. Hector sent reluctant soldiers packing to the fields with a single word. The man I married had only grown colder, his heart turning to stone, in the years of the rising conflict.

While he had never been unkind to me, Hector had pierced me deeper than any sword using words alone. That night had been our last real conversation. And with his decision made, Hector would be off the war front by the next dawn.

With golden light veiling the walls of our castle, I raced through the throne room toward him. I didn't bow to him as any proper lady should have. I didn't greet him or chase the other guards away. Time was slipping from my fingers like sand from a beach's shore, pulled deeper into the water with each passing second.

I threw myself around him without a second thought. Crying out all the worries in my chest, I buried my head in his shoulder, holding him as tight as my arms would allow. Furiously

waving a hand behind his back, I shooed the men away. I pulled back, but I wouldn't let him go. Not when the chance of him running from me was more than likely.

“Hector,” I began, forcing him to look me in my eyes as I took my final stand. My words were soured with sorrow as I knew our bleakest day was upon us. If he left these palace walls, he might never return.

I could tell Hector pitied me. The softened gaze he held told me as much. He didn't push me away, didn't force me off of him. As much as I wanted him to stay, both of us knew that was never an option.

“You can't go. You can't leave us. You can't leave me,” I pleaded.

“But I must,” he said, holding my arms tighter as if he too was torn, so much so that his body betrayed him. “I will not sit idly and bring danger into our home. I'm only a danger to you now.”

“I don't understand—” I pulled back, eyes full of unrelenting sorrow and fear. His expression mirrored my own, one of bleak surrender. Had he already given up?

“Andromache,” he muttered my name, running his thumb over my cheek. “At least death was kind enough to let me say goodbye.”

“I don't understand, Hector. What is this?” I asked again, but he was already turning away.

“You don't understand—“

“Hector, don't you dare walk away from me right now. Tell me what I don't understand!”

He whipped back around, armor clattering with the motion. “You will be in more danger if I stay. There are some things I can’t protect you from.”

“Like what? If I’m fated to die—“

“You’re not,” he said, all too fast. The words were less truth and more defense. Whether it was his defense or mine, I couldn’t tell.

“Hector,” I pleaded. He shoved me off before I could grab him again.

“Enough!” He said, a single tear rolling down his cheek as he took another long step away. The steps didn’t stop this time, the sound of his metal shoes against the marble echoing like a scream to break the silence. At the doorway he stopped, turning over his shoulder to say, “This is hard enough without you pestering me. Just let me go.”

“What if I can’t?”

“Figure it out.”

* * *

Figure it out. The nerve of that little—ugh! Balling my fists, I stormed back up a spiraling tower towards my bedroom. The sun was setting now, the sky splashed hues of red to match blood.

Hector’s blood.

To think, he could already be—that I was walking about our home, wasting my seconds on this earth, while he could already be six feet below it. Just the thought of his head propped

up on a spear, his body lost to the tide, it made my blood boil, eyes burning from tears I refused to cry.

Crying wouldn't bring Hector back, and judging by the words he mumbled to me in our last moments, he didn't expect to come home. If the gods wouldn't return my beloved to me, I'd just match out there and save him myself. Hera and Athena be damned, I'd save his soul before Hades could lay a finger on him. I'd go out there and give them a piece of my mind. I'd match down to those castle walls and drag him back by the straps of his chest plate until this war-winning fantasy of his ebbed. Until he realized that I was far more important than his pride.

I'd go down there myself, but they'd never let a woman on the wall. They'd never let a woman wield a spear, especially not their esteemed queen.

The brassy doors rang out, rattling my chamber at the sound of a visitor. My handmaiden, no doubt, had come to console me while my child slept soundly for a short time. They'd come to pity me until their trials began anew.

"Who is it?" I asked, waiting for the screech of metal against the marble as the door opened.

"It's me, my lady, one of your handmaidens."

"Oh," I said, turning on a heel to face her, "good. I don't want to be alone right now."

"Of course, you don't," she said, coming to stand behind me as I sat at my bedside.

Pulling my long curls into a tight knot, she rubbed small circles into my shoulders.

"You're not the only one whose husband is gone to war, but I'm honestly surprised you let him leave considering...everything."

“Considering what?” I asked, my head snapping around faster than a serpent’s tongue at her words. “That he’s the king?”

“Y-yes, of course,” she said, dropping her eyes to avoid me. Her hands pinched my shoulders, tightening as she reiterated, “What else could it be?”

My eyes narrowed, my skin prickling with something dark. “I don’t know. You tell me. Why shouldn’t I have let him leave?”

“No reason,” she said, trying to scramble further from me as I repositioned, grabbing her wrist. “It’s too late now anyway. I thought—I just thought he’d told you.” The maid let out a nervous laugh, eyes glossy even in the dark. “Why didn’t he tell you, of all people? You.”

“Why didn’t he tell me what?” I asked, grabbing her other arm and pinning her back against the wall. “What aren’t people telling me?”

“Hector isn’t coming home.” The words burst from her like ash from a volcano, coating the room in thick-painted quiet.

My grip paled, my nails digging under her skin. “Why is that?”

“He was prophesied to die, everybody knows that. How haven’t you heard? Everyone knows, I just assumed—”

“Liar!” I screamed, throwing her down against the floor. “You’re lying! I’ll have you killed for this, thrown from these palace walls. You’ll never be buried, you’re soul will rot in hell, I swear it.”

“And your king will join me,” she hissed back from her place on the floor. “What are you supposed to do about it now? You can kill me, but that won’t save your precious husband. After all, it’s not like you can go out there and get him yourself.”

Go get him? Could I really...

The garish moonlight pouring in from my window barely illuminated the paralyzed look of fear that washed across the girl’s face. But I could see her tears reflecting the pale white, I could see the determination in her scowl.

Pointing at her with a shaky hand, I said, “Do you want to die?”

“No, who wants to meet Hades?”

“Bring me a set of armor and a spear. If you come back with anything else, I will personally ensure you die tonight. If you come back with anyone else, I will personally ensure you both die tonight. If you run, I will hunt you down to the ends of this earth, and not even the gods will stop me. Do you understand?”

They nodded, scrambling to their feet like a terrified rat fleeing their nest. “Okay, but this won’t be easy. Most of the armor is—”

“I don’t care. Go now, before I change my mind.”

* * *

The dawn was nearing, pale oranges painting across the horizon in thick strokes, when the maid finally returned, a few pieces of coppery armor in hand. If asked, if approached before the traitorous woman had returned, I would have denied my paranoia. If their king wouldn’t be returning—

No, their king would be returning. I would drag him back from the battlefield myself. And with the chest plate and helmet, my maid had dragged from the more ancient parts of the cellar, I had my way out. With most of the palace still dark, most of this city sitting in a still fear and waiting for the war being fought to carry over the walls, there would be few to stop me. Still, the knowledge that one rebel eye could shatter what was left of my world. And with my son sleeping a room away, that breaking wasn't one I was willing to risk—not for anyone but Hector.

Chains rattled at my side like cowbells as I made my way through the silent halls. My steps felt like beacons alerting any spy who cared to my exact location. Even as I dove deeper into the catacombs under the palace, the tunnels that would lead me out to the wall, I couldn't shake the feeling of being watched. I couldn't shake the feeling that there were footsteps behind me, walking in step with my own. Every time I turned they faded back into the shadows, blinking away like a ghost.

As the sun rose, heat trickling in through the cracks in the tunnel walls, I ran faster and faster. The golden light at the end of my tunnel swam bright, blinding me in my pursuit. But my refusal to falter was a stone-cold resolve. The day was new by the time I reached the bottom of the wall, soldiers being hurried in and out through the barricaded gates. A thin layer of red covered the ground, the stones building up our great defenses. Through the thick wall, I could hear the sound of sword against spear. The gallop of horse hooves drew me closer and closer to the wall. Through the barred slits, I could see my king's chariot, Troy's royal sigil waving proudly across a bloodied flag.

A rough hand on my back forced me forward into line with twelve other men, spears in hand as they headed into battle. It was a cacophony of noise up ahead—a world seeming all too

loud and bright. My shaky hands closed around a spear, my helmet dipped low to shadow my face as the next legion of soldiers rushed out to face the Grecian fleet.

Stupid Paris, I couldn't help the thoughts that rushed through me, the boiling anger that filled my blood as I marched towards the battlefield. Why should we be at the forefront of his war? Why should my husband be forced to fight and—

Live.

Hector would live. I swore it on every god who watched from either side of the battlefield, Hector would see the sunrise tomorrow.

“Hector!” I yelled as soon as the rank broke, shattering into chaos like a wooden ship against a raging sea. Darting towards his chariot, I found my legs moving on their own. The spear in my hand was useless, the weapons littering the ground around me tripping stones in my path. Something whooshed past my head, knocking against the back of my helmet. Launching myself forward, I crashed into the side of the royal chariot and slithered behind it. My whole body was twitching, jittering beyond my control.

My hands ached as they clutched tighter around the spear, the heavy metal end tipping me to one side as I peered around the chariot. Through the chaos, I could hear a booming voice, one capable of rattling the gods. Leaning towards it, I fell over the side of the chariot, another spear clattering to the ground beside me.

My breath froze, and my heart dropped into my stomach as I saw him. Hector, sprawled on his back, his shield shattered and cast aside. Over him stood a boy of gold, still in his youth but twice the size of any full-grown soldier. The golden boy had tears in his eyes, small streams

marking clean lines across his dirtied face. His body was shaking as his voice rained over the battlefield.

“You killed him! You killed him! You—”

I had to reach him, I had to throw myself over him. I had to save him, I’d come here to save him. But my body wouldn’t move. It felt as if the heavy arm of Ares was pinning me down, freezing me in place. I felt an arm’s reach away, and at the same time, the distance between us stretched a thousand miles. The world felt too tight, a single thread chaining me to Hector. From my place behind the chariot, I could see his final plea. I watched him raise his spear in a final, desperate attack.

It never reached fruition, falling across his naval as the golden boy thrust his own sword into the pit of his stomach.

The gargled, shriveled scream that left me was beyond mortal. Pale blue eyes snapped to mine, watching like an eagle ready to pounce. In the golden boy’s face, I didn’t find malice or contempt. I found a face that mirrored my own. In that instant, it became clear that neither of us was leaving this battlefield a victor.

THE END