

From Act I, sc Scene iii of *The Raven and the Nightingale*
By Gay H. Hammond

*NOTE: this scene has been edited for use by the SAFD
IM/IF. Style: Classical (Greek)*

HECTOR:

[with satisfaction]
My brother comes, and now --

CASSANDRA:

*[springing suddenly into the circle of light and flinging herself almost upon HECTOR,
caught by a vision]*
Not Paris! NO.
He must not come, he must not land his catch.
His cargo reeks of death, of war, of thighs
perfumed with treachery, of breasts too bare,
as white as corpses caused by her, by him,
by a goddess's fatuous bribe! Oh gods! Let not
my brother land!

[HECTOR slaps her to the ground; the crowd draws back in shock]

HECTOR:

What have you been told
about your mouth?
[SHE is still]

Keep these lies in silence.
Cassandra, sister, I have loved you all
your life, but this, these frenzies, these cannot
be tolerated.

CASSANDRA:

No? Yet I must feel
this terror, see these horrors, always. Help
me, help me not to.

HECTOR:

How? I would,
if you could tell me how.

CASSANDRA:

It's easy. Please
believe me. You believe . . . and I am free.

HECTOR:

And how do I believe you, how?
You speak in nonsense more than half the time,
in nasty riddles without any answers.
Unrelentingly you sing of carnage,
of corpses, battles and swallowed men –

CASSANDRA:

I try –

HECTOR:

Try what? Try silence, sister, then –

CASSANDRA:

Then what?
If I am silent, so are you, you all!
In silence you will fill the graves of Troy.

HECTOR:

You see? Yet more. A dog that barks all night
wakes up with arrows in it.

CASSANDRA:

I am not
a dog, a nuisance, something pushed away
or tidied up.

HECTOR:

Be careful I don't put
you down.

CASSANDRA:

You are my brother, best beloved of Troy.
Just look at me and hear me once! Oh why
would I have cause to lie? Never to you,
and never to Troy.

HECTOR:

Then Speak.

CASSANDRA:

Our Troy is threatened –

HECTOR:

It is, and always. Troy is rich, of course,
is coveted. Why not?

CASSANDRA:

But this is more.

HECTOR:

Again? but all your words ring out like bells,
like broken bells with muffled tongues, they clang
and seem for someone else's ears than mine.
I hear you, but your voice sets all my teeth
to ache.

CASSANDRA:

If I were mute, then would my words
be clearer? Could you see them?
[pause; then like a child's despairing whisper:]
please, oh please . . .

HECTOR:

You move me. Sister. Child. I can see
there in your eyes a truth, a something, far
too dark and strange for smaller hearts to know.
I want to help you –
[he moves toward her]

CASSANDRA:

[with relief, a blessing]
Help me –

HECTOR:

Find the key
to understanding you.
[reaching to hold her face in his hands]

CASSANDRA:

I love you. All.
[reaching out to him]
I only want my family to be safe.

[as HECTOR puts his hands upon her face, her own come up to grasp his wrists; and with the touch, SHE is caught in the unstoppable vision. SHE writhes, collapsing, but HE does not release her; THEY are caught in a twisting web of struggle]

CASSANDRA:

[a pained cry, lost in the tumult of vision]
Ahh! Brother, brother! Head to foot, the blood
and dirt of, blade of rage – a warrior's shame –

Oh shame upon us all! My father's tears,
the twisted body of our greatest hope
paints every road, every stone with red,
with putrification and with grief. Oh Hector!
My brother dead and violated, all
our glory gone and ground to muddied gore.

[HE drops her; pause]

HECTOR:

Cassandra . . .

[cold]

Were you not my sister, I
would cast you with your madness on the rock
and let the gods decipher you, perhaps
your ravennings to them would sound like worship.

CASSANDRA:

Worship? The Gods did this to me!

End scene