



HECUBA LAMENTS

Darla Biel

Before the fall, I dreamt I birthed the fire
that burned our city down, so now these flames
are mine to own. These torches raining grief
and terror through our streets, I claim: on me,
the fate of noble husbands who fling the covers
from their legs, then hush us as they listen
to cries outside. They place their feet
upon bare floors and leave for good. On me,
the bodies of our sons who die in fear.
My own stood guard outside the gates, ignoring
his father's pleas and mine. Achilles' chariot
drug his corpse so we would see the dirt
and blood on him. He was just one of ours.
His brother, Polydorus, washed ashore,
the vultures circling around us as I wept.
On me, our ravaged daughters, too, who pray
to Athena for mercy that never arrives. My own
Cassandra was raped by Ajax at the altar.
She clung to the statue of our goddess long after
her faith in its beneficence was lost.
And Polyxena, a sacrifice demanded
by Achilles' ghost, rearranged her clothing
so she'd die with poise. On me, on me, all this.
I curse the quiet sea that keeps our victors
here long after our defeat. What grief
to bear the wails of you, my maids—the spoils
of war—who, shackled in cloth tents along the shore,
await your fate as slaves of cruel men.
Our lives are now assemblages of grief
framed stark between departure and defeat.