

THE FALL OF THE CITY

VOICE OF THE STUDIO DIRECTOR: (*Orotund and professional*)

Ladies and gentlemen:

This broadcast comes to you from the city
Listeners over the curving air have heard
From furthest-off frontiers of foreign hours --
Mountain Time: Ocean Time: of the islands:
Of waters after the islands -- some of them waking
Where noon here is the night there: some
Where noon is the first few stars they see or the last one.

For three days the world has watched this city --
Not for the common occasions of brutal crime
Or the usual violence of one sort or another
Or coronations of kings or popular festivals:
No: for stranger and disturbing reasons --
The resurrection from death and the tomb of a dead woman.

Each day for three days there has come
To the door of her tomb at noon a woman buried!
The terror that stands at the shoulder of our time
Touches the cheek with this: the flesh winces.
There have been other omens in other cities
But never of this sort and never so credible.

In a time like ours seemings and portents signify.
Ours is a generation when dogs howl and the
Skin crawls on the skull with its beast's foreboding.
All men now alive with us have feared.
We have smelled the wind in the street that changes weather.
We have seen the familiar room grow unfamiliar:
The order of numbers alter: the expectation
Cheat the expectant eye. The appearance defaults with us.

Here in this city the wall of the time cracks.

We take you now to the great square of this city.

CROWD: *The shuffle and hum of a vast patient crowd gradually rises: swells: fills the background.*

SOUND: *Bring in recorded crowd noises on balcony speakers.*

VOICE OF THE ANNOUNCER: (*Matter-of-fact, subdued tone*)

We are here on the central plaza.
We are well off to the eastward edge.
There is a kind of terrace over the crowd here.
It is precisely four minutes to twelve.
The crowd is enormous: there might be ten thousand:
There might be more: the whole square is faces.
Opposite over the roofs are the mountains.
It is quite clear: there are birds circling.

We think they are kites by the look: they are very high.

The tomb is off to the right somewhere --
We can't see for the great crowd.
Close to us here are the cabinet ministers:
They stand on a raised platform with awnings.
The farmers' wives are squatting on the stones:
Their children have fallen asleep on their shoulders.
The heat is harsh: the light dazzles like metal.
It dazes the air as the clang of a gong does.

It is one minute to twelve now:

CROWD: *Murmurs grow more intense; higher in pitch but no louder.*

There is still no sign: they are still waiting:
No one doubts that she will come:
No one doubts that she will speak too:
Three times she has not spoken.

CROWD: *Still more intense.*

THE VOICE OF THE ANNOUNCER: *(Low but with increasing excitement)*
Now it is twelve: now they are rising:

(Pause three seconds)

Now the whole plaza is rising:

(Pause three seconds)

Fathers are lifting their small children:

(Pause three seconds)

The plumed fans on the platform are motionless.

(Pause three seconds)

There is no sound but the shuffle of shoe leather.

(Pause three seconds)

CROWD: *Shuffling out.*

Now even the shoes are still.

We can hear the hawks: it is quiet as that now.

It is strange to see such throngs so silent.

Nothing yet: nothing has happened.

Wait! There's a stir here to the right of us:
They're turning their heads: the crowd turns:
The cabinet ministers lean from their balcony:
There's no sound: only the turning. . . .

(A woman's voice comes over the silence of the crowd: it is a weak voice but penetrating. It speaks slowly and as though with difficulty)

THE VOICE OF THE DEAD WOMAN:
First the waters rose with no wind.

THE VOICE OF THE ANNOUNCER: *(Whispering)*
Listen: that is she! She's speaking!

THE VOICE OF THE DEAD WOMAN:
Then the stones of the temple kindled
Without flame or under of maize-leaves . . .

THE VOICE OF THE ANNOUNCER: *(Whispering)*
They see her beyond us: the crowd sees her.

THE VOICE OF THE DEAD WOMAN:
Then there were cries in the night haze:
Words in a once-heard tongue: the air
Rustling above us as at dawn with herons.

Now it is I who must bring fear:
I who am four days dead: the tears
Still unshed for me--all of them: I
For whom a child still calls at nightfall.

Death is young in me to fear!
My dress is kept still in the press in my bedchamber:
No one has broken the dish of the dead woman.

Nevertheless I must speak painfully:
I am to stand here in the sun and speak:

(There is a pause. Then her voice comes again loud, mechanical, speaking as by rote)

The city of masterless men
Will take a master.
There will be shouting then:
Blood after!

CROWD: *Repeats "Blood after." . . . "Blood after."*

THE VOICE OF THE DEAD WOMAN: *(Weak and slow as before)*
Do not ask what it means: I do not know:
Only sorrow and no hope for it.

THE VOICE OF THE ANNOUNCER:

She has gone. . . . No, they are still looking.

THE VOICE OF THE DEAD WOMAN:

It is hard to return from the time past. I have come
In the dream we must learn to dream where the crumbling of
Time like the ash from a burnt string has
Stopped for me. (*Movement in crowd*) For you the thread still burns:

You take the feathery ash upon your fingers.
You bring yourselves from the time past as it pleases you.

It is hard to return to the old nearness . . .

Harder to go again....

CROWD: *Murmur rising.*

SOUND: *Shuffle of feet on stone.*

THE VOICE OF ANNOUNCER:

She is gone.
We know because the crowd is closing.
All we can see is the crowd closing.

CAST: *Principals on microphone near announcer sigh.*

We hear the releasing of held breath,
The weight shifting: the lifting of shoe leather.
The stillness is broken as surface of water is broken,
The sound circling from within outward.

CROWD: *Murmur rises in volume.*

Small wonder they feel fear.
Before the murders of the famous kings,
Before imperial cities burned and fell,
The dead were said to show themselves and speak.
When dead men came disaster came. Presentiments
That let the living on their beds sleep on
Woke dead men out of death and gave them voices.

A VOICE OVER THE CROWD:

Masterless men . . .

A VOICE OVER THE CROWD:

When shall it be . . .

A VOICE OVER THE CROWD:

Masterless men
Will take a master . . .

A VOICE OVER THE CROWD:

What has she said to us . . .

A VOICE OVER THE CROWD:
When shall it be . . .

A VOICE OVER THE CROWD:
Masterless men
Will take a master . . .
Blood after . . .

VOICES TOGETHER:
Blood after! Blood after!

*(The voices run together into the excited, frightened roar
of the crowd. The Announcer's voice is loud over it)*

THE VOICE OF THE ANNOUNCER:
They are milling around us like cattle that smell death.
The whole square is whirling and turning and shouting.
One of the ministers raises his arms on the platform.
No one is listening: now they are sounding drums:
Trying to quiet them likely: No! No!
Something is happening: there in the far corner:
A runner: a messenger: staggering: people are helping him:

CROWD: *Murmurs decrease, beginning near at hand and subsiding gradually.*

People are calling: he comes through the crowd: they are quieter.
Only those on the far edge are still shouting:

CROWD: *Murmurs out.*

Listen! He's here by the ministers now! He is speaking. . . .

THE VOICE OF THE MESSENGER:
There has come the conqueror!
I am to tell you.
I have raced over sea land:
I have run over cane land:
I have climbed over cone land:
I have crossed over mountains.
It was laid on my shoulders
By shall and by shan't
That standing by day
And staying by night
Were not for my lot
Till I came to the sight of you.
Now I have come.
Be warned of this conqueror!
This one is dangerous!
Word has out-oared him.
East over sea-cross has
All taken . . .
Every country.
No men are free there.
Ears overhear them.

Their words are their murderers
Judged before judgment
Tried after trial
They die as do animals –
Offer their throats
As the goat to her slaughter.
Terror has taught them this!

Now he is here!

I tell you beware of him!
All doors are dangers.
The warders of wealth
Will admit him by stealth.
The lovers of men
Will invite him as friend.
The drinkers of blood
Will drum him in suddenly.
Hope will unlatch to him:
Hopelessness open.

I say and say truly
To all men in honesty
Such is this conqueror!
Shame is his people.
Lickers of spittle
Their lives are unspeakable:
Their dying indecent.

Watch! I have said to you!

THE VOICE OF THE ANNOUNCER:

They are leading him out: his legs give:
Now he is gone in the crowd: they are silent:
No one has spoken since his speaking:
They stand still circling the ministers.
No one has spoken or called out:

There is no stir at all nor movement:
Even the farthest have stood patiently:
They wait, trusting the old men:
They wait faithfully, trusting the answer.
Now the huddle on the platform opens:
A minister turns to them raising his two arms. . . .

THE VOICE OF THE ORATOR:

Freemen of this nation!
The persuasion of your wills against your wisdom is not dreamed of.
We offer themes for your consideration.
What is the surest defender of liberty?
Is it not liberty?
A free people resists by freedom:
Not locks! Not blockhouses!

The future is a mirror where the past
Marches to meet itself. Go armed towards arms!
Peaceful towards peace! Free and with music towards freedom!
Face tomorrow with knives and tomorrow's a knife-blade.

Murder your foe and your foe will be murder!
Even your friends suspected of false speaking:
Hands on the door at night and the floor boards squeaking.
Those who win by the spear are the spear toters.
And what do they win? Spears! What else is there?
If their hands let go they have nothing to hold by.
They are no more free than a paralytic propped against a tree is.

With the armored man the arm is upheld by the weapon:
The man is worn by the knife . . .

*(The Orator's voice fades into the background, his words
unintelligible.)*

THE VOICE OF THE ANNOUNCER:

I wish you could all see this as we do.
The whole plaza full of these people,
Their colorful garments, the harsh sunlight,
The water sellers swinging enormous gourds,
The orator there on the stone platform,
The temple behind him: the high pyramid;
The hawks overhead in the sky teetering
Slow to the windward: swift to the down-wind;
The houses blind with the blank sun on them . . .

(The words of the Orator are again intelligible)

THE VOICE OF THE ORATOR:

Once depend on iron for your freedom and your
Freedom's iron!
Once overcome your resisters with force and your
Force will resist you!
You will never be free of force.
Never of arms unarmed
Will the father return home:
The lover to her loved:
The mature man to his fruit orchard
Walking at peace in that beauty –
The years of his trees to assure him.

Force is a greater enemy than this conqueror,
A treacherous weapon.

But nevertheless my friends there is a weapon!
Weakness conquers!
Against chainlessness who breaks?
Against wall-lessness who vaults?
Against forcelessness who forces?

Against the feather of the thistle
Is blunted sharpest metal.
No edge cuts seed fluff.

This conqueror unresisted
Will conquer no longer: a posturer
Beating his blows upon burdocks
Shifting his guard against shadows.
Snickers will sound among road menders:
Titters be stifled by laundresses:
Coarse guffaws among chambermaids.
Reddened with rage he will roar.
He will sweat in his uniform foolishly.
He will disappear: no one will hear of him!

For there is a weapon!
Reason and truth are that weapon!
Let this conqueror come!
Show him no hindrance!
Suffer his flag and his drum!
Words . . . win!

THE VOICE OF THE ANNOUNCER:

There's the shout now: he's done:
He's climbing down: a great speech:
They're all smiling and pressing around him:
The women are squatting in full sunlight:
They're opening packages: bread we'd say by the look.

CROWD: *Low, sustained murmur of women.*

Yes: bread: bread wrapped between corn leaves:
They're squatting to eat: they're quite contented and happy:

MUSIC: *Drum and flute fading in.*

Women are calling their men from the sunny stones:
There are flutes sounding away off:
We can't see for the shifting and moving. . . .

SOUND: *Shuffling of feet.*

Yes: there are flutes in the cool shadow:
Children are dancing in intricate figures.
Even a few old men are dancing.
You'd say they'd never feared to see them dancing.

(Music stops)

THE VOICE OF THE ANNOUNCER:

That's odd! The music has stopped. There's something . . .
It's a man there on the far side: he's pointing:
He seems to be pointing back through the farthest street:
The people are twisting and rising: bread in their fists.

We can't see what it is. . . . Wait! . . . it's a messenger.
It must be a messenger. Yes. It's a message . . . another.

Here he is at the turn of the street, trotting:
His neck's back at the nape: he looks tired:
He winds through the crowd with his mouth open: laboring:
People are offering water: he pushes away from them:
Now he has come to the stone steps: to the ministers:
Stand by: we're edging in. . . .

*(There are sounds of people close by: coughs: murmurs.
The Announcer's voice is lowered)*

Listen: he's leaning on the stone: he's speaking.

THE VOICE OF THE SECOND MESSENGER:

There has come . . . the Conqueror. . . .

I am to tell you.

I have run over corn land:
I have climbed over cone land:
I have crossed over mountains.

It was laid on my shoulders
By shall and by shan't
That standing by day
And staying by night
Were not for my lot
Till I came to the sight of you.

Now I have come.
I bear word:
Beware of this Conqueror!

The fame of his story
Like flame in the winter grass
Widens before him.
Beached on our shore
With the dawn over shoulder
The lawns were still cold
When he came to the sheep meadows:
Sun could not keep with him
So was he forward.

Fame is his sword.
No man opposing him
Still grows his glory.
He needs neither foeman nor
Thickest of blows to
Gather his victories . . .
Nor a foe's match
To earn him his battles.

He brings his own enemy!

He baggages with him
His closest antagonist,
His private opposer.
He's setting him up
At every road corner
A figure of horror
With blood for his color:
Fist for his hand:
Reek where he stands:
Hate for his heart:
Sneers for his mouth:
Clouts for his clothes:
Oaths if he speak:
And he's knocking him down
In every town square
Till hair's on his blade
And blood's all about
Like dust in a drought
And the people are shouting
Flowers him flinging
Music him singing
And bringing him gold
And holding his heels
And feeling his thighs
Till their eyes start
And their hearts swell
And they're telling his praises
Like lays of the heroes
And chiefs of antiquity.
Such are his victories!
So does he come:
So he approaches . . .

CROWD: *A whisper rustles through the crowd.*

No man to conquer .

(The messenger's words quicken)

Yet as a conqueror
Marches he forward . . .

CROWD: *The whisper is louder.*

Stands in your mountains. . . .

CROWD: *A murmur of voices.*

Soon to descend on you!

CROWD: *A swelling roar.*

THE VOICE OF THE ANNOUNCER:

That touched them! That frightened them!

Some of them point to the east hills:

Some of them mock at the ministers: "Freedom!"

"Freedom for what? To die in a rat trap?"

They're frantic with anger and plain fear.

They're sold out they say. You can hear them.

"Down with the government! Down with the orators!

"Down with liberal learned minds!

"Down with the mouths and the loose tongues in them!

"Down with the lazy lot! They've sold us!

"We're sold out! Talking has done for us!"

They're boiling around us like mullet that smell shark.

We can't move for the mob: they're crazy with terror . . .

A LOUD VOICE: (*Distant*)

God lovers!

Think of your gods!

Earth masters!

Taste your disasters!

Men!

Remember!

THE VOICE OF THE ANNOUNCER:

There's a voice over the crowd somewhere.

They hear it: they're quieting down. . . . It's the priests!

We see them now: it's the priests on the pyramid!

There might be ten of them: black with their hair tangled.

The smoke of their fire is flat in the quick wind:

They stand in the thick of the smoke by the stone of the victims:

Their knives catch in the steep sun:

VOICES OF THE PRIESTS:

Turn to your gods rememberers!

THE VOICE OF THE ANNOUNCER:

They are shouting:

Listen!

SINGLE VOICE:

Let the world be saved by surrendering the world:

Not otherwise shall it be saved.

VOICES OF PRIESTS:

Turn to your gods, rememberers!

SINGLE VOICE:

Let evil be overcome by the coming over of evil:

Your hearts shall be elsewhere.

VOICES OF PRIESTS:

Turn to your gods, rememberers!

SINGLE VOICE:

Turn to your gods!
The Conqueror cannot take you!

VOICES OF PRIESTS:

Turn to your gods!

SINGLE VOICE:

The narrow dark will keep you!

VOICES OF PRIESTS:

Turn to your gods!

SINGLE VOICE:

In god's house is no breaking!

VOICES OF PRIESTS:

Turn to your gods!

SINGLE VOICE:

In god's silences sleep is!

VOICES OF PRIESTS:

Lay up your will with the gods!

SINGLE VOICE:

Stones cannot still you!

VOICES OF PRIESTS:

Lay up your mind with the gods!

SINGLE VOICE:

Blade cannot blind you!

VOICES OF PRIESTS:

Lay up your heart with the gods!

SINGLE VOICE:

Danger departs from you!

THE VOICE OF THE ANNOUNCER:

It's a wonderful thing to see this crowd responding.
Even the simplest citizens feel the emotion.
There's hardly a sound now in the square. It's wonderful:
Really impressive: the priests there on the pyramid:
The smoke blowing: the bright sun: the faces . . .

SINGLE VOICE:

In the day of confusion of reason when all is delusion:
In the day of the tyrants of tongues when the truth is for hire:
In the day of deceit when ends meet:

VOICES OF PRIESTS:

Turn to your gods!

SINGLE VOICE:

In the day of division of nations when hope is derision:
In the day of the supping of hate when the soul is corrupted:
In the day of despair when the heart's bare:

VOICES OF PRIESTS:

Turn to your gods!

MUSIC: *A slow drum beat.*

THE VOICE OF THE ANNOUNCER:

A kind of dance is beginning: a serpent of people:
A current of people coiling and curling through people:
A circling of people through people like water through water . . .

CHANTING VOICES: (*To the drum*)

Out of the stir of the sun
Out of the shout of the thunder
Out of the hush of the star . . .
Withdraw the heart.

MUSIC: *Chant and drums under for a moment.*

THE VOICE OF THE ANNOUNCER:

A very young girl is leading them:
They have torn the shawl from her bare breast:
They are giving her flowers: her mouth laughs:
Her eyes are not laughing.

CHANTING VOICES:

Leave now the lovely air
To the sword and the sword-wearer.
Leave to the marksman the mark.
Withdraw the heart.

MUSIC: *The chant and drums grow louder.*

THE VOICE OF THE ANNOUNCER:

She's coming. . . . The drums pound. . . . The crowd
Shrieks. . . . She's reaching the temple. . . . she's climbing
in. . . .
Others are following: five: ten . . .
Hundreds are following . . . crowding the stairway. . . .
She's almost there. . . . Her flowers have fallen.
She looks back. . . . The priests are surrounding her.

MUSIC: *The drums suddenly stop: there is an instant's silence.*

CROWD: *An angry shout.*

THE VOICE OF THE ANNOUNCER:

Wait! Wait! Something has happened!
One of the ministers: one of the oldest:
The general: the one in the feathered coat:
He's driving them down with the staff of a banner:
He's climbed after them driving them down:
There's shouting and yelling enough but they're going:
He's telling them off too: you can hear him . . .

CROWD: *Chatters angrily.*

THE VOICE OF THE GENERAL:

Men! Old men! Listen!
Twist your necks on your nape bones!
The knife will wait in the fist for you!

There is a time for everything . . .
Time to be thinking of heaven:
Time of your own skins!

Cock your eyes to the wind windward!

CROWD: *Falls silent.*

Do you see smoke on those mountains?
The smoke is the smoke of towns.
And who makes it? The conqueror!
And where will he march now? Onward!
The heel of the future descends on you!

THE VOICE OF THE ANNOUNCER:

He has them now: even the priests have seen it:
They're all looking away here to the east.
There's smoke too: filling the valleys: like thunderheads!

THE VOICE OF THE GENERAL:

You are foolish old men.
You ought to be flogged for your foolishness.
Your grandfathers died to be free
And you . . . you juggle with freedom!
Do you think you're free by a law
Like the falling of apples in autumn?

You thought you were safe in your liberties!
You thought you could always quibble!
You can't! You take my word for it.

Freedom's the rarest bird!
You risk your neck to snare it . . .
It's gone while your eyeballs stare!

Those who'd lodge with a tyrant
Thinking to feed at his fire
And leave him again when they're fed are
Plain fools or were bred to it.

Brood of the servile races
Born with the hang-dog face.

CROWD: *Low murmur: uneasy stirring.*

THE VOICE OF THE ANNOUNCER:

They're all pointing and pushing together:
The women are shouldering baskets: bread: children.
They smell smoke in the air: they smell terror . . .

CROWD: *A rising tone of excitement.*

THE VOICE OF THE GENERAL: (*Louder over the increasing sound*)

There's nothing in this world worse,
Empty belly or purse or the
Pitiful hunger of children,
Than doing the Strong Man's will!
The free will fight for their freedom.
They're free men first. They feed
Meager of fat but as free men.
Everything else comes after:
Food: roof: craft . . .
Even the sky and the light of it!

CROWD: *The voices rise to a tumult of shouts.*

MUSIC: *Heavy drums.*

THE VOICE OF THE ANNOUNCER:

The sun is yellow with smoke. . . . the town's burning. . . .
The war's at the broken bridge.

THE VOICE OF THE GENERAL: (*Shouting*)

You! Are you free? Will you fight?

There are still inches for fighting!
There is still a niche in the streets!
You can stand on the stairs and meet him!

You can hold in the dark of a hall!
You can die!

. . . or your children will crawl for it!

THE VOICE OF THE ANNOUNCER: (*Over the tumult*)

They won't listen. They're shouting and screaming and circling.
The square is full of deserters with more coming.
Every street from the bridge is full of deserters.
They're rolling in with the smoke blowing behind them.
The plaza's choked with the smoke and the struggling of stragglers.
They're climbing the platform: driving the ministers: shouting . . .
One speaks and another . . .

VOICES OF CITIZENS:

The city is doomed!

There's no holding it!
Let the conqueror have it! It's his!
The age is his! It's his century!

He's one man: we are but thousands!
Who can defend us from one man?
Bury your arms! Break your standards!
Give him the town while the town stands!

THE VOICE OF THE ANNOUNCER:

They're throwing their arms away: their bows are in bonfires.
The plaza is littered with torn plumes: spear-handles.

VOICES OF CITIZENS:

Masterless men!

Masterless men
Must take a master!

Order must master us!

Freedom's for fools:
Force is the certainty!
Freedom has eaten our strength and corrupted our virtues!

Men must be ruled!

Fools must be mastered!

Rigor and fast
Will restore us our dignity!

Chains will be liberty!

CROWD: *Disperses.*

THE VOICE OF THE ANNOUNCER:

The last defenders are coming: they whirl from the streets like
Wild leaves on a wind: the square scatters them.

Now they are fewer . . . ten together or five:
They come with their heads turned: their eyes back.

Now there are none. The street's empty . . . in shadow.
The crowd is retreating . . . watching the empty street:
The shouts die.

The voices are silent.

They're watching.
They stand in the slant of the sunlight silent and watching.
The silence after the drums echoes the drum beat.

SOUND: *Hollow clank of metal in background.*

Now there's a sound. They see him. They must see him!
They're shading their eyes from the sun: there's a rustle of
whispering:

We can't see for the glare of it. . . . Yes! . . . Yes! . . .
He's there in the end of the street in the shadow. We see him!
He looks huge . . . a head taller than anyone:
Broad as a brass door: a hard hero:
Heavy of heel on the brick: clanking with metal:
The helm closed on his head: the eyeholes hollow.

SOUND: *Clanking metal comes nearer.*

He's coming! . . .
He's clear of the shadow! . . .
The sun takes him.
They cover their faces with fingers. They cower before him.
They fall: they sprawl on the stone. He's alone where he's walking.
He marches with rattle of metal. He tramples his shadow.
He mounts by the pyramid . . . stamps on the stairway . . . turns . . .

SOUND: *Clanking out.*

His arm rises. . . . His visor is opening. . . .

*(There is an instant's sharp silence. Then the Announcer's
voice low, almost a whisper)*

There's no one!
There's no one at all!
No one! . . .
The helmet is hollow!
The metal is empty! The armor is empty! I tell you
There's no one at all there: there's only the metal!
The barrel of metal: the bundle of armor. It's empty!

They don't see. They lie in the sunlight. They lie in the
Burnt spears: the ashes of arrows. They lie there.
They don't see or they won't see. They are silent.

The people invent their oppressors: they wish to believe in them.
They wish to be free of their freedom: released from their liberty:
The long labor of liberty ended!
They lie there!

SOUND: *A sudden rustle.*

THE VOICE OF THE ANNOUNCER: *(Rising)*

Look! It's his arm! It is rising! His arm's rising!
They're watching his arm as it rises. They stir. They cry.
They cry out. They are shouting. They're shouting with happiness.
Listen! They're shouting like troops in a victory. Listen! . . .
"The city of masterless men has found a master!"
You'd say it was they were the conquerors: they that had conquered.

CROWD: *A swelling roar of voices.*

THE VOICE OF THE ANNOUNCER:

The city has fallen!

MUSIC: *Up in climax to cover crowd.*