

Howard Waldrop and Leigh Kennedy

ONE HORSE TOWN

In whatever language, the meaning of the voice was clear. "Hey, you!"

Homer screwed up his eyes against the rusty colors of the windy sky, trying to focus towards the sound. Dust and grit swirled up against his face from the hillside path in the ruins.

The gruff voice reminded him of his fears when he was a little boy clambering all over the ruins on his own. His parents had conjured up dire stories of snatched boys who never saw their families again, forced to do things they didn't want to do, sometimes killed casually, sometimes savagely, when no longer needed. The fear had been part of the excitement of playing here.

Now, no longer a boy, just about a man, he found himself more afraid than ever. He knew he was even more vulnerable than when he had been a little lad. Over the past three years, his eyesight beyond the length of his forearm had liquefied into a terrible blur. Not such a problem in the familiar confines of his hometown, but he realized he could no longer distinguish between the olive trees and the juts of ancient city walls. Or people-friends or enemies.

He made out one of the shapes, dark and man-sized, in motion as if shaking his fists, and heard the crunch of quickening footfall in the rubble.

Homer made a hasty backwards move down the slope of the grassy mound grown around the wall.

The shape melted away. It didn't move away or step out of sight, but *melted* away. Homer made an involuntary noise in his throat, frozen. Perhaps that, too, was a trick of his eyes.

He could smell the sea wind just below this jagged hill, hear dark crows gathering for the night, but no other human sound besides his own panting. The oncoming dusk felt cool on his arms.

Time to go, he thought.

Darkness is the enemy of youths who were too nearsighted to spot a cow in a kitchen. Even though the family found him pretty useless, a dreamer who tripped over stools, he thought they might be getting worried.

He had discovered the ruins during family trips up north in the summers of his childhood. They captured his imagination like nothing he'd ever known, especially after hearing the stories about what had happened here; all year long had been an agony, waiting to return. The happiest days of his life: standing on the walls, shooting pretend arrows, hacking invisible enemies with swords, shouting out offers of help to long-dead imaginary hero-friends.

He was almost grown, but the magic was still here. The wind carried a soft keening moan. A woman's sigh, he imagined. When he was a boy, he had never experienced this deep pit-of-the-stomach longing for something still unknown to him.

Now the sun was going. He stood with his nose in the air like a dog, feeling the breeze, sensing the sea to his right. Turning his head, he saw sunlight glowing like coppered bronze on the almond groves below, knowing that was where he needed to go. He made his way over the uneven stones and earthen mounds alongside giant thumbs of broken buildings from the ancient city, pointing out the mute tale of its own destruction.

On an especially steep place, he found footing in an earthen ledge. The root he clutched to steady himself gave way suddenly, and Homer clawed into the earth to regain his balance. His fingers touched something smooth and round, unlike a stone, but harder than wood. He squatted close for a look. It was a pale, whatever it was. Curious, he found a stone and scraped at the soil, tugging now and then until it gradually loosened. With a jerk, it gave way and tumbled into his palm. Turning it over and over in his hands, he gradually came to realize what it was.

A baby's skull, cracked with fractures, all but two bottom front teeth still embedded in the jawbone. He almost dropped the tiny skull out of horror.

Homer looked up, working out from his knowledge of the ruins where he was: underneath the palace.

"Poor little warrior," Homer whispered, even though his neck hairs stood. He dug further into the earth, now feeling the tiny backbone, and replaced the skull. He covered it as much as he could, then scrambled away.

He set off for home, knowing that he had to run south with the setting sun on his right. Before he reached the plain below, he heard voices again. This time there were many, many of them.

Women, wailing with grief.

I'm sick of the war.

It's not my war. I'm just helping out here, anyway. These people are always going at each other, though they look like brothers, have the same religion, attend the same inter-city dinner parties. One side mines the metals, the other side makes it into jewelry. One side catches fish, the other side fashions the dishes. And so on.

But-pooof-one little incident, a bit of royal adultery, and they're at war again. They're not happy with a little battle or two. They've got to wipe each other out. And drag in all the neighbors.

Most soldiers want adventure, a chance to see the world, meet some girls, have a bit of gold to spend on a good time if the chance comes up. I'm not so different from the other guys. My background is posh compared to the farmers and the craftsmen who've taken up arms, but soldiers in this war with posh backgrounds are as plentiful as olives on an olive tree, so it doesn't make much difference.

But we've only seen *here*. The girls are okay, but after so many years of war there aren't many new faces. Except for the babies. The gold and the good times... well, it could be better.

Truth is, I was only a little lad when the war started, so I'm a relatively new recruit. And it wasn't just war that brought me; I thought I might have a chance at being near a certain young lady who lives here. But she looks right through me whenever our paths cross in town, sometimes with a pretty weird expression. I met her a couple of years ago at a party at my dad's when she was a lot more fun. She seemed to like me. You know how you can sense it. Lots of eyes and smiles and choosing to stand near me. I couldn't get her out of my mind.

As nice as he is, her dad doesn't seem to notice me either, just looks vague every time I'm under his nose. But her dad has a lot to think about, running this war year after year.

Tonight, Leo and I have watch. It's cold and windy up here on the wall. And something strange is happening. When we first came on guard, we saw something like a kid stuck in the side of the wall below, just standing there as if he were wearing it. Then he was gone.

I think we dreamt it. We're both tired. Lookout on the walls is always a guarantee to keep you alert, though, especially on a cold-ass night like this. I can't yet put my finger on what's wrong.

Leo, who isn't as tall as me, pulls himself up for a peek over the parapet, then points towards the beach. "Coro, look, the fires are different," he says.

The fires have burnt on the beach for years now to the sound of soldiers laughing, arguing, running races, washing in the surf, drinking wine, and, worst of all for us hungry ones up here, the nightly barbecues. A tormenting smell, as we don't get much in the way of steaks, being under siege. Every now and then a horse dies and we have something to chew on. And chew and chew. A trickle of supplies comes in when we find an excuse for a truce. Our greatest entertainment is to watch the enemy having a better time down there on the beach and fantasize about desertion. A reward for that is an occasional projectile lobbed up. Last week, one of our guys got a stone right in the eye for hanging over the edge too long.

It's too quiet. No drinking, whoring. No barbecues.

"Maybe," Leo says in a wishful voice, "they're burning their own camps."

"Leo," I say, "they can't be *going*. Just like that."

Yesterday had been a pretty normal day of hacking off arms and legs and jabbing spears through brains. Nothing that would make you think anyone won or lost. Pretty much like most days of the last ten years, from what I can tell.

"Mm," Leo says. He looks worried about being happy. "What if the war is over?"

"Is this how it ends?" I say, leaning over the wall, feeling I might have spied something moving below. But it's as big and slow as a ship. Must be a cloud's shadow. The night feels thick as a chunk of bread soaked in soup and I can't see any stars. "They just go away without saying anything?"

"I don't know."

"We should report this."

Just as I say that, someone rounds the corner of the walls, barking, "Leocritus! Coroebus!"

It's Aeneas, that strutting smug know-it-all. He acts like the prince of princes and he's only a cousin of the royal family here.

Leo says, "We were just noticing something a bit funny, sir."

"Yes," Aeneas says. He knew already. He may be proud, but he isn't slow.

We all lean over the wall and look into the dark nothing, hearing only the sound of the sea in the distance. At least I thought it was the sea, but it wasn't. The sound had the wrong rhythm and was too close.

Then I lift my head. "By God," is all I can say.

It's even weirder than the kid in the wall. Dust-muffled footsteps in the sky, just over our heads, accompanied by the slick sound of many shovels moving earth in unison.

When Leo bolts, I run too, and Aeneas follows. I take comfort in the fact that even Lord Aeneas looks scared.

We slow down, sobered up, inside the wall.

Leo suddenly grabs my arm and says, "We're, uh... deserting our watch."

"Oh, yeah." I stop, hoping Aeneas doesn't think our excitement is too cowardly. But he also appears shaken, trying to cover it with a lofty distant expression. "We'll just pop out onto the ramparts at the next doorway," I say, pulling Leo with me.

"I'm going to find Cassandra," Aeneas says thoughtfully, turning towards the alleys leading to the town center. "She *likes* interpreting signs."

Cassie! Her black-eyed glance can make me feel as low as a worker ant trudging through the dirt. Yes, she's the one I fell for a couple of summers ago. Before she was weird. I had heard the rumors about her and Apollo-that she dumped him-and hoped that meant she prefers us mortals. Imagine dumping Apollo, though! What chance do I stand? I can't help it. Often, I volunteer for extra palace guard duty, glancing at her window where I can see her sewing with her mother, Hecuba, both of them silent, worried, their golden needles flashing.

I brush up my helmet's horsehair plume and suck in my belly under my cuirass to make my shoulders look bigger.

If only I could have had the nobility of her brother, Hector, whose death recently gutted us all. If only I had the wiles of Odysseus, the beauty of Achilles, without their Greekness....

I try to return my attention to the job at hand. Leo and I stroll the walls confidently. The plain is now silent, the fires only smoldering orange embers, the beach dark. When we meet the men watching the north walls, they agree with us that there don't seem to be Greeks below anymore. But none of us feel easy about it. Leo and I don't mention the strange thing we had seen. We stroll back to the other side of the citadel.

Then Aeneas reappears, nervously scanning the air above us, Cassandra close on his heels. She's not at her best, pale and looking as if she's been crying for a week. Well, she probably has. Ever since Hector died, the women have been pretty soggy. But even as nervous and upset as she had been lately, tonight it appears even worse.

She gives me a long stare from behind Aeneas. "Coreobus," she says.

My heart pounds. "Evening, Cassandra," I say.

For a moment, her mouth opens as if she wants to say something but Aeneas, points up in the air. "Tell her what you heard," he commands to Leo.

"Uh, well, m'lady," Leo says, looking up over his shoulder. "They were like footsteps. Just above our heads. And digging. Like..." He stops.

Cassandra hardly looks likes she's paying attention to him. She finds one of the archers' slits in the wall and puts her head through. "So many of them," she says.

Leo, Aeneas and I all look at each other, puzzled. There was no one out tonight.

"A thousand ships full," I say. "So they brag."

"No," Cassandra says, pulling back slightly, then turning slowly and lifting her head. "Not them."

We all look where she's looking, roughly towards the horizon above Tenedos.

"Who?" I ask.

"The ones in the clouds of dust. The ones with the baskets."

I can pinpoint *this* moment as the one when I realize that she isn't *quite* the woman I'm looking for in life. Although, looking at her big brown eyes and the fall of the folds of her chiton, I can still remember...

But Cassandra has definitely gone spooky.

While she's seeing things on the plain, we all glance around at each other again. We go to the wall to look. I think the others see what I see: the dark plain, the black sea. Aeneas rolls his eyes then winds his finger mid-air around his temple, nodding towards Cassie's back.

"They're coming for us," Cassandra says, taking her earrings off and throwing them down, then grinding them underfoot. "But it won't matter after tomorrow anyway."

"Uh, right, Cassie," Aeneas says, his hand on her shoulder. "Maybe you should go back now. I'm sure Auntie Hec is missing you."

Cassandra gives me that long look again. "Coreobus. You will defend me when the big animal spills its guts into the city?"

We all freeze. I suddenly think thoughts that scare me for their impiety about Apollo and his cruel revenges on Cassandra. "Yes, ma'am," I say, being polite.

Aeneas guides her away.

After they are gone, Leo and I don't say much. I think he knows that I had it bad for Cassandra. I don't know *how* I feel now. Sick. Confused. Even if he didn't know, there isn't much to say when the king's daughter shows signs of cracking.

We are as bristled as teased cats for the rest of the night. I keep imagining creaking and groaning noises in the wind.

Like the sound a ship would make on land.
Impossible.

He stood atop the ruins rearing out his right ear with his little finger like an artilleryman swabbing down a gun barrel. The autumn wind had got there first, piercing him down to the nerve.

The pain eased, replaced with the dull ringing that came and went, daily, hourly, sometimes by the minute.

All around and below him in the trenches Turks, Circassians, and Greeks sang, but not together, as each nation competed with the most drunken-sounding drinking song in their own tongues. Heinrich Schliemann's ears bothered him too much to try to listen to any of the words; it was all a muffled din to him. The diggers handed over a long line of baskets, each to each, from where others dug with pick and shovel to the edge of the hill mound of Hissarlik, where the soil was dumped over into the plain below.

Since there were four or five clans of Turks and Greeks present, he'd learned to put a Circassian between, so that the baskets went from the diggers to Turk to Circassian to Greek to Circassian to Turk and so on. Sometimes there were four or five Greeks or Turks to each neutral middleman, sometimes ten or fifteen. The last in the line were all Circassian, who had the task of filling the flat alluvial plain that stretched away to the small river flowing to the sea two miles away.

The ringing in his ear returned slowly to the drone (he wasn't that musical, but he'd imitated it as best he could once for a violinist, who pronounced it "B below middle C") that was always there.

Today, progress was fast. They'd uncovered one of the Roman phase walls and were rapidly digging along where it sank lower into the debris. What he searched for lay below, probably far below. Only when the diggers found something other than building stone, perhaps pottery or weapons, did things slow down, the workers graduating from shovels to trowels while those shifting baskets caught up with others carrying away piles of earth. But today, the diggers kept at it full swing. He suspected that this meant his colleague, Dörpfeld, would be along to complain that the diggers weren't being systematic enough. Dörpfeld was methodical, even for a German. One thing I've learned, Schliemann thought, is that some follow and some lead. And I'm the leader here.

Schliemann wanted bones: Trojan bones buried with honor. If it was gold that honored them, so much the better. Schliemann liked the way his Sophia's eyes lit up when she saw the gold they uncovered. Just seeing her delight was almost reward enough for him these days. She deserved everything in heaven and earth simply for not being that Russian chunk of ice he had married first and foolishly.

I've made very few mistakes in my life but the Russian marriage was one, he thought. However, marrying dear, beautiful, Greek Sophia makes up for that. I am rich, I am successful, I am famous, I have a loving family.

Now all I want are some Trojan bones, and for that head louse Bötticher to sink into the earth instead of writing all that vitriolic rubbish about me.

Suddenly, he groaned. His earache had worsened.

One of the Turks scrambled up to him. "Boss!" he said impatiently.

Schliemann realized the digger had called to him several times. He pretended that he had been preoccupied rather than mostly deaf and turned slightly. The Turk handed him a shard.

Impossible. On it was the feathery curved design that Schliemann recognized as an octopus tentacle. Mycenaean.

"Where did you get this?" Schliemann demanded in Turkish, glaring at the young man. A thought flared up that someone was sabotaging the dig (Bötticher?) by bribing his workers to put Greek pottery in Turkish soil.

The Turk pointed, jabbering, but Schliemann could only hear the word "boss," which the Turk repeated with respect over and over. He was excited. Then Schliemann thought he lip-read the phrase "much more."

Mycenae. Of course. Yes, how could I forget? Schliemann's mind raced as he followed his digger. The royal families of Troy and Mycenae were guest-friends. It was on a royal tour of Sparta that Paris fell in love with and stole Helen. Of course there would be Mycenaean pottery! It was probably sent to Troy as... say, wedding gifts for Hector and Andromache.

The diggers were gathered at one corner of the trench, one of them carving the soil with his small knife. Edges and rounded curves of pottery stuck out all along.

"My good men!" Schliemann said first in Greek, then Turkish, clapping his hands. "Good work. Early lunch." Half the workforce put down their tools, wiping their foreheads and grinning. Then he repeated it in Circassian and the remainder cheered and climbed out of the trench after the others.

Schliemann smiled and nodded, watching them go, saluting them with dignified congratulations. Then he slid down into the trench and stroked the smooth edge of a partially-excavated Mycenaean stirrup cup, elegantly decorated with stripes.

"Oh, Athena!" he whispered, his throat tight, ears banging painfully, eyes stinging. "Dare I imagine that Hector himself drank from this cup?"

He felt a change in the light and looked up with a start. At first he saw no one. He put the pottery shard into his shirt, then found a foothold in the trench, climbing halfway up. The hill was a broken plane, gouged mostly by his own trenches, but also by age. The city walls had grown weary with time, crumbled, grown pale grasses and stray barley. Dark elms, losing their summer dresses, blew in the relentless seawind.

There. One of the diggers, lagging behind? Schliemann wondered. But he didn't recognize him. A young man whose shirt had torn and was hanging on one shoulder. Not even a young man but a big boy, only his upper half visible. Confused, Schliemann tried to calculate just which trench the lad was in.

"Hey, you!" Schliemann called in Turkish, scrambling towards him.

The boy turned slightly but didn't look at Schliemann. He was looking towards the tallest of the remaining towers of Ilium and then he seemed to trip backwards and was gone.

"Local rascal," Schliemann said, irritated that his spell had been broken. Never mind. He returned to the trench and took out his pocket knife to scrape, ever so gently, around the striped cup.

Already he was composing tonight's letters: two in English, to friends; two in French, to other archaeologists; one in Russian, to his mercantile partners; another in Swedish, to a correspondent there; a Turkish note to the Museum at Constantinople; a letter in Greek to his mother-in-law. Oh, yes, and he needed to write to his cousin in Germany.

This was an incredible find.

He stuck his finger back in his ear as the roaring in it crashed into his head like the ocean. "Owww," he moaned.

This watch is almost over. Look, there's old rosy-fingers in the east.

You know how sometimes you wake up in the middle of the night thinking, about how you never wrote that thank-you letter to grandad before he died? Or about the pain in your tummy being fatal? Or about the money you owe? Well, I've had a night like that without being in bed. Leo and I kept ourselves awake some of the time by gambling in a sticks and stones game, the sort you can scramble underfoot if one of the sleepless mucky-mucks happens to show. Most of the time we just stared out at nothing, worried that those footsteps might come back.

It wasn't helped by Andromache's spell of sobbing and shouting a few hours ago. Hector wouldn't have liked that, even though it's strangely heartwarming to hear a wife miss her husband. But Hector knew that women's wailing unsettled the soldiers.

Like me. Unsettled is about one-tenth of it.

Thinking about how we've lost most of our best generals, most of all Hector. Thinking about how it's no longer special being a prince when every other soldier is as well. Thinking about my family. Thinking about spooky Cassandra. Thinking about how rotten this war is.

When the sun comes up we'll see what they were up to on the beach last night.

Leo and I still don't want to believe that after ten years, they had simply swum away. But then, Achilles was *their* man, like Hector was *our* man. With both those guys gone, maybe they've decided it's time to pack it in.

Now, in the earliest light, I lean over the wall and see a huge dark shape sitting outside the main city gate. Bigger than the gate itself.

"What the *hell* is that?"

"Coro, the ships are going!" shouts Leocritus. Like me, he has come alert in the morning light. He points out to sea, which is as thick with ships as wasps on a smear of jam.

"But, Leo, what the hell is *that*?" I say again, putting my hands on the sides of his head and making him look down, to the right.

At the horse.

"Zeus H. Thunderfart!" he breathes.

The soldiers on watch from the other walls are shouting down to the people. "They're gone! The Greeks have gone!"

People come out to see what's happening. Doors open and people hang out their top windows, pointing to the ships now on the horizon.

Celebration! I hug Leo and he hugs me; we jump up and down, making obscene gestures at the cowardly Greeks ships sailing south. I've never heard such a din in Troy. The women are waving scarves, bringing out the tiny children on their hips, banging on pots. The men bang on everything, shouting about the shortcomings of Agamemnon's men and the strength and bravery of Trojan warriors. All so early in the morning, even before the wine has been brought out.

Everyone's clambering and excited, falling all over each other crowding at our end of town. Now word is getting around about the giant horse at the gate.

I'm still on the wall, looking at it.

It's about four men tall and long, probably fashioned of elm with a big box belly and a straight neck jutting

out at an angle, alert pointy ears. Its carved eyes look wild and windblown, as if in battle. Is this a peace offering?

I can hear voices asking whether we should open the gate or not. A couple of our soldiers look up at us on the wall. "What should we do?"

"I don't know," I shout down. "Get a priest. Or someone from the royal family."

After a few minutes, the great King Priam, a frail and tiny man billowing with the finest woven white robes, arrives with Aeneas trotting behind. They open the gate, go out, and a crowd surrounds the horse.

I also see a commotion, a v-shaped wedge of frightened and alarmed people, running down from the high city. The cutting point of the wedge is the massive priest of Poseidon, almost as naked as if he had come straight from bed as well, waving his thick arms and shouting out in a basso growl. "What's happening?" Probably from years of practice, his half-grown sons duck and weave around his great flying elbows, two curious kids wondering what the mayhem was all about.

"What's this about a goodbye present?" Laocoon says. "This is a trick." He turns to borrow a staff from one of his gang of water-worshipping thugs. With a mighty swing (why wasn't *he* ever on the battlefield, I wonder?), he bashes it on the side of the horse.

The wood made a moaning, low sound, the stick playing it like an equine string. Eerie.

"This is a trick!" Laocoon repeats.

"Oh, shove off, Laocoon!" a man shouts. "Go soak your head in the sea!" There is enough laughter that the man swaggers.

King Priam raises his hands, his wrists like twigs, his face mournful, but he's got that magic touch of a king. Everyone falls silent. "Let's examine the matter," he pipes in an old man's voice.

Then I see Cassandra, coming down beside Laocoon's crowd. "Don't touch it! Get rid of it!" she yells. "It will destroy the city!"

But when Aeneas laughs, everyone joins him. "It's just a pile of sticks, Cassie!"

Several people start hitting the horse again, making it shiver like a big drum.

Laocoon raises his arms to demand silence. It sounds to me like Laocoon says, "Ween ye, blind hoddypecks, it contains some Greekish navy," but the crowd was still making lots of noise.

His clinging sons look out wide-eyed from behind their father's back. Laocoon's voice is booming. "How can you trust the Greeks?" Poseidon's priest asks, staring down Aeneas but not looking at King Priam.

The laughter and banging stops.

Leo and I have relaxed. With the Greeks gone there seems to be no need to watch the plain any longer. Mistake. But I don't know what we could have done about what happened next anyway.

"Oh, look," says someone by the gate, pointing towards where the Greek ships used to be. Huge winding shapes were swimming across the land. "Big snakes."

Later, after the snakes have slithered away, a smaller crowd reforms around the horse and the three mangled bodies of Laocoon and his two sons. They look like something the butcher throws to the dogs at the end of a hard week, but smell worse, like shit and rotten meat. Even though we both would have preferred to be on the battlefield without weapons than do this disgusting chore, Leo and I help scoop the bodies onto shields to take back to the family. I always hate the moment that the wails begin; it's almost worse waiting for the wails than hearing them.

Many of the onlookers are inside the gates again, wet patches where they had been standing. Cassandra leads a shocked King Priam away with daughterly concern. Aeneas is stunned. He rubs his arm and says, "That was very unexpected," first looking at the bodies, then speculatively towards the sea.

I don't like being down here, off the wall, now. "Where did the snakes go?"

One of our old soldiers, out of breath from running, holds a corner of the shield while I lift the smallest boy onto it. He says, "They crawled straight up into Athena's temple, circled round the statue, then vanished into a hole in the ground."

"What should we do with the horse, Lord Aeneas?" one of our soldiers asks.

Aeneas doesn't answer, still distracted. "I must go," he says and strides up the hill towards the palace.

With the royals scared off and the priest mangled, we don't know what to do. Leo, myself and two other soldiers take the bodies of Laocoon and his sons up to his temple. The women come pouring out, screaming.

You think they'd be used to death by now. But even I felt a wrench when they hovered over the horrible, bloated faces of the little boys.

We miss the arrival of Sinon, the wretched Greek, left behind by his countrymen for his treasonous attitudes. He's spitting angry at his fellow Greeks. He is taken to good King Priam and explains everything, wanting revenge on Greeks for the planning to sacrifice him for good winds.

King Priam finally gets out of him that the big horse is an offering to Athena to appease her for what Odysseus did to her temple in the city when he crept in one night. These Greeks have to be apologizing all

the time for their hubris.

Foolish with victory, Leo and I join the others in tearing down the gate instead of sleeping during the day. We want the goddess's horse inside the city with us to help us celebrate the end of the ten long years of war. Athena must be smiling on us because of what Odysseus did.

I don't feel tired. I feel happy. Up there on the gate, banging away at the lintel stone with a hammer, I can see to the palace windows. Cassandra's window, particularly. There stands Cassandra, not sewing with her mother, the queen. Not celebrating with the rest of the court.

She is watching.

I think she is watching me.

The little stone harbor at Sigeum smelled of fish, brine, dank seaweed, rope, and wood. Homer could feel the change from beach to stones underfoot but the light was bright here, too bright, making him screw up his face against the dazzle. This had been the location of the Greek camp during the Trojan war but Homer felt no resonances here. It was too used; occupied by the present.

"Don't let the lad walk so close the edge!" his mother scolded.

His father grasped Homer's arm. "Stand there!" he said. "Don't go wandering. We've got to find the boat's governor. It'll be easier for us to leave you here."

"Sit down," said his mother, nudging his shoulder down. "Less likely to wander on your bottom than on your feet."

Homer sat, his ankles scraping on the uneven stones as he crossed his legs.

"Don't move!" his mother said again. Then she called for her younger children to follow.

Their footsteps faded. Homer listened to the slap of the water and the gentle tap of a boat tied below him against the harbor wall. Sea birds shrieked high above, waiting for the fishermen to return. A big shape just offshore was probably the ship his family wanted to board for their return journey to Smyrna. For a few minutes, he enjoyed the peace. He stretched out to sunbathe and found a large pebble under his back. He held it close to his eyes, almost touching his lashes, and could see fine grey textures, even a little sparkle.

Ah, beauty, he thought in wonder.

Then he heard footsteps again.

"He looks a bit simple, that's all," a man's voice said. "You're not drunk, are you, young man?"

Homer sat up and tried to face the voice but he couldn't sort it out from the wooden posts surrounding the harbor. "No," he said. I'm not simple, either, he thought, but held his tongue.

A woman's voice murmured, accompanied by the sound of a baby's cooing.

Homer sat, frozen by the arrival of strangers. He always hated the moment when they noticed that something was wrong with him.

They didn't seem interested in him. The man and woman spoke in low voices together in a fragmented way, unable to keep a conversation going. Even the baby remained quiet. Then the woman started to cry. His presence forgotten, Homer might as well have been a harbor statue.

"How can you leave us now!" she said. "You are my only family now. I'll have nothing, no one, except our son."

Homer's hearing grew sharper. He remained absolutely still, fastened on the voices at his back.

"You know I have to go, love," the man said defensively. "If I stay, you won't have any honor anyway. Look, I understand how hard this is for you. But you'll be proud of me once I've done my duty. Everything will be different." He seemed to try to sound soothing, almost light-hearted.

"Yes, I'm sure it will be different!" she said angrily in a choked voice.

Although the words paused, the sounds didn't. Homer imagined the scene he heard-the man walking away in vexation, the wife hanging her head and weeping freely, the baby whimpering.

With a shiver, Homer remembered the sound of the Trojan women on the ruins.

Then the sound of the man's feet in the coarse sand returned. "The governor and some people are coming. Perhaps you should go. It will be less painful, eh?"

Her outpouring didn't ease but changed tone from anger to sadness.

"Look, go home, love," the husband said. "Work hard. Be a good wife and mother. I will come home as soon as I am able. Yes?"

She murmured something Homer couldn't catch.

"Let me say good-bye to my boy," the man said.

The baby wailed, almost as if frightened of his father.

But the man laughed and said, "They will all say, 'Here is a better man than his father. He makes his mother proud!' Be strong, son."

All three of them wept, then the man croaked, "Go, love! Now!"

Homer didn't dare to move in the small silence; the woman's light footsteps hurried up towards town. He felt hot with someone else's grief. If only he had a sweet-voiced wife like that! He would never leave her! But

for honor... well, for honor... a sigh shuddered out of him.

"I'll never have a wife anyway, he thought. Who would have me?"

Then came the voices of his own family and of others, including a thick Halicarnassan accent, also the sound of a man breathing heavily as if ill or very fat, then a few others who were perhaps sailors and other passengers. Obviously, the Halicarnassan barked out orders here and there.

"Oh, and here's our son, gov'nor," Homer's mother was saying, panting as if the whole party had been moving too quickly for her. "He's no trouble, really, except that he can't see beyond a finger-length. We'll have to make sure he doesn't tumble overboard."

Homer stood and faced the voices, dimly perceiving the mass of movement along the beach towards him. Then he was plucked up in the crowd by his mother's grip (something he knew well) and guided down the rope ladder with cautions and advice diving all around him like seagulls on a scrap. Once the small boat was loaded with people, they began to row out towards the ship in the offing.

Homer, squeezed behind his father and the heavily-breathing passenger, felt strange ankles and shins pressed up against his. He could hear his little sister's and brother's delighted laughter at the other end of the boat but couldn't quite hear their observations. The wind strengthened and cooled as they moved offshore, blowing his mother's shushing of the younger ones back on everyone else. Two rowers grunted, four oars dipped and lifted, dipped and lifted, while the governor stood (even Homer could see him), perhaps using the long pole.

"What do you see?" Homer finally asked his father.

"It's the same ship we came up on," his father said. "Black-hulled with great white sails. The old governor's not on this journey."

Homer wanted to ask if there was a sad-looking man on the boat with them but didn't dare. The heavy breather next to him worried him. Was the illness catching? he wondered.

"Can't you see, boy?" the breather whispered.

"No," Homer said, his face pointed straight forward.

"But you have your wits, don't you?" the man said.

Homer shifted uncomfortably.

"Are you nervous on the sea?" the breather whispered. It seemed to be his normal voice.

"Not now," Homer said, lifting his face. "Hesiod says this is the time for sailing, in the fifty days after the solstice."

"Hesiod!" The breather's voice was almost above a whisper. Then he coughed. "So, the lad is a scholar."

Homer dug a finger into his father's ribs. No doubt his dad had been daydreaming, but Homer didn't want to talk to this man alone. "I'm sorry, what did you say?" asked Homer's father, leaning across Homer's lap.

"Is your lad a scholar?" the man breathed. "He knows of Hesiod."

"No. Oh, he listens to all the singers in Smyrna and his head is full of odd things. There's not much else for someone like him to do, is there? He's useless. We don't know what to do with him now he's nearly a man. Can't do a day's work of any kind."

"I know all of Mimnermos's poem of Smyrna," Homer boasted tentatively. "I didn't used to like his *Nanno* but I do now."

"Ah, you're growing old enough to be romantic, eh, lad?"

Homer felt himself blush.

"I was a singer." The whisper was low.

Homer turned his face towards the heavy-breather, interested.

"I sang in Smyrna a few years ago."

"Perhaps I heard you."

"Yes... They call me Keleuthetis. I usually sing of Theseus or Achilles."

"I remember that! It was Achilles in Smyrna." Homer remembered a honey voice and a nimble lyre. Of course, the Trojan War songs were always his favorites.

"Good lad," Keleuthetis almost chuckled.

"You don't sing anymore?" Homer asked.

His father nudged him.

"If you could see me, you would know why," the man said, hissing out the whisper this time. "I'm being murdered by my own body. A great tumor on my neck. Going home to Knossos to die."

Shocked and embarrassed, Homer made himself small on the boat's bench.

"I had a boy to follow me, but he died of fever last year," Keleuthetis whispered sadly.

One question formed in Homer's mind. Then another. Then his mind began to rain with questions, as if Zeus himself had sent a thundershower of thoughts. But Homer kept them to himself with his parents so close to hand. Besides, they were about to board the black-hulled ship; he could hear the sails flapping in the wind, the governor calling to the sailors there.

Wearing broad-brimmed hats to keep off the hot sun, Keleuthetis and Homer sat on boxes on the deck. His parents were on the other side of the ship somewhere, apparently relieved that Homer had found someone to keep him occupied. Sometimes the boxes shifted under them with the pitch, roll, or yaw of their journey, then shifted back again; Homer hung on tenaciously as he talked with Keleuthetis about singing, curious about how the singers could remember so many words.

The sick man told Homer the value of composing in circular thoughts, one of the aids to memory. "And I always call someone by the same name. If you have a 'glad-hearted Homer,' for instance, he's 'glad-hearted' even when he's just lost his best friend or is being killed." Keleuthetis panted with the effort of talking.

"Every time?" asked Homer doubtfully. He didn't like some of the epithets that Keleuthetis chose and had a secret store of his own. Especially for the Trojans, which Homer always felt were neglected by the traditional singers.

"I don't want to be pausing and trying to remember if this is where you call him 'dour-faced,' do I?"

"I see." Homer scratched his chin thoughtfully. "So you have to think up names that are flexible, that could do in many situations."

After a pause, Keleuthetis said, "You're a quick one." He heaved out a sigh, almost of relief. Then he said, "You want to be a singer, don't you? I will buy you from your parents if you like."

Homer hadn't dared say it himself. But when Keleuthetis said those words, he felt as full as a spring lake and as light as sunshine. He couldn't speak other than to say, "Oh, yes."

A deep voice from behind them said, "What's the matter? Sailors too hairy for you?"

"Sailors," Keleuthetis said dismissively. Then in a different tone, "I don't have much time left, lad. Would you be willing to stay with me to the end?"

"Yes," Homer said.

"Have one of your little sisters fetch my lyre. We'll begin."

The boy. That boy was back.

Schliemann was down in a trench, below the edge of a wall. Sophia had managed to distract the beady-eyed Turkish museum officials while Schliemann uncovered another twenty or so golden sewing needles. The workers dug up on the hill, working two different trenches, while a third party down on the plain still searched for the two fabled springs—one hot, one cold—outside the walls of the city. So far the many springs they'd measured in the plain of the Küçük Menderes Çayı, the ancient River Scamander, were tepid all year round.

The boy, of whom he caught a fleeting glimpse from the trench, was dressed in a tunic such as some of the Greeks wore but was barefooted and without leggings, even in this chilly autumn weather. He was also clumsy; Schliemann swore that he looked as if he had fallen off a wall.

Schliemann scrambled up. Where was the boy now?

The nearest workmen were thumb-size at this distance, passing buckets of soil hand to hand along a chain then, just beyond, Sophia in her black and red dress, apparently explaining something to one of the Turkish museum officials, waving her arm about expressively. He felt a sudden pang of love for her and sighed with regret at his advancing years and endless illnesses.

He tugged at his ear. The constant low buzz was there, now with a sort of high piping over it, like a double flute. But he knew that his own worsening ears produced the music from nowhere.

When I'm back in Athens, he thought, I will have them looked at again.

Earlier in the day, here, workmen had come upon an area of ash and charred wood. Immediately, but with an air of nonchalance, Schliemann sent them off to an earlier dig. Ashes... perhaps from the Sack of Troy, the real *Trojan War* Troy itself? The burning towers of Ilium? A night of chaos and death such as the ancient world had never seen.

The boy suddenly appeared again, ran across the uncovered wall, then jumped out of sight.

Schliemann frowned. Is it the same one? This one looks younger than the previous lad.

"Boy!" he yelled in Greek, Turkish, and then French for good measure. He climbed the steps and looked down the other side of the wall, most of it still under centuries of accumulated earth. Later, he would dig outside this enclosure.

The boy's head passed the turn in the wall, just visible.

"You there! Stop!" Vexed, Schliemann found his native German pouring out. In his ears, the noise rose; the wind was fierce today but Schliemann heard nothing of it. He chased him down to the corner of the wall that they had passed by in yesterday's digging.

Where's that boy? Schliemann ground his teeth with earache and irritation.

Something glittered in the jumbled wall of soil. Schliemann stopped, dropped to his knees to get a closer look. Here, too, were ashes. Why hadn't that been spotted yesterday? Bad light?

He reached for the green-flecked thing.

I feel my guts go cold as a stonemason's butt in Boeotia in the month of Aristogeton when the messenger announces, "You are to report to the palace immediately."

Leo is asleep on the floor where we soldiers are celebrating. I'm not quite drunk enough. No one else hears my summons, they carry on drinking and shouting jokes and resolutions about what they are going to do tomorrow, now that peace has come.

The palace!

My first thought is that Lord Aeneas has seen my face too often in the wrong places since last night. Then I think I might be needed for special guard duty. Or invited by King Priam to royal celebrations. Or to receive bad news about my family.

I follow the messenger through the alleys of the city; from nearly every window there is the sound of partying, a lot of it in bed. Trojan men and women are groaning with joy.

However, the palace is strangely dark. Just about the time I work out that the unlit windows means everyone is in the Great Hall and nowhere else, the messenger who brought me leads me further inside. I can hear laughter and singing-the winners' song already being composed-and smell the free flow of wine and warm fires. But we turn away from all that down a darker corridor.

The messenger shows me a door, then leaves. I knock, wary.

Cassandra opens the door to what I recognize as her bedchamber. Fully dressed in the finest woven gown edged with golden and scarlet threads, her dark hair loose, her eyes wide with fear, she's got me again. I can't help it. All she ever has to do is to look at me and I'm hers.

"Prince of Phrygia," she says, in formal greeting, stepping back slightly.

I remain where I am. "Princess of Troy," I answer.

"Son of Mygdon." Her voice softens.

"Daughter of Priam."

"Coroebus."

"Hello, Cassandra," I say.

She reaches forward and takes my wrist, pulling me into the room. Then she shuts the door. "Help me," she says.

"What's the matter?"

"We're all in terrible danger." Her eyes fill with tears.

"Cassie... the Greeks are gone. I saw their ships sailing away."

"Oh, you *too*," she says impatiently. "The curse is certainly thorough." Running her hand through her hair in exasperation, she turns away.

"What can I do anyway?" I ask her, shrugging.

"Set the giant horse alight! Now!" Her eyes are mad.

"But... but the horse belongs to the goddess! Surely not!" I am shocked.

"Then I will do it myself!"

"You can't! The crowd will rip you to pieces! The giant horse means victory. Peace!" I can't believe she's so foolish.

She looks up at me. Close. Intently. Then she just shakes her head, crying, unable to say anything.

"Cassie," I say, holding out my hand.

Just like that, she comes to me and presses her face into my neck. She is sobbing so that her words are all broken up. "Everything has already happened in my head. I can't change it. Of course. I can't."

I hold her until she is calmer. It feels good to be this close to her. Then she pulls away towards the window, picks up a fine cloth from a small table and wipes her face with it, moaning a little, then sighing. "Please, Coro. Let's talk. I'm so filled with dread. You can distract me. Sit down."

I look around and move to a three-legged stool which is too short for me but there is nowhere else except the bed. My knees stick up higher than my elbows. Cassandra makes this sort of brave-effort face that women do when things aren't going their way. She sits on the window ledge.

"Do you remember when we first met?" she asks me in a falsely cheerful voice.

I don't want to let her know that I've thought of it more and more over the years, growing in me as indestructibly as a healthy tree. "Wasn't that at my father's palace?" I say casually.

Cassandra nods, her smile flickering. "I thought of you often after that. Then... Apollo..."

I shrug and inspect my knees.

"Then I knew that we could never marry. We were a likely match, though, don't you think?"

"I had thought so," I say. My voice isn't as strong as it should be. I am growing uncomfortable. The wine I drank earlier is having its effect as I sit still, growing hot and muddled. Why couldn't we marry? I wonder.

"Coro," she says, as if she had just thought of something.

I look over at her. "Yes, Cassie?"

"Before I am in torment... Before I am used by those I don't want... I want to have..." She now has this really weird expression, longing like I've never seen her have before. "I want to know how it would have been."

"What's that, Cassie?" I say. But I know. I can smell it now.
She rises, come to me, puts her hands in my hair gently.
Yes.

"You can't sing about the Trojans," Keleuthetis said. He was so irritated that his voice was almost above a whisper. "The Greeks are the heroes. We are Greeks. What language is this-coming from your own mouth? How can you sing of barbarians?"

Homer frowns to the night air.

"What makes you even *think* such a thing?" his tutor persisted.

"Shush, you two!" the ship's governor hissed in the dark.

Their ship had been hiding from pirates on the western coast of Lesbos since afternoon. Homer's family was in a terrified heap beside him but somehow he wasn't afraid. He had just found the future and a tub full of pirates wasn't going to shake his confidence in it. Keleuthetis showed no fear for the opposite reason-his future had nearly expired anyway.

Homer closed his eyes as if to dream. For several nights now, since his visit to the ruins of Troy, he had been haunted by the voices he had heard.

The wailing women of Troy.

"I don't want to sing *just* of the Trojans, but of both sides. Even in your song of Achilles," Homer whispered, "you tell about Achilles sharing a meal with Priam when he came to pay the ransom for Hector's body."

"Yes," Keleuthetis said impatiently. "But-"

"The Trojans must have been mighty to hold off the Greeks for *ten* years. Worthy opponents."

"Okay. You're a smart-assed brat, Homer."

"I've never had much to do except think."

"That's true," said his mother in a startlingly loud voice from the nearby darkness.

"Shh!" said the governor.

They remained quiet for a time. All around him were warm people. Homer could hear the creak of timbers, and the water licking the sides of the ship where it was held in place with the anchor-stone. He could hear the wind in the trees and the far voices of people on Lesbos across the quiet stretch of water. He could hear the soft sleep-breathing of his sister and brother and low murmurs among the sailors.

Homer dreamed a dream for a few moments as he lay awake. It seemed to pour into him from the cool heavens above.

"My master," Homer said respectfully, trying to soften Keleuthetis's annoyance. "I want to sing about the people *doing* the deeds, not just the deeds."

Keleuthetis didn't reply, as if considering.

"Imagine Hector," Homer said tentatively. "Hector the..." Homer searched for a workable handle for the greatest of the Trojan heroes. Something valiant. Something he *is* all the time, happy or sad. "Hector, the Breaker of Horses. He has just come back from fighting where the battle hasn't favored them. The Trojan soldiers aren't like regular soldiers because they are at home, defending their city. Their wives and children are there. As he returns from battle, the women crowd around Hector for news of their husbands and sons but he is so sorry for the women that he just tells them to go pray. Then Hector goes to find his wife. Gentle Andromache's not at home, she's up on the citadel walls above the gate, because she had heard that things were going badly. He hurries through the streets back to the walls to look for her. She sees him first and is running towards him, their little baby in her arms. Hector smiles when he sees her but she's so fed up that she scolds him, 'Why do you have to fight? You'll leave me a widow and your son an orphan! Don't you love us?' Hector tells her that he must fight, especially when he thinks of her ending her days in slavery. If he must die fighting to prevent that, then he must. 'People will point you out as the wife of Hector, who was the bravest in the battles of Troy. "He defended his wife from slavery to his death," they will say.' When Hector tells her these things she knows she has to accept it. She smiles even though she weeps. And Hector, the Breaker of Horses, picks up little Astyanax to give him a cuddle. But his little son is frightened because Hector is wearing his terrible war helmet. He drops his little wheeled horse and cries with fear. Hector laughs. He holds him up and says, 'One day people will say that he was even braver and stronger than his father!' Then Hector tells Andromache to go back to her loom and her duties, to work hard and let the men fight because they must...."

Homer stopped.

A man sobbed several arms' lengths away.

Oh. He had forgotten that the young man from the beach was aboard. Embarrassed, he waited to be scolded for his impudence.

The governor failed to shush them.

The weeping young man managed to say, "I never heard a truer tale, lad," while mutterings of assent

passed through the sailors.

Homer smiles in the dark.

There is a long pause.

"Well?" says the governor.

Homer wonders who the governor is after now.

"Well, lad?" the governor said again.

"Me, sir?"

"Yes. So what happens next?"

I feel that I might be in a goddess's bed. I think that even if Priam himself were to walk into the room, I couldn't stir, being so solid with contentment. Cassandra is lazily brushing my arm, her head on my chest, her face pensive in the dim light of the bedside oil lamp.

Then I hear that sound again, the one that Leo and I heard on the wall. Digging. Many shovels hacking away at earth. It fills the room.

I sit up. "Cassie, do you hear that?" My heart is thudding hard.

"Yes," she says. "Sometimes I hear their voices." Languidly, she points up towards the ceiling by her doorway. "They've dug to about there now. They're digging at the front gate as well."

"Who?"

She shrugs. "It doesn't matter, Coro. Come back to me. You've got to go soon. Hold me before you go."

I am freezing cold. I snuggle down next to her again and kiss her; she is as tasty as the finest olives, as warm as solstice sun, as soft as blossoms. "I want to come back tomorrow night," I whisper to her. "And every night for the rest of my life."

A wince of pain shoots through her face. She touches my chin. "Okay," she says. "That's what I want, too."

But I see the dread in her eyes.

For the first time, I understand. She has a real sight, a god-given sight, most likely. Was this the revenge Apollo had taken because she hadn't wanted him? The air I share with her is tainted with fear, impending disaster. I feel its poison like lead in my blood.

"Will there be a tomorrow night?" I ask.

She parts her lips.

I put my fingers on that parting. I don't want the answer. She makes a kiss on my fingertips. We look deeply at each other for a moment. Above us, another spadeful of earth turns. My hairs all stand on end.

"We have to go now," she says. "We'll see each other again shortly, Coro."

We dress silently. I am trembling, sick-feeling, cold. But why must I go, I wonder? Like the other question, I'm not sure I want to know the answer—it's enough for now that Cassandra tells me to go. We move towards the door at the same time. Impulsively, I twist off the ring that my father, the king of Phrygia, gave me when I left for this war and press it into Cassandra's palm.

Her face is streaked with tears as she puts it on her finger. It looks too big on her slim hand.

"Tomorrow night," I say to her. "Goodnight, Cassie."

She smiles somehow and clings to me briefly, then lets me out of her door. The corridors are still empty, the sounds of revelry more worn and subdued than it had been when I entered.

I run, feeling pursued by the Fates; I run for the great wooden Horse.

The streets are quieter than they were before I went to the palace, the people now nearing exhaustion from drinking, eating, laughing, and lovemaking. Leo is still fast asleep on the floor where I left him; when I shake him, he rouses blearily and follows me without comprehension but also without question. I can still feel Cassandra on my skin as we trot through the narrow alleys towards the gate, where the Horse stands, its head above the rooftops. The black sky and stars say it's late but not yet near morning. Leo and I sit in a sheltered nook in the wall near the Horse and the Scaean Gate, where we'd put up a flimsy barricade after tearing down the doors to let the Horse in.

Leo is drunker and sleepier than me. Before I can even hint at what I've been up to, his head lolls to one side and he snores, so I polish off the rest of the not-very-diluted wine in the skin he had been carrying, which makes me completely blotto. I think I'm awake, but even while my eyes are wide open, someone steps on my face, squashing my nose, mashing my lips into my teeth, twisting a burn on my cheekbone.

But no one is there.

I must be dreaming, fast asleep, but feeling drunkenly awake.

Then the dream takes a strange, unsettling turn.

Some of our soldiers (and some of their ladies) have chosen to sleep between the hooves of the horse. No one stirs in their sleep but I hear a rustling, scrabbling sound.

Then a door opens in the belly of the Horse.

A voice comes out of it, a voice that all of us who have fought in the battles on the plain below know well, belonging to Odysseus the trickster.

"Echion, for god's sake, use the rope, you idiot!" the Ithacan says.

A dark man-shape falls out of the door, not wearing his shield but clutching it under his arm. For a second, there's a pale flash of terrified face in the predawn gloom. Then he falls on his head and lies crumpled on the ground, his neck obviously broken.

Then, in my dream, more Greeks come sliding down a rope, swords and shields ready, slicing into our men who are just coming around from sleep. Odysseus with his red hair sticking out from his helmet. Then Little Aias and Menelaus. The women run, screeching, drenched in the blood of the men they had been cuddling.

No one sees me or Leo in our narrow spot. But this is *my* dream, isn't it?

Out drops a newcomer to the Greek side. Neoptolemos. I hadn't seen him up close before but, minus the nobility of expression, he's the spitting image of his dad, Achilles.

He has the eyes of a madman.

The sounds of screaming and battle rise along the paths up the hill where the Greeks have swarmed. I smell fresh smoke. Some of the Greeks from the Horse's belly start tearing down the barricade at the gate. The gate swings wide open; Greeks come trotting in like a herd of uncertain stallions.

This is a stupid dream. I try to wake up.

There's no difference between waking and dreaming.

This is real.

I stand up, give Leo a waking nudge with my foot. We'd left our helmets and weapons up on the walls yesterday while we worked on the gate. So unarmed, I don't know what to do. The men who dropped out of the horse's belly are still staggering, as if having been cramped inside has weakened their legs. It would be a good time to pick them off, if I had a proper weapon.

Leo and I see the fat wife of the bronzesmith in her nightie at a doorway, her lips moving and her eyes wide. We rush her back inside and look for her husband's weapons-I think we lost the bronzesmith in battle a few weeks ago. Leo finds an unimpressive helmet and a sword. The wife brings out an Illyrian javelin (front-heavy) and a shield (too light) for me from the hearth corner.

Outside, we can hear what seems like thousands of Greek voices, swarming from the gate, past the door, and spreading into the town.

Leo kills an intruding Greek in the widow's doorway. She gibbers; as we leave, we hear her drop the bar across her door.

I advance towards the Horse, where Neoptolemos is shouting and waving his sword.

I'm scared. But it's battle and I'm a soldier so I run at him, trying to think of the glory of defeating Achilles's son. Neoptolemos has the strength of an ox, and he knocks me to the ground. He looks me over briefly, especially at the measly bronzesmith's shield, then stalks off.

"*Priam!*" he shouts. "I'm coming for you!"

I dust myself off. "Snob," I mutter to his back. But without better gear, I don't want to give him my royal credentials.

He's going the long way if he's looking for King Priam. No way am I going to let that mad dog attack the king; this is probably what Cassandra knew I must do. Leo is gone and I am the only live Trojan in sight. Another pair of feet emerge from the horse's belly door just as I duck away from the corpses around the hooves, running through the alleys, up towards the palace.

Turned on their head, the celebrations carry on in nightmarish flavor. I hear the sound of swords on shields, so at least *someone* was fighting back already. No matter where I look, Greeks run down narrow roads, climb through windows, crawl out of cellars.

I pass a house where one of our soldiers (it's the olive oil merchant's son-I fought by his side only four or five days ago) has been pushed out the window, his throat cut, blood streaking down the wall from the window. From inside I hear a woman, groaning now with anger and shame, a Greek soldier shouting with pleasure.

Screaming. A Greek tries to pull a baby from a young woman's arms. She slaps at him with her free hand. Two houses down, a big gout of flame whooshes out a window, lighting the whole road. The Greek is distracted by the sight; I stick the javelin in his ear, twist it out, then keep going. I hear the sweet sound of the Greek hitting the paving stones and the slap of the woman's sandals running away.

I duck through the streets, climb over low walls, seeing the bodies of my fellow soldiers, unarmed and unprepared. Women are crying out everywhere; men are shouting; houses are burning. Two Greek soldiers walk casually, sharing a captured loaf of bread. I hide when necessary, saving myself for the defense of the palace, impatient that it's taking me so long to get back.

A small person and a larger, strange form scurry down one of paths behind the houses. Instinctively, I know they are not Greeks. We pass, recognizing each other in the pallid daylight.

It's Aeneas, hooded, carrying his father on his back with his young son, Ascanius. Aeneas says nothing to me, but gives me a guilt-stricken glance. He is on the run, saving his family for better things than the defense of Troy.

Zeus help us.

I turn a corner and the place is full of arrows in full flight. I jump back. Don't know if they are theirs or ours; don't want to be killed by *either* side.

When I reach the palace, I see Hector's wife Andromache at the gates. She clutches little Astyanax so tightly he is struggling against her, but her gaze is down the road. She sees me and rushes to me, "Prince Coroebus, the King went to Zeus's temple, but look-that bloodthirsty Greek is dragging him back up here."

"Where's Cassandra?" I ask.

"At the temple," she says. She points again. "Help the king!" she commands.

Neoptolemos pulls Priam's beard, sword at his ribs. I can hear the old king moaning and weeping. "I should have let your father kill me when I went to ask for my son's body! He was a noble soul, your father! You are a pig!"

"Shut up about my father!" Neoptolemos shouts.

I run for him, raising my javelin, but he's got Priam in such a hold that I can't see a way to hack at him just yet.

"You're less than a pig," Priam shouts. Then he howls when his beard is given a yank. I see now that Priam's arm has been cut and is dripping blood everywhere.

"You again!" Neoptolemos laughs when he sees me. "You aren't even kitted up for a fight," he says scornfully.

"You would rather wrestle with an old man?" I say.

"A king is always a prize."

"I'm the son of the King of Phrygia," I say. "Fight me!"

"Take my helmet," Priam says to me. "I'm done. I want to die now."

But I can't get near him.

The two of them are struggling in a sort of dance. I don't think the son of Achilles expected the old king to be so strong. I ready my javelin but can't find the moment. Then Priam sees his daughter-in-law just inside the palace gates.

"Andromache, go!" he bellows in royal command.

"Andromache? Wife of Hector?" I see that gleam in Neoptolemos's eye. Lust. But he proves it a deep and twisted lust. He is bored with Priam so thrusts his sword into his ribs and drops him, then pulls the dripping sword out. Neoptolemos is accurate; Priam hardly makes a sound.

Grief bites me; he was a good and noble king and a guest-friend of my father. Seeing his eyes dull and sightless already, I removed his helmet and put it on my own head and take his sword.

"Fight me now," I call out.

But Neoptolemos lurches towards Andromache. I think for a moment that this guy is too cowardly to fight, but I soon realize that I haven't had a glimpse of his madness. He snatches baby Astyanax away from her, holding the child by his ankle, then begins to swing him. It is like some dreadful playful moment as a father or uncle might do with a tiny son, whirling him round, grinning, even chuckling.

Then he lets go.

Astyanax is silent as he flies over the wall of the palace, down the cliff.

Andromache takes in a breath, then sits down, her eyes wide with shock.

I am stunned for a moment, watching this monster. Then I come to my senses and move in to attack. Still several paces from each other, we both raise our swords, his bloodied.

Then, like a flooding river bursting its banks, a stream of palace dogs, certainly possessed, bound between us. They snarl and snap and bark, leaping onto the body of Priam and tearing at the dead king with their teeth. Even Neoptolemos looks horrified.

Then I know for certain that the gods are against us.

With a cold dread, I suddenly remember Cassie's words on the wall the other night. About defending her when the animal's belly opens.

I turn and run.

I couldn't save your father, Cassie, I say in my mind over and over as I run for the temple.

Flames everywhere. People yelling in twelve languages. I see one of our guys throwing a paving block down on a Greek, hear the crunch of armor. The block bounces and the Greek is still. But then a Greek arrow finds its way up to the Trojan and he falls back inside. I see a troop of shadows, some of them only knee-high, guided by a reassuring voice saying, "This way, this way, no need to hurry. Don't be frightened."

Sure, no need to panic. The world has filled up with murdering Greeks.

Confronted by a Greek, one I remember seeing in battle before, I am too angry to do anything but to cut

him open and keep going. My shoulder bleeds from the wound this Greek gave me. All around me, the mayhem is worse. The women are now naked, the contents of houses spilled onto the roads and alleys. At least half our buildings are on fire. I see Odysseus on a rooftop, as if searching for an untouched corner of the city, unmistakable for his ginger hair and beard, broad-shouldered yet small and wiry.

I couldn't save your father, Cassie.

I run.

Oh, gods, why have you abandoned us?

Rage roars out of my throat and I shake my sword at the rooftop behind me where Odysseus the trickster stands.

When I am close enough to have a view of Athena's temple, I see a struggle between man and goddess. It is Little Aias the Lokrian, a small but strong man whom I knew from battle, apparently pulling at Athena's statue. His bottom is bare, even though he still wears his breastplate and greaves. Shield slung over his shoulder, sword stuck through the leather thongs behind, he doesn't have fighting on his mind.

Then I realize that in the center is Cassandra. Her gown has been shredded away from her shoulders, hanging from her belt. She clings to the goddess, as a frightened child to her mother. "Dear goddess, help me. Please help me! I don't want to go! Let Agamemnon's blood spill without me!"

"Let her go!" I shout, but I'm still too far away.

Little Aias gives such a heave that the statue breaks in Cassandra's arms and they both tumble to the ground. She clings to the goddess's head, broken off in her arms. At the moment that Cassandra sees me coming to help, Little Aias rolls onto her and bites her breast savagely. I can hear him growling even at a distance.

I run, sword high.

Then an arrow hits his leg. He half-rises and looks over his shoulder. Another arrow thuds into his neck. He slumps.

I look to the side. It's Leo. He's got a Parthian bow and arrows that he's picked up from somewhere. He staggers towards me. I see he's got wounds all over. I realize that I, too, am sticky with blood running from my shoulder.

Cassie, Leo, and I come together, our arms around each other, laughing and weeping at the same time. A little victory celebration. I want to kiss both of them.

"Coro, we're forming up at the theatre. Pass the word and meet me there," Leo says and trots away, grimacing and limping.

Then Little Aias stirs.

"Cassie, run. Find a safe place!" I say.

She gestures at the temple. "This is the goddess's sanctuary! If not here, where can I go?"

"Go back to the palace with the other women. I'll be there soon."

She looks at me. Deeply, as she does. But there is still something scary in her eyes. "They will sing of all this forever, Coro."

"Cassie..."

She kisses me and walks away, head down.

Everything is on fire. It is bright enough to see about five dead Trojans for each dead Greek. The numbers are against us.

I see a big mob-fight in the marketplace ahead. I don't know which end is ours or if we even have an end. I run across a side alley, through a courtyard, up over a wall, throwing all my gear down before me, then picking it up again and coming out on the main street. I can see the Horse way down there, burning by the bigger fires.

I'm out of breath.

People line the roofs of burning houses, going out tough. They throw down paving stones and tiles on the heads of the fight below, probably hitting as many Trojans as Greeks. Two guys push with wooden bars and drop a whole section of roof on the road.

I see some Cretan helmets, mostly guys fighting on our side, headed towards the theatre. I follow.

As I pass an alley, someone sticks a sword in my ribs.

This has happened to me before; after a battle the slave pours vinegar in it, binds us up to heal in a week or two.

He pulls his sword out which hurts even more. I turn to face him, Priam's sword and helmet suddenly feeling too heavy, weighing me down.

It's Neoptolemos. He's grinning. "Young mercenary jerk," he taunts.

I slice at him, hating him. "Killed all the babies and old men?" I ask. "Now ready for a real fight?"

I hear a rumble. With another thrust, I cut into his arm. But he's looking over my shoulder, stepping back.

Suddenly, I'm hit, harder and heavier than ever before, thrown to the ground, pinned flat, one arm under

me, buried in a broken wall.

Achilles's son is over me, tugging on my helmet. Then he looks around, as if he's heard or seen something. "You're not going anywhere. I'll come back for that helmet."

I can't move. I can't see where he's gone. I can hear his voice, "Line the Trojans up!" he shouts. "Send them to me! Neoptolemos will kill them all!"

"Come back, you big bully," I say, trying hard to push myself out. I can't move my legs at all and one arm only a fraction.

I'm exhausted. I can see a little of what's going on. I see Greeks kill an awful lot of Trojans, then watch several Trojans take what seems a long time to stick enough spears and swords in one Greek to kill him. No one hears me call.

After a while, the fighting moves somewhere else.

The wall starts to feel like a pleasant, peaceful bath, but grows colder and colder. The light of the flames melts into grey daylight. Smoke and sparks drift. Sometimes I'm asleep, sometimes not. A kid toddles by, stops, sucking on a date candy, stares at me with big eyes, then wanders away. I don't even try to speak.

There is an old man leaning over me. I have a hard time focusing on him. He has pieces of glass held by wire stuck on his face, in front of his eyes. He has an odd expression on his face. Enjoyment? Wonder? Not what's you'd expect from someone finding a wounded soldier. Maybe he's a simpleton.

"A little water?" I ask. I cough; it hurts to speak.

He looks at me, crouching, not moving. He has strange, tight-fitting clothes, is balding, without his chin whiskers. He frowns and sticks his finger in his ear and shakes his head violently, then stares at me again, wonder still in his eyes.

Then he reaches for the helmet.

I jerk my head back. "Leave it alone." He's with Neoptolemos, no doubt. "It doesn't belong to you."

I feel warm and calm somehow. I think about Cassie again as I see the man take the helmet away. It's crusted and battered, looks ancient.

Damned looters. Can't have a war anymore without

Once the helmet was tucked inside his jacket, he climbed up the bank of the trench for a security check. The workers must be on a lunch break, he thought, not spotting them anywhere. Sophia still chatted with the Turkish officials, but they had moved even further away. Not even a need to send her the signal.

He hurried to the hut, trying to stroll normally, as if the bulge in his jacket were merely the wind blowing his clothes. Even Dörpfeld was elsewhere; good.

Inside the hut, he held the helmet in his hands, turning it over and over in awe.

After all this time, after all the half-successful finds, the criticism, retractions, controversies, accusations. *Now, this, now.* He could hardly wait to tell the world.

For surely, certainly, *this* must be the helmet of the noble Priam!

"Are we nearly there?" Homer asked the children. He was puffed out after the long climb. It had been much easier when he was a boy.

"Dad, there are houses here," said his daughter.

"Houses?"

"Yeah, with people living in them," said his son, "There's woodsmoke and laundry and dogs. If we had gone a bit further around the hill we could have gone up some steps instead climbing in the dust."

Houses? Steps? Homer wondered.

"Hey, there's some old wall. Come on, let's go explore there."

Homer settled down on the ground, cross-legged. So, Troy was being resettled...Besides the voices of his two children, he could still hear the wind blowing in the elms and the olive trees, smell the almonds and sea breeze. The sun was warm on his skinny back.

The last time he had been here was just before he had taken up with Keleuthetis for that short apprenticeship. For years now, he had been singing of this hill, inspired by both the Greeks and the Trojans.

And those ghostly wails that had haunted the hill.

He waited, listening for the Trojan women.

For a long time, he sat on his own. Later, a man came to sit with him, chatting about who lived on the high city now. They talked about the war stories. The children played until the chilly dusk approached.

The voices from within had gone quiet. The war was over.