

## XI • ZEUS'S MESSAGE



Achilles sat on the sand by the Greek ships and played dice with his warriors. He ignored the distant sound of the roaring battle.

Ajax had a partner in battle, a bowman named Teucer. Ajax would shield him as he prepared his curved-horn bow, then move his shield aside for Teucer to find his target. *Instantly, an arrow hissed home to some Trojan throat, eye, or brain.*

They searched for Hector, the bravest Trojan in the field. Then Teucer saw him in the thick of battle. He bent his bow and aimed. His first arrow killed one of Priam's younger sons; the second killed Hector's charioteer.

Hector called another to take the reins and leapt to the ground. Picking up a lump of rock, he headed straight for Teucer, who had left the protection of Ajax's shield. Teucer was taking aim as Hector threw the jagged stone. It struck the archer's shoulder, numbing his arm. Hector moved in for the kill, but Ajax covered Teucer with his mighty shield. Two Greeks lifted the groaning bowman and carried him out of danger.

High on Olympus, the goddesses wept for the Greeks, who were being hurled back again. Hector ordered the Trojans to set fire to the ships when they reached them. Without their ships, the Greeks would be stranded.

Hera and Athena begged Zeus to give the Greeks a chance.

Zeus sent a message from where he lay resting as the sun set across the wine-dark sea. "Those goddesses know what will happen if they even think of interfering. Tell them," he told his messenger, "Hector will harass his enemies until Achilles fights. And that will not be until the Trojans are closing in on the ships, carrying burning torches. The Greeks will fight to protect Patroclus, Achilles' friend, who is not yet dead. Then, and only then, will Achilles join the battle."

The sun set crimson over the black sea. The Trojans withdrew, to the great relief of the Greeks, who had been longing for the sun to leave the sky. It vanished just in time.