

II • A TEST



The gods, like us, do not like arrogant men. Zeus was displeased, so that thunderous night he sent a false dream to Agamemnon. Troy would be theirs if they attacked immediately.

The High King awoke, put on his tunic and flowing cloak, slung a silver sword over his shoulder, took his staff of office, and walked among the ships where his army rested. He decided to test their courage. They were called to order by their commanders. Then Agamemnon spoke.

“Mighty Zeus is against us. I believe we should leave before the Trojan hordes press us into the sea.”

Hearing their commander-in-chief counsel retreat, many panicked. They cleared the runways, knocked away the props, and began to manhandle the ships into the sea.

Hera and Athena tried to stop this cowardly rush. Athena called Odysseus to help. He ran among the frantic men, shouting, hitting, cajoling. “Are you women? You flutter like doves with a rat in their dovecote. What are you? Cowards?”

As you would expect, they were shamed then. A troublemaking orator, Thersites, goaded the men and insulted Agamemnon, calling him a coward, an old woman, a thief. But Thersites had gone too far. To insult the position of High King was to insult the gods.

Odysseus struck the ranting orator, flung him aside—and the men cheered the rough warrior-king. They were determined to fight, to regain the honor they had so nearly thrown away.

Zeus smiled. The Greeks would be overeager—all but Achilles, who sulked by his ships. Agamemnon would pay for his meanness to Achilles. It was as Zeus had promised Thetis.

Behind them, within the city walls, battle drums sounded.

The Greeks hurried to get their armor and began to dress for war.

