1

For several minutes now Yellowhead had thought seriously of moving his right leg. Though the discomfort of his present position was almost unbearable, the move was not lightly to be undertaken. Not in this darkness, packed so close as they were. The man next to him (he could not remember who it was) might be asleep or might at least be tolerably comfortable, so that he would growl or even curse if you pressed or pushed him. A quarrel would be fatal; and some of the company were hot-tempered and loud-voiced enough. There were other things to avoid too. The place stank vilely; they had been shut up for hours with all their natural necessities (fears included) upon them. Some of them-skeery young fools-had vomited. But that had been when the whole thing moved, so there was some excuse; they had been rolled to and fro in their prison, left, right, up and (endlessly, sickeningly) down; worse than a storm at sea.

That had been hours ago. He wondered how many hours. It must be evening by now. The light which, at first, had come down to them through the sloping shaft at one end of the accursed contraption had long ago disappeared. They were in perfect blackness. The humming of insects had stopped. The stale air was beginning to be chilly. It must be well after sunset.

Cautiously he tried to extend his leg. It met at once hard muscle; defiantly hard muscle in the leg of someone who was wide awake and wouldn’t budge. So that line was no good. Yellowhead drew back his foot further and brought his knee up under his chin. It was not a position you could hold for long, but for a moment it was relief. Oh, if once they were out of this thing…

And when they were, what next? Plenty of chance to get the fidgets out of one’s limbs then. There might be two hours of pretty hard work; not more, he thought. That is, if everything went well. And after that? After that, he would find the Wicked Woman. He was store he would find her. It was known that she had been still alive within the last month. He’d get her all right. And he would do such things to her … Perhaps he would torture her. He told himself, but all in words, about the tortures.

He had to do it in words because no pictures of it would come into his mind. Perhaps he’d have her first; brutally, insolently, like an enemy and a conqueror; show her she was no more than any other captured girl. And she was no more than any girl. The pretence that she was somehow different, the endless flattery, was most likely what had sent her wrong to begin with. People were such fools.

Perhaps, when he had had her himself, he'd give her to the other prisoners to make sport for them. Excellent. But he'd pay the slaves out for touching her too. The picture of what he'd do to the slaves formed itself quite easily.

He had to extend his leg again, but now he found that the place where it had lain had somehow filled itself up. That other man had overflowed into it and Yellowhead was the worse off for his move. He twisted himself round a little so as to rest partly on his left hip. This too was something he had to thank the Wicked Woman for; it was on her account that they were all smothering in this den.

But he wouldn't torture her. He saw that was nonsense. Torture was all very well for getting information; it was no real use for revenge. All people under torture have the same face and make the same noise. You lose the person you hated. And it never makes them feel wicked. And she was young; only a girl. He could pity her. There were tears hi his eyes. Perhaps it would be better just to kill her. No rape, no punishments; just a solemn, stately, mournful, almost regretful killing, like a sacrifice.

But they had to get out first. The signal from outside ought to have come hours ago. Perhaps all the others, all round him hi the dark, were quite certain that something had gone wrong, and each was waiting for someone else to say it. There was no difficulty in thinking of things that might have gone wrong. He saw now that the whole plan had been crazy from the beginning. What was there to prevent their all being roasted alive where they sat? Why should their own friends from outside ever find them? Or find them alone and unguarded? How if no signal ever came and they never got out at all? They were in a deathtrap.

He dug his nails into his palms and shut off these thoughts by mere force. For everyone knew, and everyone had said before they got in, that these were the very thoughts that would come during the long wait, and that at all costs you must not think them; whatever else you pleased, but not those.

He started thinking about the Woman again. He let pictures rise in the dark, all kinds; clothed, naked, asleep, awake, drinking, dancing, nursing the child, laughing. A little spark of desire began to glow; the old, ever-renewed astonishment. He blew on it most deliberately. Nothing like lust for keeping fear at a distance and making time pass.

But nothing would make the time pass.

Hours later cramp woke him with a scream on his mouth. Instantly a hand was thrust beneath his chin, forcing his teeth shut. 'Quiet. Listen,' said several voices. For now at last there was a noise from outside; a tapping from beneath the floor. Oh Zeus, Zeus, make it to be real; don't let it be a dream. There it came again, five taps and then five and then two, just as they had arranged. The darkness around him was full of elbows

and knuckles. Everyone seemed to be moving. ‘Get back there,’ said someone. ‘Give us room.’ With a great wrenching sound the trap-door came up. A square of lesser darkness- almost, by comparison, of light -appeared at Yellowhead’s feet. The joy of mere seeing, of seeing anything at all, and the deep draughts he took of the clean, cold air, put everything else out of his mind for the moment. Someone beside him was paying a rope out through the opening.

‘Get on then,’ said a voice hi his ear.

He tried to, then gave it up. ‘I must unstiffen first,’ he said.

‘Then out of my way,’ said the voice. A burly figure thrust itself forward and went hand over hand down the rope and out of sight. Another and another followed. Yellowhead was almost the last.

And so, breathing deep and stretching their limbs, they all stood by the feet of the great wooden horse with the stars above them, and shivered a little in the cold night wind that blew up the narrow streets of Troy.

2

‘Steady, men,’ said Yellowhead Menelaus. ‘Don’t go inside yet. Get your breath.’ Then in a lower voice, ‘Get in the doorway, Eteoneus, and don’t let them in. We don’t want them to start looting yet.’

It was less than two hours since they had left the horse, and all had gone extremely well. They had had no difficulty in finding the Scaean gate. Once you are inside a city’s wall every unarmed enemy is either a guide or a dead man, and most choose to be the first. There was a guard at the gate, of course, but they had disposed of it quickly and, what was best of all, with very little noise. In twenty minutes they had got the gate open and the main army was pouring in. There had been no serious fighting till they reached the citadel. It had been lively enough there for a bit, but Yellowhead and his Spartans had suffered little, because Agamemnon had insisted on leading the van. Yellowhead had thought, all things considered, that this place should have been his own, for the whole war was in a sense his war, even if Agamemnon were the King of Kings and his elder brother. Once they were inside the outer circling wall of the citadel, the main body had set about the inner gate which was very strong, while Yellowhead and his party had been sent round to find a back way in. They had overpowered what defence they found there and now they stopped to pant and mop their faces and clean their swords and spear-blades.

This little porch opened on a stone platform circled by a wall that was only breast-high. Yellowhead leaned his elbow on it and looked down. He could not see the stars now. Troy was burning. The glorious fires, the loud manes and beards of flame

and the billows of smoke, blotted out the sky.

Beyond the city the whole countryside was lit up with the glare; you could see even the familiar and hated beach itself and the endless line of ships. Thank the gods, they would soon bid goodbye to that!

While they had been fighting he had never given Helen a thought and had been happy; he had felt himself once more a king and a soldier, and every decision he made had proved right. As the sweat dried, though he was thirsty as an oven and had a smarting little gash above his knee, some of the sweetness of victory began to come into his mind. Agamemnon no doubt would be called the City-Sacker. But Yellowhead had a notion that when the story reached the minstrels he himself would be the centre of it. The pith of the song would be how Menelaus, King of Sparta, had won back from the barbarians the most beautiful woman in the world. He did not yet know whether he would take her back to his bed or not, but he would certainly not kill her. Destroy a trophy like that?

A shiver reminded him that the men would be getting cold and that some might be losing their nerve. He thrust through the mass and went up the shallow steps to where Eteoneus was standing. ‘I’ll come here,’ he said. ‘You bring up the rear and chivvy them on.’ Then he raised his voice. ‘Now, friends,’ he said, ‘we’re going in. Keep together and keep your eyes open. There may be mopping up to do. And they’re probably holding some passage further in.’

He led them for a few paces under darkness past fat pillars and then out into a small court open to the sky-brilliantly lit at one moment as the flames shot up from some house collapsing in the outer city and then again almost totally dark. It was clearly slaves’ quarters. A chained dog, standing on its hind legs, barked at them with passionate hatred from one corner and there were piles of garbage. And then -v ‘Ah! Would you ?’ he cried. Armed men were pouring out of a doorway straight ahead. They were princes of the blood by the look of their armour, one of them little more than a child, and they had the look-Yellowhead had seen it before hi conquered towns - of men who are fighting to die rather than to kill. They are the most dangerous sort while they last. He lost three men there, but they got all the Trojans. Yellowhead bent down and finished off the boy who was still writhing like a damaged insect. Agamemnon had often told him that this was a waste of time, but he hated to see them wriggle.

The next court was different. There seemed to be much carved work on the walls, the pavement was of blue and white flagstones, and there was a pool in the middle. Female shapes, hard to see accurately in the dancing firelight, scattered away from them to left and right into the shadows, like rats when you come suddenly into a cellar. The old ones wailed in high, senseless voices as they hobbled. The girls screamed. His men were after them; as if terriers had been sent hi among the rats. Here and there a scream ended in a titter.

‘None of that,’ shouted Yellowhead. ‘You can have all the women you want tomorrow. Not now.’

A man close beside him had actually dropped his spear to have both hands free for the exploration of a little, dark sixteen-year-old who looked like an Egyptian. His fat lips were feeding on her face. Yellowhead fetched him one across the buttocks with the flat of his sword.

‘Let her go, with a curse on you,’ he said, ‘or I’ll cut your throat.’

‘Get on. Get on,’ shouted Eteoneus from behind. ‘Follow the King.’

Through an archway a new and steadier light appeared; lamplight. They came into a roofed place. It was extraordinarily still and they themselves became still as they entered it. The noise of the assault and the battering-ram at the main gate on the other side of the castle seemed to be coming from a great distance. The lamp flames were unshaken. The room was full of a sweet smell, you could smell the costliness of it. The floor was covered with soft stuff, dyed in crimson. There were cushions of silk piled upon couches of ivory; panels of ivory also on the walls and squares of jade brought from the end of the world. The room was of cedar and gilded beams. They were humiliated by the richness. There was nothing like this at Mycenae, let alone at Sparta; hardly perhaps at Cnossus. And each man thought, ‘And thus the barbarians have lived these ten years while we sweated and shivered in huts on the beach.’

‘It was time it ended,’ said Yellowhead to himself. He saw a great vase so perfect in shape that you would think it had grown like a flower, made of some translucent stuff he had never seen before. It stupefied him for a second. Then, hi retaliation, he drove at it as hard as he could with the butt-end of his spear and shattered it into a hundred tinkling and shining fragments. His men laughed. They began following his example - breaking, tearing. But it disgusted him when they did it.

‘Try what’s behind the doors,’ he said. There were many doors. From behind some of them they dragged or led the women out; not slaves but kings’ wives or daughters. The men attempted no foolery; they knew well enough these were reserved for their betters. And then- faces showed ghastly. There was a curtained doorway ahead. He swept the heavy, intricately embroidered, stuff aside and went in. Here was an inner, smaller, more exquisite room.

It was many-sided. Four very slender pillars held up the painted roof and between them hung a lamp that was a marvel of goldsmith’s work. Beneath it, seated with her back against one of the pillars, a woman, no longer young, sat with her distaff, spuming; as a great lady might sit in her own house a thousand miles away from the war.

Yellowhead had been in ambushes. He knew what it costs even a trained man to be still on the brink of deadly danger. He thought, ‘That woman must have the blood of gods in her.’ He resolved he would ask her where Helen was to be found. He would ask her courteously.

She looked up and stopped her spinning but still she did not move.

‘The child,’ she said in a low voice. ‘Is she still alive? Is she well?’ Then, helped by the voice, he recognized her. And with the first second of his recognition all that had made the very shape of his mind for eleven years came tumbling down in irretrievable ruin. Neither that jealousy nor that lust, that rage nor that tenderness, could ever be revived. There was nothing inside him appropriate to what he saw. For a moment there was nothing inside him at all.

For he had never dreamed she would be like this; never dreamed that the flesh would have gathered under her chin, that the face could be so plump and yet so drawn, that there would be grey hair at her temples and wrinkles at the corners of her eyes. Even her height was less than he remembered. The smooth glory of her skin which once made her seem to cast a light from her arms and shoulders was all gone. An ageing woman; a sad, patient, composed woman, asking for her daughter; for their daughter.

The astonishment of it jerked a reply out of him before he well knew what he was doing. ‘I’ve not seen Hermione for ten years,’ he said. Then he checked himself. How had she the effrontery to ask like that, just as an honest wife might? It would be monstrous for them to fall into an ordinary husbandly and wifely conversation as if nothing had come between. And yet what had come between was less disabling than what he now encountered.

About that he suffered a deadlock of conflicting emotions. It served her right. Where was her vaunted beauty now? Vengeance? Her mirror punished her worse than he could every day. But there was pity too. The story that she was the daughter of Zeus, the fame that had made her a legend on both sides of the Aegean, all dwindled to this, all destroyed like the vase he had shivered five minutes ago. But there was shame too. He had dreamed of living in stories as the man who won back the most beautiful woman in the world, had he? And what he had won back was this. For this Patroclus and Achilles had died. If he appeared before the army leading this as his prize, as their prize, what could follow but universal curses or universal laughter? Inextinguishable laughter to the world’s end. Then it darted into his mind that the Trojans must have known it for years. They too must have roared with laughter every time a Greek fell. Not only the Trojans, the gods too. They had known all along. It had diverted them through him to stir up Agamemnon and through Agamemnon to stir up all Greece, and set two nations by the ears for ten winters, all for a woman whom no one would buy in any market except as a housekeeper or a nurse. The bitter wind of divine derision blew

in his face. All for nothing, all a folly and himself the prime fool.

He could hear his own men clattering into the room behind him. Something would have to be decided. Helen did and said nothing. If she had fallen at his feet and begged for forgiveness; if she had risen up and cursed him; if she had stabbed herself … But she only waited with her hands (they were knuckley hands now) on her lap. The room was filling with men. It would be terrible if they recognized Helen; perhaps worse if he had to tell them. The oldest of the soldiers was staring at her very hard and looking from her to Yellowhead.

‘So!’ said the man at last, almost with a chuckle. ‘Well, by all the-‘

Eteoneus nudged him into silence. ‘What do you wish us to do, Menelaus?’ he asked, looking at the floor.

‘With the prisoners - the other prisoners?’ said Yellow-head. ‘You must detail a guard and get them all down to camp. The rest at Nestor’s place, for the distribution. The Queen - this one- to our own tents.’

‘Bound ?’ said Eteoneus in his ear.

‘It’s not necessary,’ said Yellowhead. It was a loathsome question: either answer was an outrage.

There was no need to lead her. She went with Eteoneus. There was noise and trouble and tears enough about roping up the others and it felt long to Yellowhead before it was over. He kept his eyes off Helen. What should his eyes say to hers ? Yet how could they say nothing? He busied himself picking out the men who were to be the prisoners’ escort.

At last. The women and, for the moment, the problem were gone.

‘Come on, lads,’ he said. ‘We must be busy again. We must go right through the castle and meet the others. Don’t fancy it’s all over.’

He longed to be fighting again. He would fight as he’d never fought before. Perhaps he would be killed. Then the army could do what they pleased with her. For that dim and mostly comfortable picture of a future which hovers before most men’s eyes had vanished.

3

The first thing Yellowhead knew next morning was the burning of the cut above his knee. Then he stretched and felt the after-battle ache in every muscle; swallowed once

or twice and found he was very thirsty; sat up, and found his elbow was bruised. The door of the hut was open and he could tell by the light that it was hours after sunrise. Two thoughts hung in his mind: the war is over - Helen is here. Not much emotion about either.

He got up, grunting a little, rubbed his eyes, and went out into the open. Inland, he saw the smoke hanging in still air above the ruins of Troy, and, lower down, innumerable birds. Everything was shockingly quiet. The army must be sleeping late.

Eteoneus, limping a little and wearing a bandage on his right hand, came towards him.

‘Have you any water left?’ said Menelaus. ‘My throat’s as dry as that sand.’

‘You’ll have to have wine in it, Yellowhead Menelaus. We’ve wine enough to swim in, but we’re nearly out of water.’

Menelaus made a face. ‘Make it as weak as you can,’ he said.

Eteoneus limped away and returned with the cup. Both went into the King’s hut and Eteoneus pulled the door to.

‘What did you do that for?’ said Yellowhead.

‘We have to talk, Menelaus.’

Talk ? I think I’ll sleep again.’

‘Look,’ said Eteoneus, ‘here’s something you ought to know. When Agathocles brought all our share of the women down last night, he penned the rest of them in the big hut where we’ve been keeping the horses. He picketed the horses outside - safe enough now. But he put the Queen by herself in the hut beyond this.’

‘Queen, you call her? How do you know she’s going to be a queen much longer? I haven’t given any orders. I haven’t made up my mind.’

‘No, but the men have.’

‘What do you mean?’

That’s what they call her. And they call her Daughter of Zeus. And they saluted her hut when they went past it.’

‘Well, of all the-‘

‘Listen, Menelaus. It’s no use at all thinking about your anger. You can’t treat her as anything but your queen. The men won’t stand it.’

‘But, gates of Hades, I thought the whole army was longing for her blood! After all they’ve been through because of her.’

‘The army in general, yes. But not our Spartans. She’s still the Queen to them.’

‘That? That faded, fat, old trot? Paris’s cast-off whore and the gods know whose besides ? Are they mad ? What’s Helen to them ? Has everyone forgotten that it’s I who am her husband and her king, and their king too, curse them?’

‘If you want me to answer that, I must say something that’s not to your liking.’

‘Say what you please.’

‘You said you were her husband and their king. They’d say you are their king only because you’re her husband. You’re not of the blood royal of Sparta. You became their king by marrying her. Your kingship hangs on her queen-ship.’

Yellowhead snatched up an empty scabbard and hit savagely three or four times at a wasp that was hovering above a spilled wine-drop. ‘Cursed, cursed creature!’ he yelled. ‘Can’t I kill even you? Perhaps you’re sacred too. Perhaps Eteoneus here will cut my throat if I swot you. There! There!’

He did not get the wasp. When he sat down again he was sweating.

‘I knew it wouldn’t please you,’ said Eteoneus, ‘but-‘

‘It was the wasp that put me out of patience,’ said Yellowhead. ‘Do you think I’m such a fool as not to know how I got my own throne? Do you think that galls me? I thought you knew me better. Of course they’re right; in law. But no one ever takes notice of these things once a marriage has been made.’

Eteoneus said nothing.

‘Do you mean,’ said Yellowhead, ‘that they’ve been thinking that way all the time ?’

‘It never came up before. How should it? But they never forgot about her being the daughter of the highest god.’

‘Do you believe it ?’

Till I know what it pleases the gods to have said about it, I’ll keep my tongue between

my teeth.'

'And then,' said Yellowhead, jabbing once more at the wasp, 'there's this. If she was really the daughter of Zeus she wouldn't be the daughter of Tyndareus. She'd be no nearer the true line than I am.'

'I suppose they'd think Zeus a greater king than either you or Tyndareus.'

'And so would you,' said Yellowhead, grinning.

'Yes,' said Eteoneus. Then, 'I've had to speak out, son of Atreus. It's a question of my own life as well as yours. If you set our men fighting-mad against you, you know very well I'll be with you back to back, and they won't slit your throat till they've slit mine.'

A loud, rich, happy voice, a voice like an uncle's, was heard singing outside. The door opened. There stood Agamemnon. He was in his best armour, all the bronze newly polished, and the cloak on his shoulders was scarlet, and his beard gleaming with sweet oil. The other two looked like beggars in his presence. Eteoneus rose and bowed to the King of Men. Yellowhead nodded to his brother.

'Well, Yellowhead,' said Agamemnon, 'how are you? Send your squire for some wine.' He strode into the hut and ruffled the curls on his brother's head as if they were a child's. 'What cheer? You don't look like a sacker of cities. Moping? Haven't we won a victory? And got your prize back, eh?' He gave a chuckle that shook the whole of his big chest.

'What are you laughing at?' said Yellowhead.

'Ah, the wine,' said Agamemnon, taking the cup from Eteoneus' hand. He drank at length, put the cup down, sucked his wet moustache, and said, 'No wonder you're glum, brother. I've seen our prize. Took a look into her hut. Gods!' He threw his head back and laughed his fill.

'I don't know that you and I have any need to talk about my wife,' said Yellowhead.

'Indeed we have,' said Agamemnon. Tor the matter of that, it might have been better if we'd talked about her before you married. I might have given you some advice. You don't know how to handle women. When a man does know, there's never any trouble. Look at me now. Ever heard of Clytemnestra giving me any trouble? She knows better.'

'You said we had to talk now, not all those years ago.'

'I'm coming to that. The question is what's to be done about this woman. And, by the

way, what do you want to do?'

'I haven't made up my mind. I suppose it's my own business.'

'Not entirely. The army has made up its mind, you see.'

'What's it to do with them ?'

'Will you never grow up? Haven't they been told all these years that she's the cause of the whole thing - of their friends' deaths and their own wounds and the gods only know what troubles waiting for them when they get home? Didn't we keep on telling them we were fighting to get Helen back? Don't they want to make her pay for it?'

'It would be far truer to say they were fighting for me. Fighting to get me my wife. The gods know that's true. Don't rub that wound. I wouldn't blame the army if they killed me. I didn't want it this way. I'd rather have gone with a handful of my own men and taken my chance. Even when we got here I tried to settle it by a single combat. You know I did. But if it comes to-'

'There, there, there, Yellowhead. Don't start blaming yourself all over again. We've heard it before. And if it's any comfort to you, I see no harm in telling you (now the thing's over) that you weren't quite as important in starting the War as you seem to think. Can't you understand that Troy had to be crushed? We couldn't go on having her sitting at the gate to the Euxine, levying tolls on Greek ships and sinking Greek ships and putting up the price of corn, The war had to come.'

'Do you mean I- and Helen - were just pretexts? If I'd thought-'

'Brother, you make everything so childishly simple. Of course I wanted to avenge your honour, and the honour of Greece. I was bound to by my oaths. And I also knew- all the Greek kings who had any sense knew - that we had to make an end of Troy. But it was a windfall - a gift from the gods- that Paris ran off with your wife at exactly the right moment.'

'Then I'd thank you to have told the army the truth at the very outset.'

'My boy, we told them the part of the truth that they would care about. Avenging a rape and recovering the most beautiful woman in the world- that's the sort of thing the troops can understand and will fight for. What would be the use of talking to them about the corn-trade? You'll never make a general.'

'I'll have some wine too, Eteoneus,' said Yellowhead. He drank it fiercely when it was brought and said nothing.

‘And now,’ continued Agamemnon, ‘now they’ve got her, they’ll want to see her killed. Probably want to cut her throat on Achilles’ tomb.’

‘Agamemnon,’ said Eteoneus, ‘I don’t know what Mene-laus means to do. But the rest of us Spartans will fight if there’s any attempt to kill the Queen.’

‘And you think I’d sit by and watch?’ said Menelaus, looking angrily at him. ‘If it comes to fighting, I’ll be your leader still.’

‘This is very pretty,’ said Agamemnon. ‘But you are both so hasty. I came, Yellowhead, to tell you that the army will almost certainly demand Helen for the priest’s knife. I half expected you’d say “Good riddance” and hand her over. But then I’d have had to tell you something else. When they see her, as she now is, I don’t think they’ll believe it is Helen at all. That’s the real danger. They’ll think you have a beautiful Helen- the Helen of their dreams - safely hidden away. There’ll be a meeting. And you’ll be the man they’ll go for.’

‘Do they expect a girl to look the same after ten years?’ said Yellowhead.

‘Well, I was a bit surprised when I saw her myself,’ said Agamemnon. ‘And I’ve a notion that you were too.’ (He repeated his detestable chuckle.) ‘Of course we may pass some other prisoner off as Helen. There are some remarkably pretty girls. Or even if they weren’t quite convinced, it might keep them quiet; provided they thought the real Helen was unobtainable. So it all comes to this. If you want you and your Spartans and the woman to be safe, there’s only one way. You must all embark quietly tonight and leave me to play my hand alone. I’ll do better without you.’

‘You’ll have done better without me all your life.’ ‘Not a bit, not a bit. I go home as the Sacker of Troy. Think of Orestes growing up with that to back him! Think of the husbands I’ll be able to get for my girls! Poor Glytemnestra will like it too. I shall be a happy man.’

4

I only want justice. And to be let alone. From the very beginning, from the day I married Helen down to this moment, who can say I’ve done him a wrong? I had a right to marry her. Tyndareus gave her to me. He even asked the girl herself and she made no objection. What fault could she find in me after I was her husband? I never struck her. I never rated her. I very seldom even had one of the housegirls to my bed, and no sensible woman makes a fuss about that. Did I ever take her child from her and sacrifice it to the storm-gods? Yet Agamemnon does that, and has a faithful, obedient wife.

Did I ever work my way into another man’s house and steal his woman? Paris does

that to me. I try to have my revenge in the right way, single combat before both armies. Then there's some divine interference, a kind of black-out - I don't know what happened to me - and he has escaped. I was winning. He was as good as a dead man if I'd had two minutes more. Why do the gods never interfere on the side of the man who was wronged ?

I never fought against gods as Diomede did, or says he did. I never turned against our own side and worked for the defeat of the Greeks, like Achilles. And now he's a god and they make his tomb an altar. I never shirked like Odysseus, I never committed sacrilege like Odysseus. And now he's the real captain of them all - Agamemnon for all his winks and knowingness couldn't rule the army for a day without him - and I'm nothing.

Nothing and nobody. I thought I was the King of Sparta. Apparently I'm the only one who ever thought so. I am simply that woman's head servant. I'm to fight her wars and collect her tribute and do all her work, but she's the Queen. She can turn whore, turn traitress, turn Trojan. That makes no difference. The moment she's in our camp she is Queen just as before. All the archers and horseboys can tell me to mend my manners and take care I treat her majesty with proper respect. Even Eteoneus- my own sworn brother-taunts me with being no true king. Then next moment he says he'll die with me if the Spartans decide I'd better be murdered. I wonder. Probably he's a traitor too. Perhaps he's this raddled queen's next lover.

Not a king. It's worse than that. I'm not even a freeman. Any hired man, any pedlar, any beggar, would be allowed to teach his own wife a lesson, if she'd been false to him, in the way he thought best. For me it's 'Hands off. She's the Queen, the Daughter of Zeus.'

And then comes Agamemnon sneering - just as he always did ever since we were boys- and making jokes because she's lost her beauty. What right has he to talk to me about her like that? I wonder what his own Clytemnestra looks like now. Ten years, ten years. And they must have had short commons in Troy for some time. Unhealthy too, cooped up inside the walls. Lucky there seems to have been no plague. And who knows how those barbarians treated her once the war began to turn against them? By Hera, I must find out about that. When I can talk to her. Can I talk to her ? How would I begin ?

Eteoneus worships her, and Agamemnon jeers at her, and the army wants to cut her throat. Whose woman is she? Whose business is she? Everyone's except mine, it seems. I count for nothing. I'm a bit of her property and she's a bit of everyone else's.

I've been a puppet in a war about corn-ships.

I wonder what she's thinking herself. Alone all those hours in that hut. Wondering and

wondering, no doubt. Unless she's giving an audience to Eteoneus.

Shall we get away safely tonight? We've done all we can do by daylight. Nothing to do but wait.

Perhaps it would be best if the army got wind of it and we were all killed, fighting, on the beach. She and Eteoneus would see there's one thing I can still do. I'd kill her before they took her. Punish her and save her with one stroke.

Curse these flies.

5

(Later. Landed in Egypt and entertained by an Egyptian.)

'I'm sorry you've asked for that, Father,' said Menelaus, 'but you said it to spare me. Indeed, indeed, the woman's not worth your having.'

The cold water a man wants is better than the wine he's no taste for,' said the old man.

'I'd give something better than such cold water. I beseech you to accept this cup. The Trojan king drank from it himself.'

'Will you deny me the woman, Guest?' said the old man, still smiling.

'You must pardon me, Father,' said Menelaus. 'I'd be ashamed -'

'She's the thing I ask for.'

'Curse these barbarians and their ways,' thought Menelaus to himself. 'Is this a courtesy of theirs? Is it the rule always to ask for something of no value ?'

'You will not deny me surely?' said his host, still not looking at Helen, but looking sidelong at Menelaus.

'He really wants her,' Menelaus thought. It began to make him angry.

'If you won't give her,' said the Egyptian, a little scornfully, 'perhaps you'll sell?'

Menelaus felt his face reddening. He had found a reason for his anger now: it accordingly grew hotter. The man was insulting him.

'I tell you the woman's not for giving,' he said. 'And a thousand times not for selling.'

The old man showed no anger - could that smooth, brown face ever show it?-and kept on smiling.

‘Ah,’ he said at last, drawing it out very long. ‘You should have told me. She is perhaps your old nurse or- ‘

‘She’s my wife,’ Menelaus shouted. The words came out of his mouth, loud, boyish, and ridiculous; he hadn’t meant to say them at all. He darted his eyes round the room. If anyone laughed he’d kill them. But all the Egyptian faces were grave, though anyone could see that the minds within them were mocking him. His own men sat with their eyes on the floor. They were ashamed of him.

‘Stranger,’ said the old man, ‘are you sure that woman is your wife?’

Menelaus glanced sharply towards Helen, half believing for the moment that these foreign wizards might have played some trick. The glance was so quick that it caught hers and for the first time their eyes met. And indeed she was changed. He surprised a look of what seemed to be, of all things, joy. In the name of the House of Hades, why? It passed in an instant; the set desolation returned. But now his host was speaking again.

‘I know very well who your wife is, Menelaus, son of Atreus. You married Helen Tyndaris. And that woman is not she.’

‘But this is madness,’ said Menelaus. ‘Do you think I don’t know?’

“That is indeed what I think,’ replied the old man, now wholly grave. ‘Your wife never went to Troy. The gods have played a trick with you. That woman was in Troy. That woman lay in Paris’s bed. Helen was caught away.’

‘Who is that, then ?’ asked Menelaus.

‘Ah, who could answer? It is a thing-it will soon go away-such things sometimes go about the earth for a while. No one knows what they are.’

‘You are making fun of me.’ said Menelaus. He did not think so; still less did he believe what he was told. He thought he was out of his right mind; drunk perhaps, or else the wine had been drugged.

‘It is no wonder if you say that,’ replied the host. ‘But you will not say it when I have shown you the real Helen.’

Menelaus sat still. He had the sense that some outrage was being done to him. One

could not argue with these foreign devils. He had never been clever. If Odysseus had been here he would have known what to say. Meanwhile the musicians resumed their playing. The slaves, cat-footed, were moving about. They were moving the lights all into one place, over on the far side near a doorway, so that the rest of the large hall grew darker and darker and one looked painfully at the glare of the clustered candles. The music went on.

‘Daughter of Leda, come forth,’ said the old man.

And at once it came. Out of the darkness of the doorway

[The manuscript ends here.]