



## V The Trojans Stop in Sicily

AENEAS' ships sped before the wind. Looking back at the distant towers of Carthage, he saw a faint smear of black smoke rising to the sky. His companions followed his gaze, but only young Iulus exclaimed and pointed at the brilliant rainbow now stretched over the coastline, making the column of smoke stand out thin and stark. The adults exchanged silent glances, and Aeneas fixed his eyes on the open sea ahead, willing Italy to appear quickly.

"Message from the steersman, sir. Will you go up and speak with him at once, if you can, sir?"

Glad to be distracted, Aeneas hurried to the stern and found Palinurus studying a mass of clouds that hovered some distance before them. They were very dark, and the sea beneath them looked shadowed and unwelcoming.

"Storm ahead, sir," the steersman explained. "Looks like a bad squall. Could hit us badly if we sail straight through it."

"Try. We must make all speed to Italy." Aeneas succeeded in sounding firm. Palinurus frowned, but did not argue. The air grew chill; the sea was grey now all around. The sails began an urgent flapping. Something tore.

"Gale's too strong for sailing, sir."

"Then row!" retorted Aeneas. To quell his own fear, he

flung himself onto a bench and grabbed the end of an oar. For an hour the crew strained and sweated at oars that lurched out of their hands, while the ship spun helplessly in a whirling sea.

"We can make Sicily, sir," urged Palinurus. "The nearby coast is friendly, and we don't want to chance another shipwreck."

"No, we do not. Very well, steersman, bear east. It seems the gods will not be kind to us." Then, seeing the man's downcast face, Aeneas added, "It's not your fault, Palinurus. You did your best. You never know, this landing could be a blessing. As you said, this coast of Sicily is friendly, and personally very dear to me, since it holds my father's grave."

Soon they were beaching the ships on the peaceful sand, and exchanging greetings with old Acestes, ruler of the local settlement, whose mother had been of Trojan blood. Acestes welcomed them with hearty hospitality, and provided food and shelter at once for the weary travellers.

Early the next morning, Aeneas summoned all the Trojans to a meeting on the beach. He watched them gather, walking slowly in small groups, trusting but down-hearted. "How much longer can they keep their faith in me?" he wondered. "I have given them nothing but setbacks."

When the stretch of sand was quite crowded, Aeneas climbed a nearby hillock and raised his arms. "Friends," he called, "this is a very fortunate landing. It is exactly twelve months since royal Anchises, my honoured father, was laid to rest here on this coast. The gods have sent us here today to honour his memory with celebrations. Our good kinsman Acestes has generously donated two splendid oxen for every ship. We shall devote eight days to sacrifice and

dedication, and on the ninth day hold a festival of sports and games. There will be something for everyone – rowing, running, archery and boxing! I shall provide the prizes!”

A buzz of cheerful excitement broke out among the crowd. Youths were exchanging good-natured punches, and some of the older men were flexing their muscles to the friendly teasing of their comrades. Aeneas felt some of his secret worries lifting from his heart. After a few moments he called again for silence. “Let us put on holy garlands.”

Aeneas put a myrtle wreath on his own head, and was followed by his son and their host, Acestes. All the others did the same. In a long and silent procession, the Trojans moved to the site of Anchises’ grave. There Aeneas poured on to the soil two goblets of wine, two of milk, and two of ox-blood. Then he scattered blossoms about the grave, and addressed in reverent words the spirit of his beloved father.

Hardly had he begun to pray, “Greetings, O sacred ashes of my father, prevented by fate from reaching the shores of Italy . . .” when a huge snake slid out from the tomb and glided to taste the ritual foods. The people watched breathlessly, but it only drank its fill, and returned peacefully to its lair under the tomb. Aeneas, suspecting that the snake was his father’s guardian spirit, continued the ceremony with redoubled zeal. He slaughtered two sheep, two pigs and two young bulls, and invoked once more the spirit of the dead. The offerings made, the Trojans began to roast the carcasses over their cooking-fires. The air filled with the scent of roasting meat.

The ninth day dawned at last. Spectators for the games streamed in from nearby towns and villages, attracted by

the fine weather and rumours of excitement. The Trojan ladies withdrew, as was their custom, leaving the games to the men.

A trumpet-blast signalled the opening event, a rowing-race, to be contested by four fast Trojan ships, each manned by a crew of champion oarsmen. As the captains drew lots for positions, the herald announced the names of the competing ships: “*Whale*, captained by Mnestheus, *Chimaera*, captained by Gyas, *Centaur*, captained by Sergestus, and *Scylla*, captained by Cloanthus. Competitors will row as far as the rock directly opposite, marked clearly by the leafy tree-trunk, turn, and row to the starting-line. Rowers, take your oars!”

The crowd was hushed. The captains stood prominently on the afterdecks, the steersmen placed expert hands on the tillers, the crews, their muscles taut and glistening with oil, crouched over the oars. The trumpet blew a long, clear blast.

In an instant the calm sea became a churning cauldron of white foam and spray, almost hiding the boats from the lines of yelling spectators. The huge *Chimaera* took the lead, followed closely by the *Scylla*. Some distance behind, the *Whale* and the *Centaur* were vying fiercely to avoid the last place.

Almost at the rock, the *Chimaera* was still leading, when her captain, Gyas, shouted anxiously to his steersman, “Closer to the rock! Bring her in closer!” But the steersman, fearing a hidden reef, kept well in deep water. At that moment *Scylla*’s steersman seized his chance, and slipping in between *Chimaera* and the rock, made a triumphant turn. Her captain, Cloanthus, laughed merrily at Gyas’ furious expression, and waved cheekily as they

passed. Gyas, boiling with frustration, grabbed his unfortunate steersman, heaved him overboard, and seized the tiller himself. The crews of the *Whale* and the *Centaur*, toiling at their oars, found time to chuckle at *Chimaera's* steersman clambering on to the rock, blowing and spitting out salt-water and bad language.

Mnestheus, captain of the *Whale*, strode restlessly among the benches, urging his perspiring crew to try harder. "Never mind victory! Just don't come last!" Luck was on their side, for the *Centaur*, edging in to get closest to the rock, suddenly met a jutting reef. There was a splintering crash, and *Centaur* was out of the race. Encouraged by this stroke of fortune, *Whale's* crew increased their efforts. They were now in clear water, with a fresh wind at their back, and were gaining on the enormous *Chimaera* which was now feeling the loss of her proper steersman. Gyas was doing his best, but his lack of experience was showing.

Now only *Scylla*, captained by Cloanthus, lay ahead of the *Whale*. The spectators were in a riot of noisy excitement. Cloanthus, seeing defeat only seconds away, cried a desperate prayer to the sea-gods. Instantly his ship felt the blast of a mighty, invisible force, and it shot like an arrow to the finishing-line.

The crowd roared, and the herald proclaimed Cloanthus the winner. Aeneas stepped forward to present the prizes. Cloanthus was crowned with bay leaves and received a beautiful cloak of gold thread patterned in purple. Mnestheus, in second place, was cheered heartily as he was presented with a handsome breast-plate of gold chain-mail. Gyas was handed a set of carved bowls in copper and silver. As the three bore off their prizes amid general

applause, the unfortunate Sergestus finally succeeded in bringing his crippled ship to harbour, with many oars missing, and many broken. The spectators laughed at this inglorious arrival, but Aeneas, pleased that no one had been hurt, came forward to greet Sergestus and gave him a slave-girl as his prize.

Athletic events were announced. They were to be held in a nearby plain, where wooded banks formed a natural stadium. For the running-race competitors came flocking from all parts of the crowd, local men as well as Trojans, all the more when Aeneas declared that everyone who entered would receive a prize. "The winner," he continued, "will get this splendid horse. The second prize is a jewelled quiver filled with arrows, and the third this fine helmet, captured from the Greeks in Troy."

Among the eager runners at the starting-line were two friends, Euryalus and Nisus. As soon as the signal was given, Nisus sped like the wind ahead of all the others. The race was as good as won, when all of a sudden he trod in a mess of blood and dung left from the recent sacrifice, slid helplessly, and fell flat on his face. The spectators gasped. Nisus half-rose, spattered with blood and dirt, saw that his friend Euryalus was in third place, and flung himself bodily in front of the second runner, a man called Salius. Salius tripped and fell, and Euryalus dashed past him to win the race. The crowd cheered loudly; for the handsome Euryalus was a popular winner. Salius began to object furiously, gesticulating at the judges and shouting that he had been the victim of foul play. His friends took up the cry, "Foul! Foul! Salius! We want Salius!" The majority, however, continued to support Euryalus, and began to chant his name and stamp their feet in rhythm.

The judges were looking anxiously at Aeneas. As he was seen to rise, the spectators stopped shouting and waited to hear his verdict. There was a tense pause. "The order cannot be changed," announced Aeneas. "Euryalus was first. Bad luck, Salius. But here, as a personal gift from me, take this lionskin. I hate to see a good friend disappointed."

Salius stammered his thanks, and his friends cheered. Nisus, however, exclaimed hotly, "What about me? I would have won easily if I hadn't slipped. Look at me — don't I deserve a prize?" Some of the spectators laughed at the bold youth, still covered in mud and filth from his fall. Aeneas laughed too, but then patted Nisus on the back in fatherly fashion and presented him with a valuable shield.

The boxing match was next. Aeneas described the prizes: a bullock all decorated with garlands and gilded horns for the winner, a consolation prize of sword and helmet for the loser. At once a powerful young champion called Dares stepped forward. As his skill and strength were well known, there was no rush of challengers. Dares grinned around at the murmuring crowd, flexing his brawny arms, and then laid his hand on the bullock. "I claim the prize!" he roared.

Acestes, as host, felt obliged to supply a match for the visiting champion. He nudged his neighbour, a veteran boxer named Entellus, and urged him to remember his reputation. "I'm not the young hero I was," protested Entellus. "The years have slowed me down. There was a time when I wore gloves seven hides thick, weighted with iron and lead. Here they are — the very gloves that stood up to Hercules! Take a good look at them, Dares!

Frightening, eh?" He flung the massive objects into the arena, and pulled himself to his feet. "Come on then, since the younger generation has lost its nerve, I'll fight you man to man, if someone will provide us both with ordinary gloves."

Two pairs of gloves, identical in weight and thickness, were immediately supplied. The spectators settled back to watch, comparing Dares' youth and strength with Entellus' huge, knotted muscles and experienced air.

Dares attacked fiercely, jabbing rapidly at his opponent from every angle. Entellus was soon struggling for breath, but managed, by skilful ducking and weaving, to avoid most of the blows. At last he attempted a heavy punch, missed, lost his balance, and collapsed in a grunting heap. Acestes helped him to rise. No one had laughed, but Entellus' pride was hurt, and he flung himself into a determined pounding of his opponent. Now it was Dares who had to give ground. Thick and fast the blows came, until it seemed that Entellus would not stop till he had knocked the young man senseless.

"Stop the fight!" It was Aeneas' voice. Dares was led away, spitting blood and loose teeth from his torn lips, dizzy and punch-drunk. The garlanded bullock was awarded to the veteran Entellus, who immediately slaughtered it, crushing its skull with one terrific blow of his fist between the horns.

For the archery contest, Aeneas himself devised the target: in the middle of the arena a ship's mast was erected; almost at its top a living dove was tied to it with a cord. There were four competitors, the last being old Acestes. The first archer took aim and shot; his arrow came close to the dove, and stuck fast in the wooden mast by its foot.

The poor creature flapped its wings pitifully. The second contestant was that same Mnestheus who had almost won the boat-race. Eager for a victory this time, he took careful aim. His shaft missed the bird, but cut cleanly through the cord that bound it. The startled dove made off at once for the sky and freedom, but not soon enough. The third archer was ready, bow bent. He let fly, and the bird tumbled to the earth, spitted on the arrow. Acestes was left with no target to aim at, but he was determined to prove himself as fit as the young men. He shot high into the open sky. The arrow flashed from the bow, soared into the clouds, then caught fire and vanished in a streak of flame.

There was no mistaking an omen from the gods. Aeneas embraced his old friend and bestowed on him the first prize, an engraved bowl that had belonged to Anchises, and crowned him with the wreath of victory. No one disputed the award, and the other contestants accepted the lesser prizes cheerfully.

Now the crowd was ordered back to leave a larger area clear. Aeneas waved his hand, a fanfare sounded, and young Iulus rode into the arena at the head of a parade of noble Trojan boys, all proudly mounted, with garlands on their heads and polished weapons in their hands. Their leader was riding the horse Dido had given him in Carthage, and was the best-looking of them all.

The boys trotted slowly around the edge of the arena, while the spectators applauded each one warmly, and made fond comments on family likenesses. Then they prepared to admire the display for which the boys had practised so intently.

During all the excitement of the games, none of the men

had given a thought to the Trojan women who were sitting in a disconsolate group on the shore by the ships. The years of homeless wandering had tired them thoroughly, and they were sick at the thought of putting to sea yet again.

They could not know that they were being observed. For some time Juno had been watching for an opportunity to strike again at the Trojan expedition. Choosing her moment, she sent her servant Iris on a spiteful errand.

As soon as Iris touched the shore, she shed her divine appearance and kicked aside the rainbow trail that always marked her path. In a single instant she was disguised as an elderly and respected Trojan matron called Beroe. Taking her place among the grumbling women, she spoke in complaining tones, "I don't see why we should put up with this! Enough is enough! Seven years of nothing but trouble, ever since we left Troy. I tell you, none of us is going to live to see Italy." The other women nodded and muttered indignantly in agreement. "If it's a settlement we're looking for," went on the supposed Beroe, "just what is wrong with this place here? The people are suitable; Acestes is our own relative; I say it's good enough for me! Let's insist on staying here."

"I couldn't agree more, Beroe," said a stout matron, firmly folding her arms. "I think we should go and talk some commonsense into those men. They're living in a dream-world."

"Talking won't do any good," the disguised goddess asserted. "We must show them some action! I know what to do — I had a dream last night about poor Cassandra: she was waving a torch and saying, 'Make this your home!'



Look, ladies, this is our chance! Let's burn those wretched ships! Follow me!"

The astounded women saw the dignified figure of Beroe suddenly jump up, snatch a firebrand from a nearby altar, and with unbelievable strength hurl the leaping flame at the ships. There was a shriek – and then the oldest of the women screamed, "That's not Beroe! She's lying sick in bed! Look at those blazing eyes – it's a goddess, I tell you!" At this the figure of Beroe laughed maliciously, and before their terrified gaze, turned into a radiant, youthful maiden. Still laughing, Iris shot up into the clouds, leaving her unmistakable rainbow trail.

Now the Trojan women lost all control of their shaken wits. Shocked into a state of frenzy, they raced from altar to altar, seizing the torches and flinging them at the ships. The wild madness grew; cackling and screaming, they piled twigs and branches over the benches, the rigging and the tar-smearred decks.

"Fire! Fire!" A breathless messenger brought the alarm to the sportsground, where the boys' cavalry parade was still in progress. "The women have gone mad! They're burning the ships!"

At once Iulus wheeled his horse, and galloped at full speed to the beach. "Stop!" he cried, "You're burning our future! Listen to me – I'm Ascanius, your prince!" In despair he threw his helmet at the hysterical band. The arrival of Aeneas and a crowd of Trojan and Sicilian men broke the spell. With a final howl of frenzy, the women scattered and ran into the wood.

Buckets were snatched from the farthest ships, where the fire had not yet spread. Salt water was passed from hand to hand and flung on the blazing timber, but the fire had

already eaten into the holds and the smouldering tar only hissed in menace when the water touched it.

Aeneas turned his eyes to the sky. "Almighty Jupiter," he prayed, "if we have been true to you, then help us now, or send us a quick death."

A blast of thunder answered him. Black clouds rolled over the clear sky, and a deluge of rain drenched the crowd on the shore, extinguishing the smouldering fires. All but four of the ships were saved.

Delighted by the miracle, the Trojans relaxed into a happy, exuberant mood, ready to trust in the gods, their leader and their destiny. But Aeneas himself retired to his quarters, and summoned his senior officers to a council. "How long can I try the patience of these people?" he was thinking. "Do I have the right to draw them over the sea against their will?"

The officers arrived. Without waiting for Aeneas to open the council, an elderly captain called Nautes addressed him. "Sir, forgive me for speaking first, but I think I understand the present problem. There is no point in a half-hearted expedition to Italy. Now this land of Sicily, it's not so bad. Acestes is our kinsman and . . ."

"Are you suggesting that we give up and stay here?" Aeneas faced him with angry eyes.

"No, no, my lord," said Nautes, "just hear me out. Why not offer a settlement here to those who would prefer it? Those who are tired, faint-hearted, sick of adventures – we don't want them in Italy any more than they want to come. We need to cut down our numbers, anyway, since we have lost four ships. Acestes would co-operate, I feel sure, especially if we named the settlement after him."

The words of Nautes seemed good sense, but Aeneas

could not pronounce a decision at once. He wandered away by himself to think. Darkness came. As he sat alone by the sea, wrestling with his worries, a phantom glided through the silent air, and spoke to him in the voice of his father, Anchises: "Dear son, Jupiter has sent me to help you. Nautes spoke good advice. Take only a picked band of your bravest young men to Italy. The natives there are fierce, and you will have to meet them in battle."

Aeneas breathed his relief and thanks. But the phantom had more to say: "When you reach the shores of Italy, my son, seek out the Sibyl. She will lead you through the dark kingdom of the dead, through the deep haunts of Pluto's kingdom, to visit me in the Land of the Blessed. There I will show you the future of your race. I feel the touch of day; I must return. Do not fail me, Aeneas." The vision faded into the chill air of dawn.

Acestes agreed readily to Aeneas' proposals. The arrangements were quickly made: the people were divided according to their wishes, and Aeneas marked out the boundaries of the new city and consecrated shrines to Venus and to the memory of Anchises.

Only when the moment of parting came did the Trojans realise that they had each made a binding decision. Some of the women who had been loudest in their abuse of the sea now sobbed and begged not to be left behind. Aeneas did his best to console them, reminding them that Acestes was their cousin, and that they would be living among friends.

The ships were hauled to the water; Aeneas was the last to board; the rowers were fresh and eager.

In the domain of the gods, Venus was anxiously pleading with Neptune, the ruler of the seas. "Remember how once

before Juno dared to interfere with your kingdom? All I ask now is a safe passage for my son, Aeneas, and his people to the shores of Italy.”

In his deep, rolling voice, Neptune pronounced, “What you ask is only proper, and I shall grant your request. Aeneas will reach his Italian harbour safely. I claim only one life in return for many.”

One life? Aeneas had no thought of danger. The breeze was strong. The sails filled out contentedly on all the ships, as they moved in convoy following the course steered by Palinurus. When the sun set, all the rowers rested, but Palinurus kept steady watch, his hand on the tiller of the flagship. The night was peaceful. Palinurus watched the stars, felt the gentle rocking of the deck, and heard a low, enticing voice, “Sleep, Palinurus,” it said, “your eyes are heavy. Sleep!”

“No!” Palinurus cried to the empty air. “How can I sleep on duty? Aeneas needs my skill. The sea is treacherous!”

What happened then Palinurus never knew. A slumber he could not resist came over him; still clinging to the tiller he was tipped overboard. No one heard the crack of the timber as it was wrenched away.

The unusual lurching of the ship roused Aeneas, and brought him to the afterdeck. The broken tiller told him enough. “Palinurus,” he groaned, “why did you trust the sea?” The ship glided on, while Aeneas took over as helmsman, and wept for his loyal friend, now a nameless body on some unknown shore.