



XI Turnus is Challenged

"TROJANS, Arcadians, Etruscans, and all faithful allies, we are gathered to dedicate to the god Mars this trophy, the armour and weapons of the hated tyrant, Mezentius. We give thanks for the glorious victory over the forces of Latium which, by the grace of the immortal gods, we won yesterday on this field."

Aeneas paused in his speech, and looked over the soldiers assembled before him. They seemed pleased, but very tired. A number were wounded.

"Today is a day for rejoicing, and celebration. It is also a day of mourning for some of our brave friends, whose names will be honoured for ever among their people. I commend to you especially Pallas, son of our dear friend, King Evander of the Arcadians, who was our first help and support in this new land. It is our sad duty to return to him today the body of his only son, a youth untried in battle, who was not afraid to face the champion Turnus. What a pity the great Turnus had to leave before I could meet him myself! He will not stay out of sight for long. I swear to you, before all the gods, that Pallas will be avenged. Tomorrow we march on the walls of the city. King Latinus will find that he must make good the promises he offered so generously when we arrived."

The men were dismissed. Aeneas smiled at their cheers and returned their salutes. He patted proud young officers on the shoulder, listened to their excited stories, admired the helmets, medallions and shields they had stripped from the enemy, and comforted those who had lost friends and brothers. Within himself he felt drained and dispirited. The battle-fury that had carried him through the previous day had left a bitter taste.

The grass glittered with broken and abandoned weapons. Back and forth from the battle-field the duty-patrols worked, carrying the bodies of their friends to the funeral pyres that smoked along the shore.

"Envoys from the Latins, sir. Request permission to recover their dead from the field." The messengers were anxious, middle-aged men in shabby cloaks, clutching olive branches with both hands. Aeneas granted their request at once.

"Tell King Latinus," he added, "that I have nothing against the people of Latium. If he had kept his word to me, there would be no war at all. But since he has allowed Turnus to take matters into his own hands, tell him that Turnus must answer for his deeds. If Turnus is so set on challenging my right to settle here, let him meet me in single combat. There is no need for thousands of men to risk their lives. The gods will decide between him and me. Go, tell him what I have said."

The envoys bowed, and were making as if to depart, when one of them turned back. He was a skinny, grey-haired man called Drances: "I shall be pleased to report your words to my king, sir. There are many of us who see no cause to fight, and would be happy to see peace

restored to Latium. Let Turnus settle his own quarrels, without dragging us all into war.”

The other envoys exchanged glances, and nodded. “Then shake hands, friends,” Aeneas responded warmly. “Let us agree on a truce to bury our dead. That will give you a chance to persuade your king to call off this war, and honour his promise to us.”

“Excuse me, sir,” a soldier broke in nervously, “the funeral-party is ready to leave. You said to call you at once.”

Pallas lay on a wicker-work bier, wrapped in a robe of royal purple, a gift Queen Dido had made for her cherished Aeneas. In front of the body marched a double file of soldiers, some loaded with trophies, others leading captured horses and pitiful human prisoners. Behind the body of Pallas walked his horse, without saddle or bridle, nuzzling the bier that carried his silent master. After it came an Arcadian officer, with Pallas’ helmet and spear; his sword-belt was missing. A column of Trojans, Etruscans and Arcadians, their spears reversed as a sign of mourning, brought up the rear.

Aeneas watched the funeral-procession until it was out of sight. His thoughts were with King Evander.

Rumour had reached Pallanteum, bringing news of a Trojan victory. The people looked forward with joy to the first official report. There were cheers all over the town when the approaching column was sighted. But as the people crowded the hilltops and roofs for a better view, the cheers died away. No one could mistake the slow march and muffled drums for a victory parade. They poured out of the gates – parents, wives, small children – and flocked around the bier, pushing the shining trophies aside.

“Pallas!” The familiar name sounded harsh on the air. The crowd parted to let King Evander through.

His outburst was short and fierce. At last, letting the body drop from his embrace, he said, quite softly, “You promised to be careful, Pallas.” Then, remembering himself, he declared in a clear voice: “The Trojans are not to blame. I sent you willingly to join them. I am proud – look at the trophies you won in battle. You fought by the side of Aeneas; what greater glory could a young man want? He is known to be true; I know he will avenge your death.”

At that moment Aeneas was not thinking of revenge. Under a sky grey with the sweetish smoke of funeral pyres, he was thinking of peace. Was there any hope in the words of the envoy Drances?

In the city the Laurentes were in turmoil. From every house came sounds of grief. People in the streets were cursing the war and heaping abuse on Turnus for causing it. Others, admiring his spectacular deeds, were arguing loudly that he had a right to claim the hand of the princess Lavinia.

Those in the palace were not any calmer. King Latinus had just received news that the Greek hero, Diomedes, who had fought Aeneas in Troy, now refused to help the Latins against him.

“We visited Diomedes in his Italian settlement,” the messengers reported. “He said he has no intention of fighting the Trojan War over again, and risking the anger of the gods. He described Aeneas as a champion warrior, equal to Hector, and noble and true in character, and he advised our people to make peace with the Trojans.”

The senior councillors muttered uneasily. King Latinus rose to speak. His breath came in heavy gasps, and his

voice had lost its ring of command: "Gentlemen, you have heard the message from Diomedes. This war is pointless. The Trojans are here by the will of the gods. Who are we to oppose them? I propose that we make a fair treaty, grant the Trojans land along the Tiber to build a city, and offer Aeneas a share in the rule of Latium. We will only suffer if we try to resist the Fates' decree."

The councillors buzzed in discussion, most of them favouring the king's proposal. Then suddenly someone shouted outside the hall. There was a scuffle and more shouting, and through the doorway strode Turnus. Eyeing the astonished councillors, he walked around the room slowly. As he reached the throne, he folded his arms, and faced the king.

The council chamber was hushed, but only for a moment. Drances was on his feet: "Your Majesty, I support your words. I have met Aeneas. He is everything a man could wish for in a son-in-law. Let us end this war with a marriage that is blessed by the gods, that will bring peace and added strength to our country. As for you, Turnus – haven't you caused enough death and destruction? How many households are in mourning today in this city, just because Turnus wanted to show off in battle? What gives him a special right to marry the princess? If Turnus has such a desperate desire to win her hand, he should meet Aeneas alone, man to man, and try his courage in single combat. If he refuses, if he insists on sheltering behind an army of thousands, then he is proved unworthy of this royal marriage and must give up his claim."

There was a chorus of support for Drances. Turnus, who had been facing the throne, swung round, strode over to

Drances, seized him by the arm, and hauled him to the centre of the floor: "You're a fine one to talk about single combat, Drances! When was the last time you lifted a spear? Showing off, am I? If you had dared to venture outside these walls during the battle, you would have seen the Tiber red with enemy blood, the insolent tribe of Evander destroyed, and countless Trojans backing away before my charge. You think we're beaten, do you? How many Trojans have you seen inside this city? I had the impression that these walls were still fairly strong, unlike the courage of people like you." He was shaking Drances in his powerful grasp, towering over him head and shoulders. Now he released the councillor so suddenly that he toppled over. "Scared, are you? You needn't worry – I don't waste my strength on enemies like you."

"Turnus," the old king began, "will you listen?"

Turnus faced the throne once more: "I ask your pardon; I could not let such insults pass. To make peace with the Trojans would be a disgrace. Maybe they have gained a temporary advantage; but for every man of ours they killed, we can kill six of theirs. We have mighty allies on our side – look at Camilla with her troop of Volscian cavalry. Have we less courage than a girl? We have a good chance of a glorious victory over the Trojans; but if there is anyone else who thinks I should fight Aeneas in single combat, then just name the day, and I'll be there! I solemnly swear, before you all, to meet Aeneas, alone, in arms, and fight till one of us is killed!"

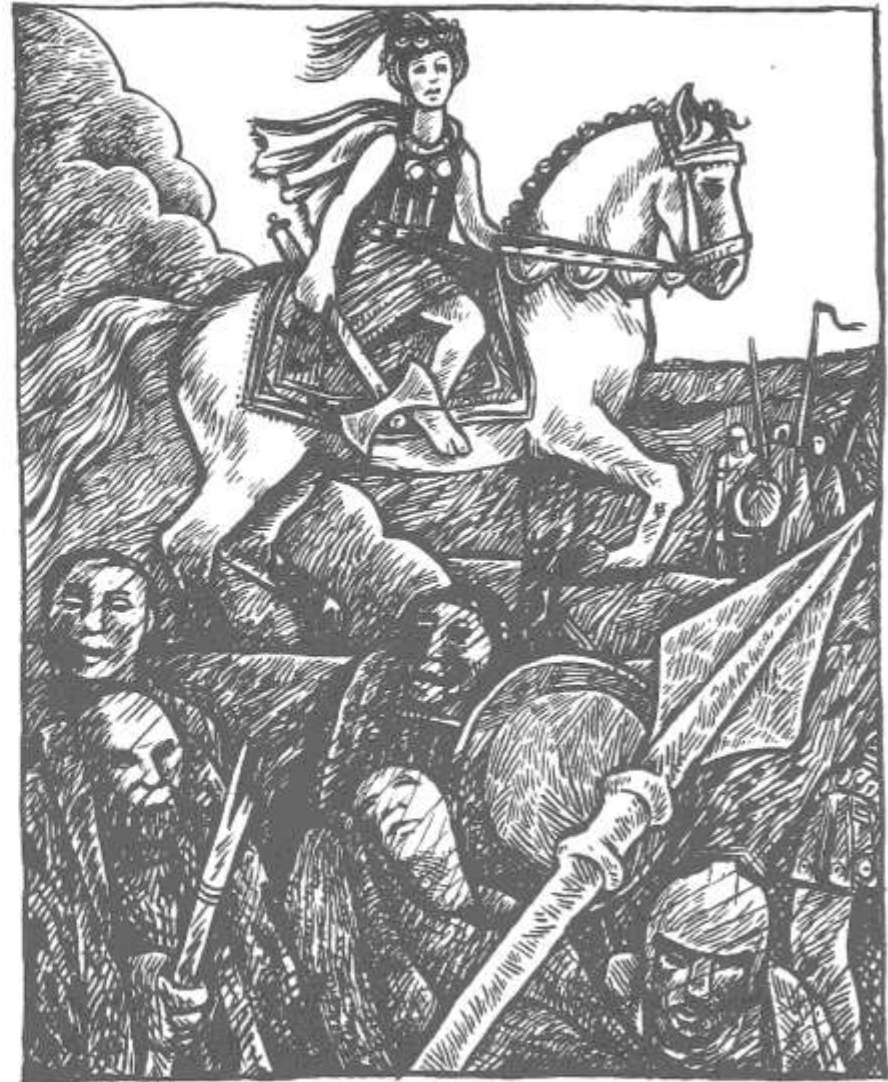
What King Latinus might have decided was never heard. An alarm-trumpet sounded shrill within the city. A messenger burst into the hall, shouting, "Your Majesty,

the Trojans are attacking the city! There are thousands of men sweeping across the plain!"

The king shrank helpless into his seat. Turnus laughed. "Peace, is it? We'd better barricade the gates and man the walls. Will your Majesty give the orders yourself, or trust me to see to them?" And, as the king only hid his face and moaned, Turnus dismissed the panic-stricken councillors and gave orders for the defence of the city. The townsmen were sent to collect stones and pile them in heaps along the battlements. Able-bodied youths dug trenches in front of the gates. A party of noble ladies, led by Queen Amata, climbed the steps of Minerva's temple to offer prayers for victory.

These activities kept the people too busy to panic. Turnus, meanwhile, held a conference with his allied commanders: "My last report said that the cavalry out there is only a band of Etruscan light troops, spread out to look more dangerous than they are. The idea is to keep our attention on them while Aeneas leads the main force round through the hills to attack the city from the rear. That's a trick two can play. You, Camilla, and you, Messapus, will ride out with your troops and engage the Etruscans. They shouldn't give you too much trouble. In the meantime I'll take a picked band of Rutulians out through the rear gate and wait for Aeneas. I know the very place — where the only pass through the hills is narrow and wooded, perfect for an ambush!"

The citizens cheered Camilla as she led her troops through the gates to face the enemy. She was an attractive young woman with steady eyes, dressed in a short hunting-tunic in imitation of her patron goddess, Diana, and armed with battle-axe, spear and bow. Close by her rode a



bodyguard of warrior maidens, armed and equipped like their leader.

The Etruscans were charging at full gallop, howling their war-cry. Camilla waited till they were almost in spear-range, then raised her arm in command. Missiles hummed through the air, and the ground shook with the thunder of hooves.

Since early childhood, Camilla had served the maiden-goddess of hunt and woodland, and Diana loved her dearly in return. Hovering now in the clouds, she was anxiously watching Camilla's progress. She knew the girl's fate, and the knowledge filled her with grief. With a silvery gesture, she summoned her attendant, a fleet-footed nymph called Opis: "Our servant, Camilla, must die in this battle. I cannot prevent her death, but I can avenge it. Follow her closely, Opis, and take the life of the man who kills her."

Twice the Etruscans had charged and retreated before Camilla's volley of spears. Now they made a third attempt at short range. Shields clashed together, and horses and riders were enmeshed in a tangle of limbs and weapons. The dying were trampled by rearing hooves, and the ground grew moist under a steady drizzle of blood.

Every shot of Camilla's was true. Her spears flew from her nimble fingers with deadly speed; her battle-axe smashed a terrible path through enemy helmets.

Tarchon, the Etruscan commander, was roused to fury. "What's the matter with you all?" he roared at his men. "Are you saving your energy for the victory feast? Get in there and fight, instead of shying away from that girl! Watch me, and learn!"

Spurring his horse, he rushed straight at an enemy rider, swept him off his seat in full gallop, and rode on,

grappling with the man on his heaving saddle. The Latin seized Tarchon by the throat, desperate to strangle him. Tarchon, in turn, jabbed with the point of his enemy's broken spear, his right arm still clamping the man across his saddle. The horse plunged to and fro with its double burden, till at last Tarchon dropped his victim to the ground, where he slumped in a lifeless heap.

An Etruscan soldier named Arruns, jealous of his general's daring feat, decided to win a share of glory for himself. His goal was Camilla. For a time he circled her at a distance, watching for a chance to cast his spear. But Camilla wheeled and spun like a whirlwind, allowing no weapon to catch her, while she dealt out death on every side. Then she suddenly spotted a man in an unusually splendid outfit; he had once been an eastern priest, and wore embroidered trousers and a yellow cloak fastened with a gaudy brooch; his horse was clad in a coat of bronze scales linked with gold. Camilla's eyes sparkled at the thought of winning such garments. Forgetting all danger, she made straight for her trophy.

Arruns, trailing her closely, saw his chance, and threw. His spear stuck in her breast. She shrieked. Her friends rushed to her side. Arruns was suddenly frightened at his own success. He did not stay to gloat, but melted into the crowd as fast as he could.

Camilla, still conscious, was murmuring to her attendants: "Tell Turnus that he must lead this battle himself. I can do no more to help him." She slipped from her saddle, and died.

The nymph, Opis, on a nearby hillock, saw that Camilla was dead. She fitted an arrow to her golden bow, and shot

Arruns clean through the throat. He never knew who killed him.

Without Camilla, the Latins panicked. They rode in yelling confusion towards the walls of their city, the Etruscans hard on their heels. The gates were barred; they found no way in. On the battlements their own friends were shouting, "Let them in! Open the gates!" but the citizens, seeing only the enemy in pursuit, flung stones and spears on the heads of Etruscans and Latins alike.

News came to Turnus of Camilla's death and the rout of the Latin forces. At once he abandoned his plan of ambush and ordered his troops back to defend the city. Scarcely had he left his position when Aeneas, at the head of the Trojan army, reached the narrow track through the wooded hills. He passed through it easily, and emerged on to the open plain, in time to see Turnus' column making all speed for the city.

The sun was sinking; the Trojans postponed their attack and camped outside the city walls.