



XII The Final Duel

WHEN Turnus entered the city gates, there were no cheers. The people had witnessed Camilla's death, and could see Aeneas' army camped on the plain. Whispers and stares greeted Turnus in the streets, and occasionally a voice would call out: "Call yourself a hero? Then fight your own battles!"

He found King Latinus almost ill with despair, blaming himself again and again for allowing the war to take place. By his side was the queen, now with nothing to say. Lavinia, a pale, modest figure, sat at the end of the room.

"The gods are punishing me," moaned the king. I knew their will, and did not obey it."

"Enough of this!" was the heated response of Turnus. "If everyone thinks I'm to blame for this war, I'm ready and willing to fight for my rights. I'll leave you to arrange the time and place with your friend Aeneas. I'll make him regret the day he set foot on this land. If he wants to marry Lavinia and rule in Latium, he'll have to kill me first!"

King Latinus plucked Turnus' arm in feeble dismay, and tried to look stern: "Turnus, calm down! You are always too hot-tempered. Sit here by me, and listen. Your father is rich and you own acres of good land in Italy. Plenty of

pretty girls from good families would be honoured to marry a fine man like you.”

“Are you trying to tell me . . . ?”

“Hear me out, boy. You must control your temper. I never should have promised Lavinia to you or to any other Latin prince. If an old man like me can admit a mistake, surely you can do the same. It will be no disgrace to give up your claims. You won’t be admitting defeat at enemy hands. Rather, you will be showing yourself the loyal servant of the gods, and what could be more honourable than that? It would be a sheer waste to die on the sword of Aeneas – and die you would, for the gods have decreed that *he* must rule in Latium. Think of your old father at home in Ardea: he would never forgive me for letting you die in a futile attempt to win my daughter.”

“Forgive me, sir, but you have too little faith in me. How do you know Aeneas must win? My sword is as sharp as his, my courage sharper. Without his goddess-mother, he is nothing!”

The king sighed and fell back on the couch, burying his face in his shaking hands. Queen Amata’s arms were around him at once, and, as she comforted him, she said, “How can you upset us like this, Turnus! If you get yourself killed, what will become of us? I would die rather than become Aeneas’ slave!”

Turnus glanced at Lavinia. She blushed and looked away. He bent to kiss the queen on the cheek. “Don’t count me dead so soon, madam. You have been a good friend to me; now you must pray for my victory.”

A few minutes later a herald was speeding to the Trojan camp with a message for Aeneas: “Turnus agrees to meet the Trojan upstart in single combat at dawn tomorrow.

Let both their armies stand as witnesses. The winner will marry the Princess Lavinia.”

Day dawned, brisk and cloudless. The towering walls of the city and the plain below began to fill with spectators. People of all ages crowded the walls. There was a murmur of excitement. From the Trojan camp hardy warriors strolled confidently onto the field. Priests and officials marked out the arena, and set up altars for sacrifices to the gods. On one side a line of Trojan soldiers formed a barrier with their shields and spears; opposite them the Latins did the same.

Inside the city gates Turnus stood by his chariot, a hand on the neck of each of his prized white horses. That morning he allowed no one else, not even his driver, Metiscus, to harness them, though the grooms fussed around with buckles and brushes and nervous advice.

Turnus himself was clad in shimmering gold, his helmet crested with scarlet. His shield hung ready. As he climbed into the chariot, he lifted his spear and ordered it loudly to tear open the cowardly heart of Aeneas. People hurried up to wish him well, but backed away in alarm when they saw his flushed cheeks and narrowed, glittering eyes.

At the edge of the Trojan camp Aeneas was speaking earnestly to his son. A small group of officers, his lifelong friends, stood by in silence. On his splendid shield each carved scene shone with promise for the future.

When the trumpet sounded from within the city, he motioned Iulus into the chariot, and stepped in after him. At his word of command the driver gathered the reins, and the chariot rolled slowly forward to the field of combat.

The thousands of Latins and Trojans and their numerous allies who thronged the plain and the walls were not the

only spectators. On a nearby hilltop stood the goddess Juno, aching with bitter anxiety. A nymph stood beside her, a beautiful goddess of rivers and lakes. Her name was Juturna, half-sister to Turnus. Her eyes trickled with tears as she listened to Juno: "I have done all I can, but the Fates are too strong for me. This must be the day of your brother's defeat. If there is anything at all you can do, to put off the moment of doom, then do it!"

A magnificent procession was moving on to the arena. In a four-horse chariot King Latinus was driven to the field. His twelve-pointed crown spread a halo of light like the blaze of the rising sun. Behind him rode Turnus, his red crest shaking defiance. A retinue of attendants and priests in ceremonial robes brought cups and incense and beasts for the offerings.

From the Trojan side, a single chariot came into view. In it rode Aeneas, wearing the armour of Vulcan, and his son Ascanius, now a handsome, well-grown youth.

To the cheers and applause of their people, the chariots circled the field, and came to a stop by the holy altars. Latinus dismounted first, and held out his arms. The rivals approached him on either side, and together they faced the altars. The priests slaughtered the victims, a pig and a woolly sheep. As the smoke rose high from the roasting carcasses, Aeneas drew his sword and addressed the gods:

"I call the Sun and the Earth to witness my oath. If Turnus is fortunate in this battle, and kills me with his own hand, then my son will give up his claim to this land, and the Trojans will never again make war on the Latins. But if – as I believe will happen, by the will of the gods – if my sword is victorious, and Turnus falls, I make this solemn promise. I will not enslave the people of Latium, but join

the Trojan race to theirs, as equal dwellers in this land. Lavinia shall be my honoured wife, and I shall name my new city 'Lavinium' after her. I pray to the immortal gods to bless me in this venture, to you, mighty Jupiter, to Mars, the patron of warriors, and to Juno, great queen of heaven, whose goodwill I crave."

Old King Latinus stretched out a trembling hand: "I add my oath, Aeneas, by the Earth, the Sea, the Stars, by the twins Apollo and Diana, by Janus who looks both ways, and the terrible powers of Pluto. Never, never shall this pledge be broken. There will be peace between the Trojans and the Latins, whatever the outcome of this battle. May Jupiter witness these words I speak before these altars."

Now all eyes were on Turnus. The Latins craned their necks to catch his words, but they were mumbled and inaudible. The spectators looked at each other uneasily. Where were the usual ringing tones of Turnus, the fearless roar that would echo across the din of battle? Muttering grew amongst the crowd, especially in the ranks of the Rutulians: "What's the matter with him? Why doesn't he speak his prayer out loud? It looks like a bad omen to me!"

No one noticed the extra soldier in Rutulian dress. The nymph Juturna was taking advantage of the restless mood among the troops. "It's all very fine for Turnus – if he wins, he wins," she said loudly. "If he gets killed, he's a hero. But what about us? No one asked us if we want to share our land with the Trojans. We could wipe them out right now, if we take them by surprise!"

The resentment caught. Up and down the lines the Latins were arguing that the moment had come to strike,

that Aeneas could not be trusted to keep the oath he had sworn, that Turnus was doomed by the gods.

And then, as the murmuring was about to break into angry clamour, an astonishing sight appeared. Across the sky, squawking loudly, a flock of wild swans flapped their wings in terrified flight. After them swooped an enormous eagle. Its power and speed were too much for the swans; exhausted, they made for the river, but as they clustered helpless on the water, the eagle seized one of them in its talons, and bore it triumphantly into the air. That should have ended the incident, but no – as if moved by a secret signal, the whole flock rose as one body and went for the eagle. Slowed down by its burden, the eagle swerved to escape, but was battered and pecked in mid-air by the furious swans. For a moment the spectators were blinded by an explosion of feathers; then, as it cleared, they saw the bedraggled eagle drop its victim and fly away. The victorious swans returned to the river.

At once a voice cried out from the Latin ranks, "What are we waiting for? Are we no better than the birds, to leave our prince to die when we have the numbers to save him? Strike now!" A spear, cast by a powerful arm, whistled across the arena. An Arcadian soldier screamed, and fell to the ground.

It was enough. A moment later the field was a blizzard of spears and hacking swords. King Latinus fled to the sidelines in terror, clutching the images of the gods. Charging horses kicked the altars aside. Men grabbed the sacred firebrands and hurled them at their enemies.

In the centre of the riot, like a rock in a raging sea, Aeneas stood bare-headed. His sword was at his side, undrawn, and he held up his open hand and shouted with

all his might, "Stop this madness! The treaty is made – no one may fight except Turnus and me! Do not defy the . . ." His speech was drowned.

From somewhere an arrow flashed, and gored Aeneas deep in the thigh. He staggered with pain, and groped for support. A Trojan ran up, and helped him from the field.

"Aeneas is down!" The cry flew over the battlefield. The Trojans shuddered; the Latins cheered and attacked with added force.

When Turnus heard that Aeneas was seriously wounded, his hopes revived in an instant. The gods, it seemed, had not deserted him yet. He leapt into his chariot, and, in his wild excitement, snatched up the sword of his driver Metiscus instead of his own. With a yell of triumph, he raced into the thick of the fight. At the sight of his dazzling figure, the Trojans ran. He only laughed, and ploughed straight through with his murderous wheels. Not a man in his path escaped alive; those not trampled to death by the thundering hooves felt the bite of his spear. His chariot was splattered with enemy blood. So Turnus, drunk with the pleasure of killing, dashed over the field, and laughed.

Sick with pain, Aeneas lay gasping in the stalwart arms of Achates. The deadly barb jutted from his flesh.

"What should we do?" Iulus asked in a frightened whisper.

"Pull out the barb," Aeneas said faintly. His own fingers found the broken arrow-shaft, and he tugged once and again, till his eyes were rolling and his lips were white. The arrow had not budged.

Iapyx, the doctor, hurried up with his bag of tools and medicines, the hem of his long gown tucked into his belt: "Lie back, sir, and let me see. A nasty angle, but we'll get it out, have no fear."

He pressed the swelling skin, and tweaked the barb with a pair of forceps. Aeneas struggled in Achates' arms; he did not cry out, but his breath was grating strangely in his throat. "He'll die from the pain," an officer muttered. Iulus, huddled on the ground, was shivering.

Iapyx had set out several jars, and was deftly mixing a different potion in each. As he applied the first concoction to soothe the wound, the battle-cry of Turnus rang out, alarmingly close. The shouting and drumming of hooves grew louder and nearer. The doctor, bent on his work, ignored the noise and the billowing dust, but the others were stiff with fear. Aeneas was flinching at every touch, and the arrowhead still stuck in his flesh.

No one could see the goddess Venus as she knelt by her son and slipped a magic herb into the last of the doctor's jars. As soon as Iapyx dipped his lint in that final potion, and rubbed it gently around the wound, the swelling subsided, and Aeneas opened his eyes. "Is it out?" he said in his normal voice. Iapyx looked at his face, and took hold of the barb. It slid easily out of the wound.

Aeneas jumped up, impatiently allowed his thigh to be bandaged, and praised the doctor's skill. "It's not my doing, sir. You must thank the gods," Iapyx answered humbly. "They still have work for you to do."

In a moment Aeneas was fully armed. As he slung on his shield, he spoke briefly and quietly to Iulus: "I'll try to show you the meaning of courage. When you are a man, remember the deeds of your father Aeneas and your mighty uncle, Hector."

When the Latins saw Aeneas and heard his terrible war-cry, they forgot their recent boldness and fled in a hectic stampede. Like a blinding gale of destruction, the Trojans

charged. The shrieks of dying Latins were smothered in whirling dust.

Aeneas alone took no part in the killing. The only man he wanted was Turnus. He skirted the field; he weaved in and out of the struggling fighters; he called "Turnus!" until his throat was hoarse.

Alarmed for her brother, the nymph Juturna took a flying leap into Turnus' chariot. Pushing Metiscus on to the ground, she seized the reins herself and whipped up the horses. Her figure and voice became those of the driver; Turnus never noticed the change. Over the field darted the chariot. Aeneas caught a glimpse of his speeding enemy, but before he could run down the horses and force them to stop, they had dodged out of sight. The arrogant figure of Turnus shot through the crowd in a glittering blur; with no thought of the danger around him, Aeneas dashed in pursuit.

Messapus was watching the Trojan leader. Taking careful aim, he flung his spear at close range. Aeneas ducked instantly, raising his shield. The spear screeched over his head and ripped the crest from his helmet.

Up to this point Aeneas had not dealt a single blow. Now his blood was up. Calling the gods to witness that his hand had not broken the treaty, he hurled himself into the storm.

Back and forth through the crowd rode Turnus in splendour, scattering men and weapons in all directions. He would jump down and stab with his flashing spear, whip off a man's head, helmet and all, and board the returning chariot, waving his prize.

Aeneas, no less, was hacking a path through the uproar. Powerful warriors crashed to the ground in a blood-spattered

mess around him. One man he pierced through the brain, another under the ribs; three others were pinned together by his plunging spear. The treaty might never have been.

Through all the havoc on the field of battle, the walls of the city had been free from attack. They were lined with anxious citizens, peering down at the slaughter below. As Aeneas looked up, his mother Venus slipped an idea into his mind. "Prepare to storm the city!" he said to Mnestheus. "Pass the order along! I'm not waiting for Turnus to pluck up the courage to face me. The Latins broke the treaty — they can pay for it with fire!"

The order was quickly obeyed. A disciplined party of Trojan troops, armed with flaming torches, wedged themselves against the gates and the walls. Scaling-ladders were rushed from the camp.

"Latinus!" Aeneas bellowed from the surging line of attackers. "Your people broke the treaty! When your city crumbles to ash, remember the words of your solemn oath!"

Commotion broke out on the walls and down in the streets. There were many who agreed with Aeneas, and wanted the gates to be opened at once to the Trojans.

"If we let them in now, they'll spare the city!"

"Never! We'll fight to the death!" cried the others, and ran to fetch weapons.

While the citizens argued and the Trojans hammered at the gates, a shocked Queen Amata was looking out from the high palace window. She had heard for some time the din of distant battle, but now she saw blazing missiles leaping the city walls. The steady crash of a battering-ram sent tremors through the massive foundations. Amata felt the rocking and shaking within her brain; the roof

seemed about to collapse; she sensed the enemy beating at her door.

"Turnus!" she cried in despair. "We need you here!" A neighbouring oil-store roared into flame. "My fault!" moaned the queen. "Turnus is dead, and the city is lost. I defied the will of the gods, and forced this war on the king!"

In his empty hall, King Latinus sat wrapped in dusty robes, calling on the gods to spare his city from ruin.

Somewhere in the palace a woman screamed. There were shouts, and running footsteps. Slowly Latinus looked up. A servant stood by the door. She began to describe what she had seen in the queen's chamber. The king understood, took hold of his robe, and tore it from neck to hem.

At the outer edge of the battlefield, Turnus, still roaring with blood-crazed laughter, was charging the Trojans with reckless courage. "Run them down!" he ordered his driver. "There are hardly any left. They've fled at the sight of my thirsty spear, the cowards!"

It was true that very few of the Trojan forces were still on the open field. Turnus, his ears ringing with the clash of steel, the thunder of hooves, and his own triumphant yells, had not noticed the commotion by the distant walls. But now he ordered the driver to stop: "What's that noise? Look there, man, the city's on fire! The Trojans are storming the gates! Quick, turn the horses!"

"No, Turnus!" the driver exclaimed. "Don't go to the city! There are plenty of people to defend the walls. Don't let these Trojans here escape alive!"

Turnus stared in astonishment. "Have you forgotten who I am?" he roared, angrily swinging the driver round by

the shoulder. "Oh! Well, I might have suspected! What do you hope to gain by this trick, Juturna? You know I must fight and die. Do you want me to die a deserter, leaving my people to face Aeneas without me?"

"Sir! Turnus!" The call came from a breathless horseman, spurring an exhausted animal over the plain. "Sir, we need you!" The man was bleeding from a terrible gash on the cheek. "The Trojans are firing the city! Aeneas is battering down the gate, and the whole army is storming the walls. We can't hold them off! The city's in total panic; they say the queen has hanged herself, and the king has lost his wits!"

Gripping the chariot-rail to steady himself, Turnus gazed at the messenger and then at the city. "Well, sister," he said to Juturna, "the Fates have caught up with me. I am going to meet Aeneas at last. Please, leave me this last chance of dying with honour."

He stepped down from the chariot, and ran to the walls of the city, to the place where the fighting was thickest. "Stop! All of you, stop!" he shouted, waving his arms through the hail of arrows and spears. "Turnus is here! Let me fight, me alone, with Aeneas!"

Once again the field was quiet. The armies drew back and set down their shields. Silent crowds leaned from the walls. The ground was cleared of weapons and the mangled forms of the dead and the wounded.

With his dazzling shield at the ready, Aeneas stood poised for attack. At the other side of the clearing, Turnus, a champion in shimmering gold, gripped the earth with his toes and balanced his ten-foot spear.

At one and the same moment they launched their weapons, and ran at each other. The spears crossed in

mid-air and plunged to the ground at opposite ends of the field. Sword clashed on shield. Like two mad bulls locked in desperate combat, gouging each other's flesh with their cruel horns, the rival champions closed in a furious struggle. With deadly speed the swords lunged to and fro, but every thrust met a ready shield.

Then Turnus saw his chance. Stretching to his full height, he aimed the point with terrific force at Aeneas' throat. The Trojans rose in alarm. A sudden crack – the sword, Metiscus' sword, had snapped in half. The blade was spinning away to the ground, and Turnus held only the hilt. Now, in their turn, the Latins cried out.

Turnus saw the whirling point of Aeneas' sword, and parried it – just – with his shield. He could not return the blow. Dodging from foot to foot, he knew his hopeless position, and turned to run.

In utter despair, he circled the whole arena, calling out to his friends, "Throw me a sword!"

"If you help him, I'll burn down the city!" Aeneas vowed as he raced in pursuit.

As they dashed round the field for the fifth time, Aeneas knew that he could not match Turnus in speed. The wound in his leg was throbbing and slowing him down. Glancing round for a missile, he saw his own spear, stuck in the stump of a tree at the edge of the field. With a yell of triumph, he took hold of the shaft and strained to work the head loose from the wood.

Turnus saw him and prayed, "Faunus, god of the woodland, that tree was sacred to you. The sinful Trojans cut it down to clear this battlefield. Now pity a son of your own land – hold fast to that spear."

The god must have heard, for the spear stuck firm.

While Aeneas struggled to free it, Juturna, disguised again as Metiscus, ran up to her brother and gave him his own powerful sword. As soon as she did so, Venus, invisible, helped Aeneas to pull out the spear. So they faced each other once again.

On high Olympus, the gods were watching intently. "Well, Juno," said the father of gods and men, "what more can you do? You know that Aeneas must win this battle. Why prolong the agony by sending Juturna to help her brother, when you know he is doomed? This is the end. I forbid you to do more."

Juno's reply was unusually subdued. "Very well, my lord. I give up my war with the Trojans. I have had enough of blood and death and quarrels. Let Aeneas settle in Latium, as Fate wills, and marry the Princess Lavinia. I ask only one small favour, great Jupiter."

The king of the gods smiled graciously at his penitent wife. "If it lies in my power, you may have whatever you wish."

"Let the Latin people keep their name and their ancient customs. There is no need to remember Troy in this new land. Instead of 'Trojan' (a name I can never learn to love), let their language be 'Latin', their country 'Italy', and their nation 'Rome' for all time."

"A very reasonable request," Jupiter agreed. "We'll blend the Trojan race into the Latin, and preserve the customs and traditions of this blessed land. And this, I am sure, will please you – they will faithfully worship Juno, more than any people on earth. They will be true of heart, steadfast, devoted and loyal, an inspiring example to mortals, and even to the gods."

It was time to end the duel. Jupiter kept by his throne

two hideous Furies who, on command, could swoop down to earth, spreading havoc and plague. Like the rest of their breed they had vipers for hair, and wings with the power of wind.

Down to the field of battle sped one of these creatures, with orders to drive Juturna away from her brother. In mid-flight, the Fury changed into an owl, the symbol of death, and in this sinister shape screeched loudly at Turnus and beat her wings in his face. He stiffened with fear; his limbs lost their strength, and his voice choked in his throat.

Juturna recognized Jupiter's herald of death. She could no longer help her brother. Weeping bitterly, lamenting that she could not die with Turnus, she dived in the river and vanished.

And now Aeneas, raising high his enormous spear, advanced and shouted his challenge. Turnus answered bravely, "Save your breath! Jupiter makes me tremble, not your threats!" and, heaving up a gigantic rock, a boundary-stone so big and heavy that twelve strong men could hardly move it, he charged at Aeneas.

But even as he hurled the rock, Turnus knew it was no use. His limbs seemed leaden; it was like trying to run in a nightmare. The rock crashed to the ground a yard in front of his feet. All he could see was the lowering point of the spear.

It struck. Turnus' shield, with its seven strong layers, was ripped apart; the point gored deep in his thigh. He tumbled on to his knees, and stretched out a hand in entreaty.

"Aeneas, take Lavinia for your wife. You have beaten me; everyone knows it. Only, I beg you, have pity on my father – let him have me back, alive or dead, as you desire."

Aeneas stood over him, his sword poised, but did not strike. The battle was won; he had no need for the death of Turnus. His glance ran over the humbled warrior, and a glint of metal caught his eye. It was Pallas' belt, the trophy that Turnus had stripped from the corpse of that brave young man.

"Pity? What pity did you show for Pallas, or for *his* aged father? How dare you flaunt the spoils that you took from him, and beg for pity? Now Pallas, Pallas himself, has come to strike you dead!" Seething with rage, Aeneas plunged his sword into Turnus' heart.

So Turnus died, and his spirit flew to the Land of Shades.