

Eleni Dikaiou

THE WAR OF TROY

ILLUSTRATED BY LOUISA KARAGEORGIU







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PARIS CHOOSES

In the old days, when the gods lived in palaces made of gold and clouds, high up on Mount Olympus, a sea nymph, the Neirid Thetis, fell in love with a mortal king whose name was Peleus.

Their wedding was attended by all the gods and many mortals. Only one of the lesser goddesses, Eris, hadn't been invited, because she always caused trouble and quarreling.

As soon as she found out, she took a golden apple, wrote "to the fairest" on it and tossed it in the



middle of the hall where the wedding feast was taking place. In the commotion that followed, first the mortal women and then the goddesses began to withdraw, all except Aphrodite, Hera and Athena, each of whom insisted that she deserved to have the apple because she was the fairest.

Seeing them quarrel, Zeus commanded the god Hermes to take the golden apple and fly together with the three goddesses to the East and up Mount Ida, the mountain that towered behind the castle of Troy. There, he told them, they would find a young shepherd called Paris. They should then ask him who was the fairest of the three.

And so it happened. In utter astonishment, the young shepherd listened to Hera and Athena as they promised him glory and power if he gave them the golden apple. But Paris, without hesitating at all, gave the apple to Aphrodite, who had promised him the “most beautiful woman in the world” to be his wife. From then on, the other two goddesses felt only hate for the young man who had scorned them.

Some time later, when Paris was declared the winner at games held in Troy, the daughter of King Priam of Troy, Cassandra, who could tell the future, recognized in Paris her long lost brother who had been left in the woods as a baby to be eaten by wild beasts, because according to a certain prophecy, the boy would cause the destruction of Troy. Everyone thought it was a sign from the gods that the child had not died, and so Paris was led with honors to the palace.

Then, Paris remembered the beautiful woman that the goddess Aphrodite had promised him. He rigged several ships and set out in search of her. And indeed, he found her, only she was married to Menelaus, the King of Sparta. The unsuspecting Menelaus invited Paris to be a guest in his palace, but, the moment he was away for a short time, Paris shamelessly carried off Helen --who, meanwhile, had also fallen in love with him-- and the palace treasures, snuck into his ship by cover of night and set sail for Troy.



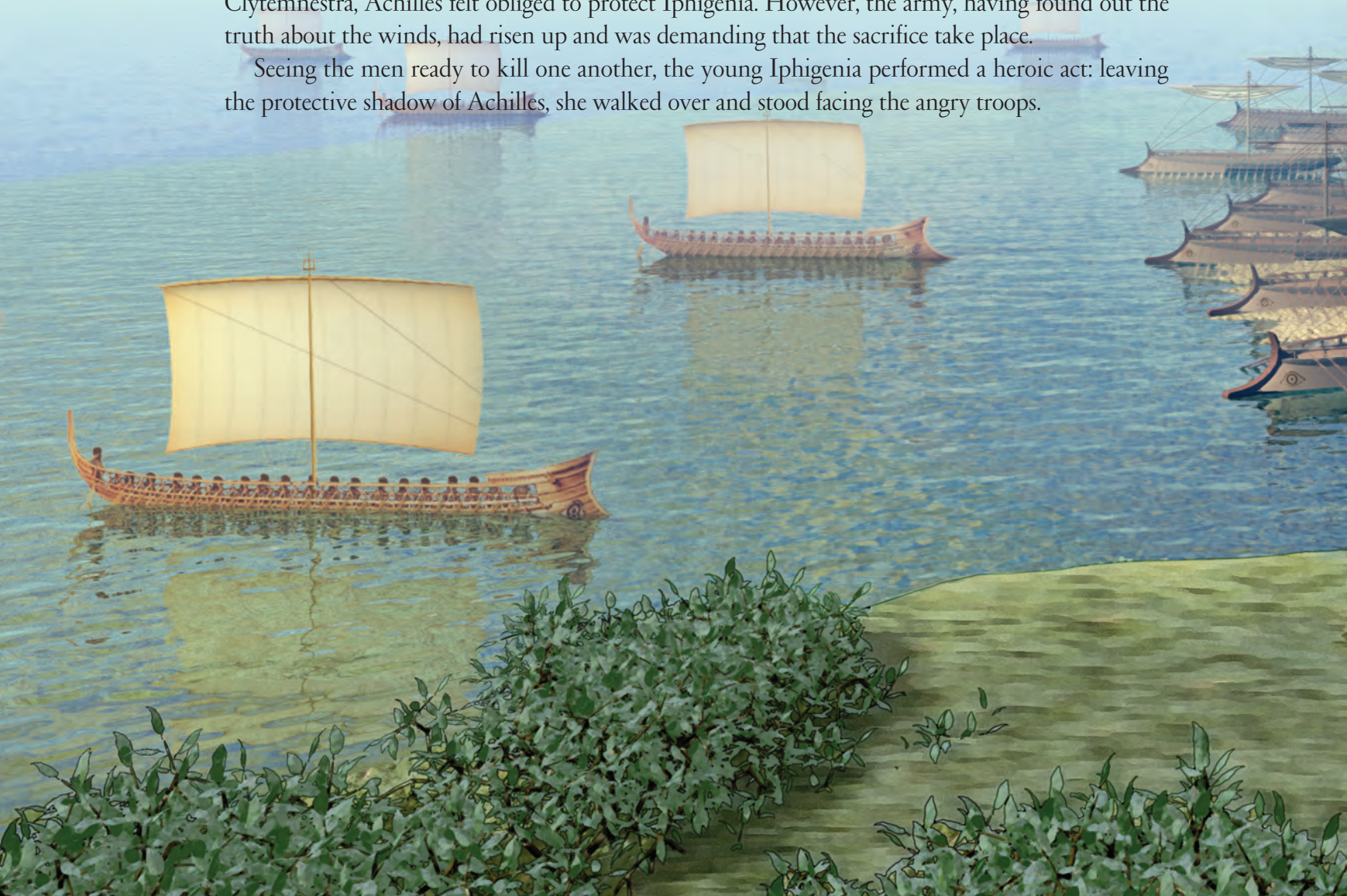
THE SACRIFICE OF IPHIGENIA

Carrying off the fair Helen was a terrible insult, not only towards Menelaus, but towards all Greeks. Thus, they decided to go to Troy and bring her back. The leader of the campaign was to be the brother of Menelaus, Agamemnon, who was king of the wealthiest city in Greece, Mycenae. The fleet was to assemble at the harbor of Aulis.

And so there began to arrive Greek kings with their armies and fleets, and among them Achilles, the son of Thetis and King Peleus, the youngest, handsomest and strongest of all, who joined the campaign as the leader of the famous army of the Myrmidons. But it was in vain that they waited for the wind to blow so that the ships could sail. They then asked Calchas the soothsayer to tell them what was wrong, and he secretly revealed to Agamemnon that the goddess Artemis was angry at him for having shot one of her sacred deer while out hunting. That was why she was holding the winds captive. In exchange for setting them free, she asked that Agamemnon sacrifice his daughter, Iphigenia. At first he refused, but finally he was forced to write to his wife, Clytemnestra, asking her to send Iphigenia down to Aulis, supposedly because he wanted to give her as a bride to Achilles.

Filled with joy, Clytemnestra arrived at the camp with her daughter and her younger son, Orestes, but when she learnt of her husband's terrible decision she began to scream like a wild woman. The camp was thrown into disorder. Sobbing, Iphigenia begged Achilles not to allow her to be sacrificed. Though unaware of the fact that Agamemnon had used him to trick Clytemnestra, Achilles felt obliged to protect Iphigenia. However, the army, having found out the truth about the winds, had risen up and was demanding that the sacrifice take place.

Seeing the men ready to kill one another, the young Iphigenia performed a heroic act: leaving the protective shadow of Achilles, she walked over and stood facing the angry troops.



“If it is the will of Artemis, then go ahead and sacrifice me,” she said calmly. “My life is less important than the honor of Greece for which you are going off to fight.”

The men fell silent, filled with admiration. Holding her head up high, Iphigenia walked alone towards the altar. But the goddess Artemis couldn't bear to stick by her harsh decision to the end. Just before Calchas's knife touched Iphigenia's neck, she wrapped her up in a cloud and took her far away from Aulis, leaving a deer to be sacrificed in her place.

At that moment, a breeze began to blow towards the East. The ships of the Achaeans, as the Greeks were also known, would soon be setting forth for Troy in full sail.

