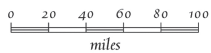




The Ancient World



Pronunciation

Military terms

	Ancient Greek	Ancient Greek Pronunciation	English Pronunciation	Meaning
archon	ἄρχων	ark-own	<u>ark</u> -on	Ruler, leader.
epistates	ἐπιστάτης	ep-ist-at-airs	ep- <u>ist</u> -at-eez	Chairman in the Athenian Assembly.
keleustes	κελευστής	kel-eu-stairs	kel- <u>you</u> -steez	Trireme officer.
lochagos	λοχαγός	lock-a-goss	<u>lock</u> -a-goss	Rank equivalent to captain.
phalanx	Φάλαγξ	fal-anks	<u>fal</u> -anks	Body of heavily armed infantry.
strategos	στρατηγός	strat-air-goss	<u>strat</u> -egg-oss	General, commander.
trierarch	τριήραρχος	tree-air-ark-oss	<u>try</u> -err-ark	Commander of a trireme.

Underlining indicates stressed syllables.

Locations

Agora	Ἀγορά	ag-or-a	ag- <u>or</u> -a	Open place, market.
Areopagus	Ἄρειος πάγος	a-ray-oss pag-oss	a-ree- <u>op</u> -ag-ous (as in danger-ous)	Rock of Ares. Hill in Athens used as a court.
Cypros	Κύπρος	cou-pros	<u>sigh</u> -prous	Island of Cyprus.
Plataea	Πλάταια	plat-eye-a	pla- <u>tee</u> -a	Greek town in Boeotia.
Pnyx	Πνύξ	p-nooks	p- <u>niks</u>	‘Packed in’. Hill. Meeting place of the Assembly in Athens.
Scyros	Σκύρος	skoo-ros	<u>ski</u> -ros	Island where bones of Theseus were found.

Characters

Agariste	Ἀγαρίστη	ag-a-rist-air	ag-a- <u>rist</u> -ee	Wife of Xanthippus.
Anaxagoras	Ἀναξαγόρας	an-ax-ag-or-as	an-ax- <u>ag</u> -or-as	Friend of Pericles, natural philosopher.
Aristides	Ἀριστείδης	a-ris-tay-dairs	a- <u>rist</u> -id-eez	Strategos, eponymous archon 489 BC.
Cimon	Κίμων	kim-own	<u>ky</u> -mon	Son of Miltiades.
Eleni (Helen)	Ἑλένη	hell-en-air	e- <u>lay</u> -nee	Daughter of Xanthippus and Agariste.
Ephialtes	Ἐφιάλτης	eff-ee-al-tairs	eff-ee- <u>al</u> -teez	Athenian politician.
Epikleos	Ἐπικλέος	ep-i-kle-oss	ep-i- <u>klay</u> -oss	Friend of Xanthippus.
Leotychides	Λεωτυχίδας	lair-oh-took-i-das	lee-oh- <u>tick</u> -i-dees	Spartan king.
Pericles	Περικλῆς	per-ik-lairs	<u>per</u> -ik-leez	Son of Xanthippus and Agariste.
Tisamenus	Τισαμενός	tiss-am-en-oss	tiss-a- <u>meen</u> -ous	Soothsayer.
Xanthippus	Ξάνθιππος	ksan-thip-oss	<u>zan</u> -thip-ous	Strategos, leader.
Xerxes	Ξέρξης	kserk-seez	<u>zerk</u> -seez	King of Persia.
Zeno	Ζήνων	zairn-own	<u>zee</u> -no	Friend of Pericles, natural philosopher.

Prologue

Pausanias took a deep breath, feeling calm spread through him. He exchanged a glance with his soothsayer, then rose from kneeling to walk the length of the hall, for once completely alone. The royal chamber of Sparta was cool after the heat of the morning. His armour clinked and rattled as he strode down the central aisle. He was unwounded, thanks to Ares and Apollo, his patron gods. He would endure no crippling disfigurement, no fever to steal away his wits. In the prime of his youth, he had already recovered from the hardships of the campaign. Of course, victory had a way of reducing aches and hungers. Only those who lost a great battle had to endure exhaustion. Those who won often discovered they could dance and drink enough for two.

Pausanias was pleased he had managed to bathe before the summons. His hair was damp and he felt cool despite the heat. Yet he had not been long back in Sparta. His personal helots had still been cleaning his cloak when the runner came. Most of the dried blood and dust had been brushed out, as well as lines of salt his sweat had left behind. It would do. He draped a length of it over his shoulder as he walked, held with an iron clasp.

When he had first immersed himself in the cold pool, Pausanias had watched a skin of oily filth moving away from him over the water. He still hoped it was a good omen. He had looked up from strange patterns and suddenly seen the red eyes of his helots, their trembling hands. He understood then, as he had not before. They grieved.

He might have dismissed them for intruding on his thoughts; he had not. They too had fought at Plataea, losing thousands of their number against Persian infantry. It had been a kind of madness and he still blamed the Athenians for inspiring them. Pausanias had warned Aristides not to let slaves think they were men!

As he walked down the long nave, he thought the helots would not need to be culled that year. In normal times, when they grew too numerous, young Spartans would hunt them through the streets and into the hills, competing for kills and trophies. Yet as he had leaned back in the pool, he thought he'd seen something new in their eyes, something troubling. For just a moment, he thought they looked on him as wild dogs might look on an injured deer.

He shook his head. Perhaps he would order a cull after all, to remind them of their place. Curse Aristides! Helots were too numerous ever to be free. It was a knife-edge Sparta chose to walk – the constant threat that kept them strong.

He caught himself in his thoughts. *He* would not order any cull. His authority had ended the moment he crossed back into Spartan territory. No, it would be the man who had summoned him who would make decisions of that sort.

When he reached the end of the hall, Pausanias dropped to one knee, staring at polished stone. He was somehow not surprised when silence stretched. The younger man wished him to understand which of them held power in that place. Pausanias told himself to be cautious. There was more than one kind of battlefield.

‘Stand, Pausanias,’ Pleistarchus said at last.

The young king was still a month from his eighteenth birthday, but the fact that he was a son of Leonidas could be seen in the massive forearms, thick with black hair. Pleistarchus had wanted desperately to command at Plataea,

but the ephors of Sparta had forbidden it. They had already lost their battle king at Thermopylae. His son was the most precious resource Sparta had.

Instead, it had been Pausanias who led the army of Sparta, standing in as the king's regent. It had been he who won an extraordinary, impossible victory, ending the great invasion and breaking at last the dreams of Persian kings.

Pausanias swallowed, suddenly weary. His triumph had earned him no goodwill, he could see that. He raised his head and met the cold gaze of the king. At least whatever was coming would be quick. Athenians seemed to be three-quarters wind for all the talking they did. His own people spent words with more care.

'You have done your duty,' Pleistarchus said. Pausanias bowed his head in response. It was enough, and still more than the young king wanted to say.

Two of the ephors nodded, expressing their support. It mattered more that three did not. They only watched the man who had led every Spartiate and helot to victory.

'I will present the names of the honoured dead,' Pausanias said into the silence. The helots would not be listed, of course, only Spartan warriors who had fallen. With the blessing of Apollo and Ares, they at least were few.

Pausanias tried to resist the fierce pride that rose in him then, despite the formal words. He had been part of that extraordinary day! He had held back men in dust and chaos, until it had been time to put them in, as a golden stone in the flood, to stand against the Persian generals. The ephors had not been there then. The son of Leonidas had not been there!

Pausanias felt a weight settle upon his shoulders. That was exactly the problem they faced, the reason they stared as if they wished to open him up like a fruit and examine his entrails. The ephors had forbidden Pleistarchus from leaving

Sparta – and in doing so, denied him the greatest victory in the history of the city-state. The young king must hate them for it, or perhaps . . . Pausanias felt his mouth grow dry. He had been called alone to that place. Only because the soothsayer had been with him had the other man come. Would either of them be allowed to leave alive? He tried to swallow. The heart of Sparta was in *peitharchia* – total obedience. This son of Leonidas had endured utter misery, watching his father’s army taken to war by someone else. He had not made a word of complaint, Pausanias recalled. It spoke rather well for the sort of king he would be.

‘I have been deciding what to do with you,’ Pleistarchus said.

Pausanias felt cold steal into him. If the young king ordered his death, he would not leave that room. By his own hand or another’s, his life was in the hands of a youth who resented him, in the hands of ephors who regretted the battle that had saved them all. Win or lose, it seemed there had been no way back. Sensing his life hung in the balance, Pausanias spoke quickly.

‘Majesty, ephors, I would like to visit the oracle at Delphi, to learn what lies ahead.’

It was well judged. Even the ephors of Sparta would not ignore a request to speak to Apollo’s own representative. The Pythian priestess sat above steam from the underworld and spoke with the voice of the god. Pausanias felt his heart leap as two of the ephors exchanged a glance.

King Pleistarchus shook his head, frowning.

‘Perhaps you will, when duty allows. Until then, I called you here this evening to give you command of the fleet, Pausanias. King Leotychides and I are in agreement. You will take our authority amongst the cities and their ships. There are Persian strongholds still. They cannot be allowed to

rebuild or grow strong once again. Sparta leads, general. So lead – far from here.’

The message behind the last was clear enough. Pausanias felt relief flood through him. He had swung from pride to dread and back, and he felt himself flush as his heart thumped. It was a fine solution. The victor of Plataea would go far away from the young king who actually ruled the armed forces of Sparta. There would be no awkward clash of loyalties, no chance of civil war. Men revered those who led them, Pausanias knew very well. In that moment, he might have flung the entire army against the ephors. They had to fear him. He thought he saw it in their eyes, in the way they watched. Yet he was obedient.

He knelt once more.

‘You honour me, Majesty,’ he said. He was pleased to see Pleistarchus smile. He must have been worried about his battle-hardened general returning with victory under his belt.

‘It is more than a reward for service, Pausanias,’ the young king said. ‘Athens seeks to rule at sea, as we rule on land. They have been gathering at Delos, but I do not want them leading our allies. Sparta is first among the Hellenes and always will be. You will take six ships to them, with a full complement of Spartiates and helot rowers. Your authority is given by my hand to remind them of that. You will lead the allied fleet, do you understand?’

‘I do, Majesty,’ Pausanias said. He could feel his skin twitch, hairs rising. He wondered how the Athenians would feel about that.

He rose to his feet and was pleased when the young king held him by both shoulders, then kissed him on each cheek. It was a mark of royal approval and it meant he would survive. He felt himself tremble in reaction, sweat making his skin shine.

‘Your ships are in port by Argos, Pausanias. Summon whomever you wish as your officers. I leave that to your discretion.’

Pausanias bowed in reply. Of course. The young king sought to rid himself of anyone else who might support Pausanias over his own right to rule. Pausanias forced himself into cool *praotes* – the perfect calm of Spartan men. He took the king’s hand in his own and raised it over his head.

‘You have served Sparta well,’ an ephor said.

It was not one of those who had shown any support for him, Pausanias noted. Even so, he bowed deeper. The five old men spoke for the gods and kings of Sparta, after all.

Pausanias strode back down the long nave, his head high. He saw Tisamenus waiting for him there, both eyebrows raised in question. The soothsayer was not sure what mood Pausanias was in after whatever he had been told.

Pausanias clapped him on the shoulder as he passed, allowing himself a tight smile.

‘Come on, my friend, we have a lot to do.’

‘You’re pleased, then?’ Tisamenus asked.

Pausanias thought for a moment and nodded.

‘Yes. It’s good news. They have given me the fleet!’

PART ONE

'In great good fortune, men never think
they might yet stumble.'

– Aeschylus

I

In darkness, the trireme struck the beach at the speed of a running man, knifing through shingle in a hissing roar. A second followed, almost the shadow of the first. One after the other, they came to a halt, and leaned.

On the third ship, helmsmen threw their weight against twin steering bars, aiming for clear beach. Below their feet, oarsmen beat waves to a froth, ninety to a side. They had scouted that coast as best they could, but in the night, none of the three ships carried lamps. Those who laboured on the benches could see nothing at all. A hoplite leaned far out at the prow, ready to call a warning, ignoring the sea spray crashing over him.

When the third keel struck, it sliced through shining banks, peeling them back. The first jolt of contact threw men down, tumbling them where they knelt on deck. One went over the side with a stifled cry, landing in shallows and then rolling clear in panic. Shingle lifted under him like a bow wave, pressing him aside. He was left behind, blowing in relief at stars overhead.

The Athenian warship ground on, cutting higher and higher up the shore until the vast weight and speed suddenly fell away. Wooden beams ticked and croaked and the trireme stopped. It was out of its element: clumsy where it had been quick, dead where it had been alive.

The deck tilted slowly on its keel, bowing to the land. Ropes and ladders unfurled like festival ribbons and men leaped down. The rowers on both sides had been quick to

pull their precious charges in, rather than see oars snapped to kindling. They too spilled out, crunching over sand and stones. The slope into the sea was gentle there, which was why Cimon had chosen that place. On another day, their task would have been to put small boats into the water, to carry ropes to whichever galleys were still afloat. They would have heaved the ships down the trench again, into the shallows, until the moment of joy when the sea claimed her own. Not this time.

Cimon had sent his three ships like spears against the shore. All the Athenians had learned to row, taking turns like the crew of the *Argos* centuries before. On land, they took up weapons and shields, gripping them tightly, murmuring thanks to the gods. Cimon had seen the strength of rowers, the powerful shoulders and legs that meant they walked like cats and climbed like Barbary apes. He had insisted on his hoplites taking full days at the oars, building fitness. In return, he had trained the rowers with spear and shield. They had all rowed; they had all fought.

The hoplites gathered a little way from the dark hulls. Their kit cost a small fortune, so they carried a part of any family's wealth with them. A good shield could be three months' salary, saved up for a year – the bowl measured and fitted, then painted with a personal crest. Greaves too had to be shaped by a master, held to the shins by the spring of metal. Crested helmets cost as much again. Some wore swords on their belts, but the main weapon was always the long dory spear.

Each set was a treasure of Athens, marked with family names, guarded and oiled, brought home from every battle. For those who fell, the bronze pieces were collected. In time, they would be handed to an eldest son, or sold so a widow could live.

As Cimon dropped to the shingle, he saw only good order under the stars. His men stood in ranks, exchanging greetings and comments in quiet voices, ready to march. He nodded, satisfied. The hoplites moved well with spears, as befitted ones who had practised since childhood. Each of the fearsome things was topped with a leaf blade of iron, thick as armour. Those were balanced by a heavy point at the other end. In the hands of a competent man, those spears were destroyers of cavalry, breakers of Immortals, the bristling spines of the hoplite shield line. At Plataea and Marathon, they had shown their worth. At Eion too, where they had sacked a Persian fortress.

Pericles watched Cimon stand apart from them, dark and very still in the starlight, though his cloak twitched in the breeze. Pericles himself stood with Attikos, a man at least twice his age but who was of his tribe and deme in Athens. Attikos shivered in the breeze off the sea, his teeth clattering so that he began to hum through the noise. Much shorter than Pericles, he sometimes appeared more ape than man, breathing always through his nose. Attikos would not admit his age, but he knew his trade and he revered Pericles' father. There were times when Pericles wondered if the man had been sent by Xanthippus to keep him safe.

'Waste of time standing here, freezing my balls off,' Attikos grumbled to himself, his voice barely audible. 'Hear that sound? Balls landing on shingle. I'd look for them if it wasn't so dark. I'll have to leave them for when we come back. If I can even find them. Then there is my back, which is a red-hot iron at the moment, from jumping down. It was the same at Eion. *That* will only get worse . . .'

Pericles shook his head. Attikos muttered when he was nervous. Telling him to stop worked for a while, but then he began again, unknowing, like a child talking in his sleep.

Pericles preferred silence. He knew he was ready for this. He would march with the others when Cimon gave the order. He felt the heft of his shield and spear and it was a good weight. He would not turn from the fight, though his bowels ached and his bladder wanted to empty down his leg. Until the moment came to move, he would endure a feeling of sickness, a gripe in his gut. Attikos muttering about his endless physical ailments did not help at all. The man had fought at both Marathon and Plataea, picking up new scars to add to his collection. For a bronze obol coin, he would show them to anyone who asked.

A shudder went through Pericles, roughening the skin on his arms and bare legs, making hairs rise like insect wings. He told himself it was just the sea breeze, the damp. In truth, it was more because he wore his brother's armour. He had seen Ariphton killed wearing it, not far from a shore like this one, on the same sea. Pericles had tried to hold his brother's wound closed, but his fingers had slipped on pale lips. The blood had stolen his brother away from him. While Attikos muttered on, Pericles flexed his grip on his spear. His fingers felt wet. It had to be sea spray or perspiration. It could not be his brother's life gumming his fingers together, it could not. Even so, he did not lift his hands to peer at them.

They had trained for this, he reminded himself. The order had come down from the Assembly of Athens – to find and destroy every Persian fortress and garrison in the Aegean. The entire fleet had gone out in threes and dozens, hunting the enemy, making sure he would never know peace. Persia ended before the sea. They would have no more footholds there – not the islands, not even the coast of Thrace.

Cimon had gathered some six hundred men to his name and rank of strategos, earned at Salamis. Ninety of them were experienced hoplites and the rest better trained than any oarsmen had ever been. A month before, they had landed

on part of the Thracian coast held by Persians for a century. Cimon had chosen it, a stronghold and a symbol of their influence. There had been walls there, with a river running by. Pericles remembered Cimon peering into the distance, judging the land around the city.

The governor had refused to surrender, of course. In reply, the Athenians had killed the messengers he sent out, then blocked all roads around his walled fortress. Cimon had told them his plan that night. Pericles could still see his gaze as it rested on him, weighing him.

‘Achilles knew,’ Cimon had said, ‘when he stood before Troy. A man should run *towards* death, not just accept it. He should seek it out, shake blood from his beard into its face and laugh! Only in that way can he win whatever glory makes us more than sailors or farmers or makers of pots. Only then can we earn true fame – *kleos*, where men and gods meet.’

Pericles swallowed. He wanted Cimon to know he was one to trust. He was nineteen years old. He knew he could run all day, then drink or fight or make love all night. He found himself grinning at the last. Chance would be a fine thing. He hadn’t even seen a woman for a month. Yet he *was* strong and fit – and the son of a great hero. He was an Athenian. He was made for this.

Somehow, reality threatened to unman him, like some terrible dream so real he could feel sand crunch under his sandals. He had not found *kleos* in the Persian fortress. He and the others had settled in for a long siege, waiting for starvation to wear down the inhabitants. Weeks had passed in boredom and sword drills. Cimon had spoken to all the carpenters and shipwrights, scouting the land around the stronghold. The task of war had turned into something else as he crept up each night to examine the walls. Pericles shivered in memory, recalling his terror they would be spotted.

The Persians had used poor mortar to lay their stones. Over three days and nights, Cimon's people dammed the river and turned it onto a new course, sending it against the Persian foundations. In just hours, an entire section had crumbled, the walls collapsing like ramparts of sand.

Pericles had cheered with all the others, racing forward to meet the enemy. What they had found had stilled both voices and laughter. Inside the fortress of Eion, the Persians had chosen to die rather than be captured. The commander had killed his family in the last moments, then turned the knife to his own throat. Pericles swallowed at the memory of blood splashed on marble, brighter as he looked back than it could possibly have been. He had not drawn his sword in anger since.

They had found riches in Eion – and that too was a victory, like pulling a gem from a knife's hilt. More importantly, Persia would no longer have safe haven there, nor be able to dominate the land around. Yet Pericles did not feel he had proven himself. He still feared some weakness lay within, like a crack in a shield.

Neither Cimon nor Attikos seemed to be nervous, not in the way he was. He clenched his fists, telling himself the choice was made. Shingle shifted under his feet and he took a step, changing his stance. He would go in with the rest and if necessary, he would die. It was simple. He could throw his life away, for *kleos* and his father's name. No son of Xanthippus could bring shame on the family.

He felt relief flood him. He might die, but what was death, really? Nothing at all. He had found the body of his father's dog on the shore at Salamis. Its eyes had been white, he remembered, stained by the moon or sea salt. It was the same for men. When the gods took back their part, what was left was just flesh.

2

Pericles loped up dunes with only the panting breath of those about him and the jingle of metal to break the quiet dark. At first the going was easy, over loose stones and scrub grass. Some of the men stumbled when they crossed patches of sage or thorn bushes, leading into the hills. Compared to them, Pericles touched the ground only lightly, as if mere roots could not claim him. He was determined not to let anyone else down. His father had stood at Marathon and he had won. Reputation stayed with a man, like a scar. Pericles was determined to choose death over scorn. That was a certainty. His mother may have named him 'Famous', but there were different kinds of fame. He would not live in shame. He reminded himself of that as he scrambled with the others over unseen ground.

Attikos cursed suddenly behind him, though Cimon had given an order for silence. None of them truly knew what to expect on Scyros. Over time, the island had become known as a dangerous place, even cursed. Fishing boats never dropped their nets there, though the waters teemed with anchovy and squid. There were rumours of lone men sighted by passing ships – shepherds or deserters, perhaps. Stories drifted in from traders, of merchant vessels seen burned to the sealine. Of raiders out of Scyros, of coastal villages made charred timbers, with all the women taken. The reputation protected the island. Most gave it a wide berth, rather than risk small boats stealing out to board and set ablaze.

Thieves, pirates and murderers had made Scyros their

refuge. Yet it was not for them that Cimon had brought crews to that place. Not that he would refuse to dig them out if the chance came. Pericles had seen a zeal in him, a desire to use the strength he had been given. Cimon would never be satisfied with a life of quiet duty. He was one who wanted glory, however it came to his hand. Pericles felt the honour of being one of his chosen, almost like pain. He would not let him down. Cimon would learn he could rely on him, like a good blade.

The three hoplite ranks tramped over the first hill and down the other side, so that the glitter of stars on the sea slowly vanished behind. Two hundred rowers went with them, with the rest left to guard the precious ships. Triremes burned only too well, but Cimon left nothing to chance. Like Pericles, he took his responsibilities seriously.

Scyros was all hills, with very little water and wild hares bolting away. No one would choose such a desolate place to eke out a living, Pericles thought, not unless the rest of the world was barred to them. Or because they could live without laws on Scyros, he did not know. His father said some men were too weak to live within bounds. Pericles shook his head. When he was younger, he'd thought Xanthippus knew all there was to know. He had been wrong.

There was no sign of either homes or inhabitants as he craned his neck in the darkness, turning this way and that. Pericles was shifting his spear in his hand when it was jolted from behind. Attikos told him loudly to watch where he put that thing, then threatened to stick it somewhere darker. Pericles clenched his jaw, staying silent as he had been ordered. Hundreds of men made noises as they moved; it was unavoidable. There was no reason to make it worse with idle talk.

It was late in the night by then, with a sliver of moon dipping down and dawn just a few hours away. The sea-scavengers

had to sleep somewhere on the island. On foot, in the dark, Scyros seemed much larger than it had by day. If Cimon had to search for long, the sun would rise and all their surprise would have been wasted.

A couple of younger lads had gone ahead without armour or weapons to slow them down. Like long-legged hares themselves, they'd vanished through undergrowth, barely rustling fennel and sage as they passed. Pericles watched for them to return as he climbed another hill, beginning to sweat despite the night's cold.

Somewhere in the distance, he thought he heard a whinnying sound, a cry of warning. Were there ponies on the island? He supposed raiders and savages would value the animals as much as anyone else. It was hard to build anything without horses or wild asses broken to harness. Athens still had only a few, having lost them all to hungry Persian soldiers. If there was a decent breeding herd on Scyros . . . He put the thought aside for later on.

In the deep shadow of the valley, Pericles could no longer see the faces of those around him. Attikos had come alongside and they climbed for a while in silent companionship, placing each step and grip as the slope grew steeper. Both he and Attikos wore their helmets high, resting on a club of hair. Attikos had his shield on his left arm and leaned on the edge, almost like an armoured limb as he clambered up. Pericles' shield still lay across his shoulders. It made him feel invulnerable with it there.

They leaned into the climb as the ground roughened, small stones scattering and falling. In daylight, they would have chosen the best path, but at night, all the men could do was remain together, no matter how hard the going became.

Pericles was panting and trying to control the sound of it by the time the ground flattened onto a wide crest. Attikos

was not breathing half as hard, he noticed in irritation. The older man seemed to take physical exertion in his stride, as if he could march or climb for ever. Or he hurt as much but showed it less. Either way, Pericles tried to match him, though sweat fell in fat drops.

There were still no crags there, only rolling hills where lizards or nesting birds scurried away from the presence of hoplites. The entire front line halted when a shadow startled, breaking into sudden life. A few even lowered spears as the unmistakable sound of hooves came to them. Some sleeping horse went racing off down the hill, kicking its heels and whinnying in outrage. That sound carried far and Pericles could only shake his head. Like barking dogs, the horse would surely alert anyone else to the presence of strangers on the island.

Halfway down the other side, Pericles suddenly resolved the shadows, understanding what he could still only barely make out. He dropped to one knee, Attikos beside him. The rest of Cimon's hoplites did the same and the rowers all halted behind. They were looking down into a much wider valley than before. There were no lights down there, but Pericles thought he could make out the shapes of houses, even the lighter strip of some sort of road that caught the moonlight. It looked more like an actual town than a rough camp for killers and exiles.

Pericles could hear murmured questions from the men. He had not been wrong, thank the gods. Halting them on a false alarm would have been humiliating. Pericles realised he could hear running water somewhere in the distance. A stream then, or some ancient spring. There had to be a reason for the inhabitants of Scyros to have chosen this spot. He turned his head slowly, seeing the bowl of hills around them. Perhaps the smoke from their fires was hidden from

passing ships. Or perhaps they lived cold; he had no way of knowing.

From over on the right, Cimon strolled the length of the line, passing three ranks of thirty hoplites. They had kept their sense of separate ship crews, though they were all his in the end. He favoured no particular ship, knowing how jealous men could get. He could be found sleeping on the open deck of any one of them. Pericles was in awe of him – and of the things Cimon had seen. While Pericles had been forced to sit with his evacuated family on the island of Salamis, Cimon had been out commanding squadrons of ships, burning and boarding Persian enemies. It was in his eyes, his voice. He had surely known *kleos* then. In his presence, Pericles was reminded he had yet to earn his own.

Cimon stopped by him. The strategos wore helmet, greaves and breastplate over a thick linen tunic that left his legs bare. He carried a shield as if it weighed nothing. The crest of his helmet was black and white, but he looked like any of the others. Pericles knew him, however.

‘What can you see?’ Cimon said softly, peering into the night.

Pericles blinked, understanding his eyes were better than those of the man he revered.

‘There are houses down there – a hundred perhaps, or a little more. A path and a crossroads, some sort of running water.’

‘I can hear it,’ Cimon replied.

He shook his head as if in irritation. He had not had any trouble in the daylight, Pericles recalled. Some men saw better in the night than others, that was all. It made him feel useful and his chest swelled.

‘We’ve found them, then,’ Cimon murmured.

Pericles nodded.

‘I can’t see any movement,’ he said softly.

He saw Cimon rub the back of his hand along the bristles of his chin. This was the moment that would decide lives – those of his own hoplites and the scavengers of Scyros.

‘I don’t think I can leave them in peace,’ Cimon said. ‘They know this island better than we do. I don’t want them arming themselves tomorrow to come at us while we are looking for the tomb.’

Pericles was pleased to be included in the conversation. He was not sure Cimon would take his advice, but the opportunity was there.

‘We have a duty to the towns and islands they prey upon,’ he said. ‘We cannot leave them alive.’

The helmet turned to regard him for a moment of stillness and silence, then Cimon clapped him on the shoulder.

‘I agree,’ he said. ‘We’ll go in – with caution. Even rats bite when they are threatened. You have command of the left wing, Pericles. Take three ranks of fifteen and . . . half the rowers. Allow no wildness in your men. Whatever we find below, if we come through without a single wound, I will be content. Treat the enemy with the caution you would bring to a battle line. Keep shields high – and close together. Use spears if you can. Strike with the shield boss as you draw your sword, to knock them back.’

It was basic instruction, of the sort any strategos might tell new recruits. Yet Pericles was grateful. He rose slowly to stand under the stars, feeling suddenly ill. He understood he was about to fight men, to their death or his. It felt right to go over the simplest things when his mind had gone blank. This was why they trained so hard, until sweat poured from them. Because killing was difficult and brutal work. Only a few took well to it – and they either became heroes or were hunted like lions.

‘I won’t let you down,’ he said to Cimon.

‘Nor I, strategos,’ Attikos muttered at his shoulder.

Pericles felt his pride tinged with irritation at having Attikos intrude just as he was showing his worth to Cimon. He rolled his eyes, but Cimon had already turned away, jogging back to his own position.

‘Pass the word – but quietly,’ Pericles said to the men behind him. ‘We’re going in as the left wing – quick and silent.’

He cleared his throat, remembering how his father addressed men older and more experienced than he was. Sternness was the key. He hoped they could not hear the quaver in his voice, but somehow he could not rid himself of it.

‘I will stripe the back of any man who gives out a battle cry,’ Pericles told them. They were grinning, one or two of them. He hoped it was out of nervousness and not in amusement at a young officer telling them their business.

‘Pay attention, you shit-trench cockerels,’ Attikos said clearly. ‘Or I will speak to you myself, after.’

Pericles closed his eyes. Attikos had undermined him at a crucial moment. It could not go unanswered. He felt his cheeks flame in a great heat, but Cimon was already moving and they were being left behind.

‘*Thank* you, Attikos,’ he snapped, meaning it as a rebuke.

‘You’re welcome, kurios,’ Attikos replied. ‘I’ll bring you through safe, don’t worry.’

A dog barked, a series of deep sounds that turned into a frenzy of howling. As Pericles reached the valley floor, a blur sprang from between the buildings, all shadows and scrambling paws. One of the hoplites swore as it came at him, more afraid of its teeth than any man he might face. The howl strangled as someone jabbed a spear at it. Snapping rage turned to screeching and Pericles winced. The whole island had to have heard that.

‘Keep good order,’ he growled. ‘Steady pace.’

They all knew the work better than he did, but at least he had given them no cause to doubt him. Pericles heard the scrape of shields coming together, overlapping like scales so they advanced as a battle line. It would last about as long as it took to reach the shacks of thieves and pirates, but neither would they be caught in a sudden ambush. Fighting was already a dangerous business, his father always said. There was no point making it harder by being careless.

More dogs took up the barks and howls of the first. Another of them attacked and was cut down as it broke its teeth on the edge of a shield. Still, there was no sign of defenders. Pericles peered and squinted, straining to see. The houses were all dark. Was the place deserted? The dogs might have been part of a wild pack. It would be a fine joke if they found the entire place abandoned after all the caution of the approach.

Pericles called an order to halt. Cimon was out of sight, but still trusting him, relying on him. There would be no

mistakes, not while he commanded. Pericles could not control a great part of his life, but for one night, for this advance and these men – well, they were his and he would not let them down.

‘In threes,’ he snapped. ‘Lay down your spears on the right side – they’re no use indoors. Spears down, I said. Draw swords. Quickly now! On my order, go in fast. Search every room – and watch for attacks. There is something wrong here. They . . .’

Pericles stopped the string of instructions, turning sharply. A woman’s voice had cried out, or a child’s. It had sounded above the noise of soldiers and he waited. Over there, he was almost certain. He pointed to a building, then to the closest pair.

‘You two. Go with Attikos. Find whoever made that sound and bring them to me. The rest of you, what are you waiting for? In threes – advance.’

If he had called fours or sixes, the hoplites could have formed just as quickly. They all knew their groups and they could arrange themselves a dozen different ways, even in the middle of a battle. It meant the lochagoi or the strategos could adjust attacking lines as they saw fit, choosing where to bring the greatest strength. Only the full phalanx worked as a single formation, pressing forward against an enemy.

As the first doors were kicked in, Pericles found himself grinning, as much from nerves as excitement. Yet it was a grand scene as it played out in his imagination. Athenian hoplites in helmet and armour would be like Achilles reborn in a small home – untouchable, fast and deadly. If there *were* scavengers hiding in the houses, they would surely be slaughtered. Yet it nagged at him, making his heart thump and flutter in his chest. These people knew this place. It was their home, and he wondered if something had been missed.

A shriek sounded away on his right. Pericles turned his head, listening, trying to understand. The rowers still stood at his back. They were in no great hurry to go in, he could sense that much. Most men would prefer to stand without an order to move, at least when the alternative was walking through doorways in complete darkness, never knowing who waited behind each one. Pericles could not send them after the hoplites, not until he had a better sense of what lay ahead – or until they had sprung an ambush. Only forty-five hoplites had gone crashing through the street of shacks. Further away, he could hear shouts and metal on wood as Cimon brought in the second wing. Whoever they caught in the middle would surely be helpless, but still the sense of wrongness nagged. Pericles needed to see, but it would draw enemies like crane flies if he sparked a lamp. If they were there.

He heard Attikos returning before he could see him.

‘Bite me again. I’ll knock you out,’ Attikos snarled.

He and another man held some writhing figure between them. She must have ignored the order as Pericles heard Attikos hiss in pain. The older man raised his arm in reply, but Pericles gripped his wrist, catching it.

‘We need to question her,’ he said.

Attikos shook himself free. The man muttered something that made her try to kick him, so that he had to jerk back, swearing and laughing.

One of the other hoplites still had the woman’s long hair in his grip, a great hank of it wrapped around his fist. Pericles waved him off and he released her with great caution, standing away before she could lunge at him. Pericles rather admired her spitting rage, though she was about as helpless as a cat and in more danger. They would cut her throat in an instant if he gave the word. Judging by the way he sucked his fingers and glared, Attikos might do it anyway.

‘How many men live here?’ Pericles said.

The woman ignored the question, looking around, clearly judging if she could make a break for freedom. With three men blocking any way out, she slumped.

‘Do you speak Greek?’ Pericles demanded. ‘You’re no use to me if you don’t.’

‘I am of Thebes,’ she said. ‘You? I hear the accent of Athens.’

‘Good,’ he replied in relief. ‘If you are a prisoner here, can you tell me how many men there are? We can take you away, as far as Athens, if you help us.’

‘Why would I help *you*?’ she said. Without warning, she raised her voice to a great shout into the darkness. ‘If my *husband has any sense*, he will stay . . .’

Attikos stepped in and smashed a blow across her face, knocking her to the ground.

‘We didn’t tell you to shout, love, did we?’ he said.

Pericles was furious. He hadn’t forbidden Attikos from touching her, but he’d thought the older man had understood. It felt like disobedience.

Pericles could hear other groups returning. They were herding what sounded like women and children, some of them already wailing. He shook his head, unnerved by the strangeness of it. He could hardly see his captive in the darkness. As she fell, her hair had been flung loose, hanging over her face like a curtain. He saw something pale shift under that hair as her arm twitched at her belt. Then she launched, coming up on strong legs, straight at Attikos. He roared in pain as she stuck him. His wild blow in return caught her on the side of the head and she fell dazed, leaving him to yank her knife from his thigh.

‘That bitch!’ he shouted, lifting the blade to strike.

Pericles stepped across him.

‘Is mine to question. Stand back, Attikos – and put that down.’

Attikos was breathing hard, more in anger than pain. He was close to cutting loose, Pericles could feel it. The young man returned the gaze, his confidence total. If Attikos disobeyed, Pericles knew he would kill him. He was nineteen, trained and fast. He did not doubt himself. Some of that certainty seeped through at last to the man he faced. Attikos dipped his head, giving way. Pericles watched him even so, in case he changed his mind. He’d fought his brother too many times to be fooled by some trick or false surrender. In that moment, he missed Ariphron with a fresh pang. Still teaching lessons, though he lay cold in a tomb.

‘In fact, Attikos – go in again and find me anyone else alive in this place.’

Attikos turned on his heel and vanished before Pericles had even finished speaking, leaving him with a hundred oarsmen at his back, waiting for orders – and an unconscious prisoner at his feet. A crowd of women and children was being assembled on the road around them, with hoplites prodding at the edges.

‘Tie her hands,’ Pericles ordered one of the rowers. ‘She is a Greek – though of Thebes. Be gentle with her. She is one of ours and perhaps has been treated cruelly.’

It was a noble sentiment and he was proud of the delivery. He had to ignore the crude comment another of the men made. If he reacted to every one, he’d never get anything done.

‘Where are your men?’ Pericles said, raising his head and addressing the crowd of captives.

Some of them had begun to weep and the rower at his back murmured something else that made him flush. Pericles smothered his irritation. He saw hoplites as decent men who might fight for the city, then sit as a juror. Honest, even noble,

they were part of the dream of Athens. The rowers did not seem quite the same sort. He clenched one fist. He'd inspire the bastards, or put an iron edge against each throat. There would be no bothering these women, not while he stood as officer over them.

'Ladies! You are not here alone!' he called again. 'Where are your men?'

He could smell them, he realised, a scent of herbs and unwashed flesh. Dawn was not far off. If there had been more light, he thought their poverty and filth would have been even clearer. Even as he looked across them, there was the first hint of grey in the dark. There couldn't have been more than eighty or so. He imagined each one had been snatched from somewhere else. There would always be men cast out from their towns for some crime, driven into exile like a dog. They might find their way to Scyros, without a doubt, but not the women. The women had to have been taken, or been born there.

A number walked with small children or carried them on a hip, snivelling and owl-eyed. They were no threat, but there was still the mystery of their menfolk.

'Leave us alone!' one of them shouted. The voice of a crone.

Pericles hesitated, suddenly fearing Athena stood in the shadowy crowd. There were perils in dealing with women when the goddess could walk amongst them. He swallowed. It sounded weak, but he repeated himself once more.

'I will not ask you again,' he said. 'Where are your men?'

'They're out hunting, but they'll be back,' one of them shouted. 'They'll kill you all if you touch any one of us!'

He could hear fear in her voice. Attikos had returned to stand at his side, limping badly. Pericles realised he could see the man. Dawn was upon them at last, in all its grey glory.

‘Gone hunting in the dark?’ he heard Attikos mutter. ‘I don’t think so. Nothing much to hunt anyway, not in this place. Unless she means those ponies . . .’

The older man trailed off and Pericles felt his own eyes widen. The men were not hunting the land. They were out at sea, either looking for fish or a different kind of prey.

Pericles looked up as Cimon approached. He stood a little straighter and saw that Attikos did the same.

‘I can’t find anyone except women and children. You?’

Pericles shook his head.

‘Same on this side. I think the men are out looking for ships to attack.’

Cimon nodded.

‘They might not be back for days, then. It doesn’t matter. Leave a few guards on these . . . men you can trust.’

He said the last with a peculiar emphasis that made Pericles flush.

‘I can stay, kurios,’ Attikos said. He addressed himself to Cimon, but it was Pericles who answered.

‘No, I need you with me, Attikos. I’ll choose the ones we must leave behind.’

He felt rather than saw the man’s suppressed fury as Pericles turned back to Cimon.

‘You’re going to search for the tomb?’

Cimon had not missed the strange tension between the two men. He actually missed very little, but he saw no weakness in Pericles, so trusted him to handle his own problems. After just a beat, he dipped his head.

‘It’s why we came. Not for ragged pirates or their women. Theseus died on Scyros. If there really is a tomb here, it could be his. If it *is* his, I want to bring the bones back to Athens, for a proper burial. He was an Athenian king. His father named the Aegean!’

The woman at their feet stirred then, struggling when she realised she had been bound. In the dawn light, Pericles saw she was a little older than him, with hair that had never been cut and hung in a mass to her waist. She was filthy, but he felt a strange sensation when her eyes met his. Her face was already swelling, with a great bruise on one side that reached right to her eye.

‘The lads will kill you when they come home,’ she said.

Cimon chuckled.

‘You are Greek? Then look around you. Go on, it’s not just shadows now. Do you see my hoplites and rowers? You think your men will take us on? I don’t think they will. If they have any sense at all, they’ll stay out of sight until we have gone. We have no interest in any of you, not really.’

‘They’ll kill you,’ she said again and spat on the ground at his feet. Even in her anger, she was careful not to let the spittle touch his sandal, Pericles noticed.

Overcome at her insolence, Attikos stepped forward, his hand raised.

‘Get *back*, Attikos!’ Pericles growled. ‘I swear, if you strike this woman again, I will strap you to the prow for a week at sea.’

‘Kurios, she . . .’

‘Not another word!’ Pericles snapped.

He turned to the woman then as if the matter was settled and beyond any further dispute. The corners of her mouth twitched at seeing Attikos reined in, which she tried to hide under the curtain of her hair.

‘What *do* you want?’ she asked Cimon, her curiosity showing.

‘First tell me your name.’

‘Thetis,’ she said with a shrug.

‘Like the mother of Achilles?’ She nodded and Cimon

smiled. ‘That is an old name – a name of power. Well, Thetis, we are looking for a tomb . . . perhaps a temple. Old and lost and probably overgrown. Somewhere on the island. My father said he’d heard of one here.’

He waited while the woman considered. Her eyes had flickered at his description and Cimon found he was holding his breath, excitement catching in his throat.

‘You’ve seen something like that?’ he said.

She shrugged.

‘Perhaps. There is an old grave on the north side, high in the hills over there. Some of the children play around it.’

‘Can you tell me how to get there?’ Cimon asked. ‘That’s what we came for. Nothing else matters to me.’

His voice was suddenly gentler, as if he soothed a wild deer. She could not seem to look away and, to his surprise, Pericles felt a pang of jealousy. *He* was the one who had saved her from Attikos! He was the one without ties, while Cimon had a young wife back in Athens, already pregnant with his first child. Yet the woman’s dark gaze lingered only on his friend.

‘I can show it to you,’ she said.

4

With the sun rising, the young woman led the Greeks up the other side of the valley. Cimon had ordered a still-limping Attikos to keep hold of her. He pinched her arm cruelly in his spite. Pericles saw pale marks from his fingers, but said nothing, not while there was a chance Thetis might bolt and leave them far from the others. Attikos seemed to be suffering from the wound in his leg, though he had bound it. The man muttered threats and promises to Thetis as they went, making her lean away from him.

The going was hard, with thick undergrowth and olive trees about as old as the island. Twice more, they saw one of the wiry little ponies startle and go cantering off at the sight of armed men. It might almost have been pleasant, if their purpose had not been so serious. They hurried along, watching the sun.

Cimon had leaped at the chance to see the tomb, leaving behind the bulk of his force. Pericles bit his lip at the thought. Cimon had almost a dozen years on him, but it was still a young man's error. They had taken only six hoplites along with them. The rest waited in the valley or were back guarding the ships.

On a goat path barely more than a thread along the ground, Thetis reached the crest. She didn't hesitate, going straight over, stretching out her free hand for balance on a steep slope. With his injured leg buckling, Attikos yanked savagely at her, making her cry out. Pericles watched in sullen anger as she swung to slap him. Once more Attikos pulled back a fist.

‘Attikos!’ Pericles roared at him.

He used his voice as a weapon, forgetting they were in a hostile place. The crack of sound echoed back from the hills, so that a couple of the hoplites turned their heads, following it. The rest stood like statues, stunned for an instant, then grinning. Pericles had always had a good voice for a battlefield.

Pericles heard Attikos swear in disbelief. Another young man’s error, this time his own. His irritation only increased as he felt his face grow hot. It had been Attikos who’d pushed him to it, embarrassing them both in front of Cimon.

In silence, Pericles strode forward, feeling the stares of the others. He waved Attikos off and took Thetis by the arm. She watched him from underneath the mass of brown hair and seemed to be smiling. He wondered when she had last bathed.

‘He won’t hurt you again, you have my word,’ Pericles said.

He ignored Attikos standing just a couple of paces away. In response to her quick and nervous glance, the man snorted, but had the sense to stalk off and leave Pericles alone with her.

‘You won’t kill me when we reach the tomb?’ she said.

Pericles looked at her in surprise.

‘No. I have a sister and a mother who would never forgive me. You won’t be harmed.’

‘Your friend said he was going to have me . . . like a husband and wife . . .’ she said.

Even beneath the protection of her hair, he could see her flush a deep red. He assumed it was a mirror of his own face in that moment.

‘He is not my friend, s-so, I think . . . no it doesn’t matter. Come on, is it this way?’

She began to head down the slope once more, with the

hoplites falling in behind. Pericles saw her hesitate on a section where rocks protruded through the earth. She needed both hands to climb down and he released her arm, ready to throw himself after her if she ran. She shook her head, reading his thoughts as he scrambled closer.

‘I’ll show you the tomb,’ she said. ‘Then you’ll leave. That’s what he said.’

‘We’ll want to see who lies within, if it is a tomb,’ he replied. ‘But yes, after that, we have no more interest in this place. A great man died here once, long ago. That’s all Scyros is to us.’

She led them on through a hillside of bracken, with strange black flies that seemed to seek out exposed flesh. Pericles rubbed at a spot of blood on his forearm where one had bitten him.

‘Will you stay here, on the island, when we go?’ Pericles said.

Attikos had come closer, so that he was just a few paces behind, chatting to one of the other men. Cimon brought up the rear, so he did not hear Attikos suggest ‘the young kurios’ had been ‘caught by her parts, like fishhooks’. It was as perfectly audible and yet as under the breath as any soldier could manage. Pericles felt his fist close and made himself open it. He had to ignore mere insults, for all they were meant to hurt or mock. He put it all aside, like salt, for later on. If his father had told Attikos to watch his back, perhaps it was time to remove that protection and fend for himself. The price of having him close was just too high. Pericles glanced over the shield on his shoulder, finding Attikos watching him with a crooked grin.

‘Are you all right back there?’ Pericles asked.

‘Yes, kurios. All fine and alert,’ Attikos replied, with perfect insolence. He was still angry at being roared at in front of them all, that was clear enough.